

C-7389 Transcription

United Jewish Appeal Study Mission. Masada ceremony.

1971.

M1:

[00:00] We have come to this awesome place humbly, as dedicated Jews. We have come as individuals, of our own free will. But we are not alone, nor are we free of the magnetism and mysteries of this place. It is a rendezvous with destiny, for as we stand here the Jews of nineteen centuries stand with us. The Jews of Judea that was, and the Jews of Israel that is. Those who passed between, them and their forefathers, the wanderers and the oppressed, the proud and beautiful people who live in this land today [01:00], for we are them...and they are us. They have much to do with what we are today. Listen to their story.

F1:

Come with me, come back nineteen hundred years. The empire that was Rome sprawls its heavy limbs across the face of the known world. It is fact, and it is comfortable. But along the Mediterranean Sea in the east, the fever of freedom rages. The

tiny province of Judea, the second Jewish commonwealth, is breathing its last. There are four years of blood and desecration, and at the end, the land lies ravished, the holy city and its temple smolder [02:00] in ruins. It is the year 73. The tragedy has made its way to this fortress; this stark rock has become the only place on Earth where a Jew can say, "This land is ours." The spirit of freedom lives on here, writhing from the carnage and the defilement, and the legions of the mightiest military power the world has ever seen are unable to extinguish it. It is a mystery to the generals, a mystery to the emperors and the governors, a mystery even to the Roman historians. But they do not understand that, to a Jew, freedom is life, and that life - Jewish life - is part of a holy covenant, a covenant with Abraham, a covenant with Moses, a covenant made on another mountain with the Almighty, a covenant which has [03:00] made this land, and life as a Jew inseparable. There were nine hundred and sixty Jews on this mountain in the year 73, zealots they were called, for their defiance in struggling for a life with dignity knew no bounds, and their leader was called Eleazar, the son of Ya'ir. Eleazar and his people, their feet on this very soil, looked down and saw Flavius Silva and his Roman slaves and his troops on the white

cliffs below, and they watched them build a solid bank, raised to the height of three hundred feet, and the zealots prayed and pledged themselves to freedom and to this land. And on the embankment they watched the Romans build a platform of great stones, seventy-five feet high and just as long. And the zealots praised the Lord [04:00], and they prayed for His greatest gift, life. And they watched as the mighty engines of war were placed upon the platform, and they watched a tower ninety feet high and shielded by iron grew upon the cliff. And they watched as on the tower the Romans mounted weapons to beat off the defenders, forcing them to seek cover. And the women and children trembled as Silva ordered his great battering ram to pound the wall which surrounded them, pounding, pounding, incessantly and without relief, and the wall was breached. But the defenders had done more than pray. As they prayed for life, for what is most precious to the Holy One, they had also built another wall inside. They built it, these nine hundred and sixty, without slaves, without troops. They built it of great wooden beams [05:00], and filled the spaces between with earth, and so the blows of the engine has little effect, for they fell on a yielding material, and Silva in his fury ordered his soldiers to destroy the inner wall by fire, and it blazed in flames, and the

Romans returned to their camp and rejoiced. The desert night was filled with their drunkenness and their bloodlust and their revelry, for in the morning their swords would bring an end to the proud and arrogant people above, and there were those among them who kept watch through the night, lest any of the defenders escape.

And Eleazar stood in this place, but his thoughts were not of flight. They rested instead upon the children and the women, and he knew what could be expected from the victorious Romans, and he assembled the bravest of his followers and he spoke to them, thus: [06:00] "Long ago, my brave men, we resolved neither to serve the Romans nor any other except our God, for He alone is man's true and righteous Lord. Now the time has come when we must test our resolution by our actions. We have it in our power to die nobly and in freedom, a privilege denied to others." And Eleazar said, "Let our wives die undishonored, our children with no knowledge of slavery, and when they are gone, let us render ungrudging service to each other using our liberty as a noble, winding sheet. Let us spare only our food supply, for it will testify when we are dead that it was not want which subdued us, but that we chose death not slavery." [07:00] And the people were moved by pity for their dear ones, as they stood here that

woeful night. But Eleazar was filled with a mighty fervor, and her mourned for his people, and he mourned for Jerusalem. "Who hates his country so much, who is so unmanly, so fond of life, that he is not sorry to be alive today?" he asked. "I wish we had all died before we saw the holy city razed by an enemy's hands, and the holy sanctuary so profanely destroyed." And he cried, as you may well cry now. "Pity the young, whose vigorous bodies can sustain torture. Pity the more advanced in years, too weak to bear such calamities. May the man to see his wife led off to violation, to hear the voice of his child crying, 'Father?!' [08:00] when his own hands are bound? No. While these hands are free and can hold a sword, let us die as free men, with our children and our wives!" The velvet blackness of the sky enveloped this mountain, and the moon and the stars bathed it in a gentle light, and our brethren in Israel took their wives and their little children in their arms, clinging to them with tears and with parting caresses, and all carried through the task with their dearest ones. Ponder it. Ponder their courage, their wretchedness, their desperation, as they slew their wives and their own children with their hands. And they chose by lot ten of their number and so laid them down, each beside his fallen wife and children, and taking their dearest

ones in their arms, [09:00] the *shema* on their lips, they offered their throats to the sword.

Close your eyes and behold the scene, as the chosen ten, having slaughtered their comrades set up the same rule of chance for themselves, that one chosen by lot must slay the nine who remained, their eyes blinded by tears, their throats choked with grief, their hearts bursting with pity and sadness, they bared their throats. And the solitary survivor prayed for strength, and he set this place ablaze and fell upon his sword, and died beside his family. The nine hundred and sixty were no more.

It was daybreak...and the Romans under arms thirsting for the blood which they themselves thought to draw advanced to the assault, seeking [10:00] the first defender on whom to vent their wrath, and they were greeted on all sides by an awesome silence. Now, behold the silence of this place, behold it with the eye of you heart. Meditate upon it. What would we give for life? And what would we sacrifice to give that life meaning? How dear is freedom, how precious liberty, how sacred justice? The answers, my friends, are in these very stones. They are the stones of our people. Let them renew your determination, these stones. Let them touch your soul, and add your voice and your courage and your substance to the chorus of freedom. And let

that chorus ring out for all mankind to hear! [11:00] These stones of your people ask not for your life. They ask only that you endow that life with meaning, by endowing those of others with quality. They ask that you fear not, so that others may never know fear. They ask that you love your brother, that you demonstrate that love not as the zealots of Masada did, but by joining hands with your brother Jews as they choose life, and by resolving with them that Masada shall not fall again...

**M1:**

We are Jews. We are a people of freedom, lovers of peace. We cherish life and learning, and we [12:00] strive for justice. We are atop this mountain today to vow that these phrases shall not be empty, that we are men and women not of words but of action. We cherish our people's past, for it is a part of us, and we cherish the future, for we have an important role in what lies ahead. So amongst these sad stones, on this hallowed earth, I ask that you repeat with me that which is in all of our hearts...

[crowd recites with speaker] "We stand humble before Thee, Giver of life, and we ask that You grant Thy people, Israel, lives of freedom and peace so that they may carry out with vigor

Thy task here on Earth [13:00], and be a light unto the nations.  
We thank Thee that Thou hast enabled us to achieve, and we  
pledge that we shall sacrifice that Thy people might survive,  
and we remember those who gave their lives here for the  
sanctification of Thy name. We are strengthened in our  
determination to help give meaning to the lives of others, for  
each of us is a soldier in the battle for liberty, and we vow  
that in the words of Your prophet, for Zion's sake I will not  
keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest."...

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