**Nothing New Under the Sun**
**Rabbi Dan Moskovitz**
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I want to begin by reading you a news report from Jerusalem:

HOLY CITY UNDER SIEGE FROM WITHIN
BY: JOSEPHUS

JERUSALEM: In Jerusalem today right wing religious zealots took up arms against more progressive Jews over the issue of who controlled Jerusalem and political relations with the non-Jewish residents of the city. The greatest bloodshed was not between Jew and non-Jew but between Jewish factions that disagreed over the direction of the Jewish state. The right wing leadership led by radical rabbis and militant religious zealots demanded that all decisions regarding the status of Jerusalem and its boundaries adhere to their strict interpretation of Jewish law. They proclaimed themselves as the only true representatives of the Jewish people and therefore the only voice of relevance in the conflict. The more moderate voices on the left, were pushed to the side by leaders of the governing coalition who sought to maintain power even if it meant siding with the radical right and agreeing to their ultra-religious, messianic agenda to maintain power. The foreign policy of the Jewish state was thus hijacked by those who saw Israel only through the narrow prism of a theocracy. This narrow and unsustainable approach to governance, ultimately led to civil war - Jew vs. Jew, the toppling of the government and the ultimate capture of the holy city of Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus, who went on to expel all Jews from the city for more than 2,000 years."

That startling report was filed by the historian Josephus in the year 70 ce – but it could have been the NY Times or Wall Street Journal of this past week. As shocking as it may seem, the headlines of today remind the student of history of those of 2,000 years ago when conflict between Saduceeds, Pharacies and Zealots dominated the land of Israel and ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans.

I am not a politician, as a rabbi the politics of the synagogue are no match or training ground for the geopolitical chess game of international diplomacy. I remind myself time and again that I can only speak with authority about Judaism. But if Judaism is anything it is a lesson in history and the history of our people is that we are our own worst enemy. That time and again it was our own internal conflicts, intolerance and narrow mindedness as much as existential threats that have led to the destruction of our greatest institutions, communities and even to our national home.

The problem in Israel today is not the Palestinians – the problem is **<u>us</u>**. The solution to these problems are there, Jews and Palistinians agree on 95% of the final status map. But we, the Jewish people are allowing the religious right to hold the future of Israel hostage to its ultra religious agenda.

But I can't even really say the problem is us, because the right wing religious parties with tent, sign post and gun have taken it upon themselves to set the borders of Israel and in doing so the foreign policy of the Jewish state. In all sincerity – the religious right hate us in this room [Reform Jews] nearly as much as they hate the Arabs. On the very day the settlement expansion was announced the right wing religious parties proposed a law in the Knesset that would make it impossible for a convert to Judaism or a person not born of a certified Jewish mother to make aliyah under the right of return – the founding principle of the Jewish state.

I don't understand why we are defending the actions of the radical religious right?! In their arcane view reform, liberal, progressive Judaism is as much a threat to the Jewish people as the Palestinians.

And yet, we subjugate our voice to their perceived authority. We think because they wear a yamulka and tzitzit that they are the only truly authentic Judaism and therefore if they say the land was ours because God gave it to Abraham – then it must be always and eternally – because they are really Jewish so they should know.

They don't know, they don't know what they are doing – we will lose this land and its people if we continue down the path of settlements and alienation of our only true friend and ally in the world the United States. The ultra religious have no end game, ask them where does it end and they will tell you when the Arabs are pushed beyond Israel's borders. Ask them what those borders are and they will cite the Torah, not the UN, not peace accords, not the road map, but a greater Israel that is not only indefensible; but unattainable. While they fight with Palestinians over acres of land Iran is building bombs and missiles - settlement expansion makes finding a political solution to Iran that much more difficult if not impossible.

And to what end, in 8 years the Palestinians will out number Jews within the land of Israel regardless of its borders. Israel will discover itself to be an apartheid state and the nations of the world will demand that the Arab majority have a seat at the table and that will be the end of the Jewish state, the end of Israel. It will happen in our lifetime.

I want to be clear I am not criticizing Israel, I am criticizing us, the American Jewish community that have not created the political will, the political urgency, for Israel to do the hard, but necessary thing. The only real solution is for us in this room, for lovers of Israel to demand a two state solution **now** before it too slips away. To create the positive political pressure to draw a line in the sand and say this is it, this land is your land, this land is our land and negotiate the details the less than 5% that is actually in dispute.

The response of the American Jewish community must be to find our voice and stand up to the religious right and demand a two state solution NOW. Enough with settlements built out of religious zealotry with total disregard for political

expediency. Enough with a foreign policy of religious self interest and not the long term best interests of the Jewish state.

There are enough existential threats to Israel today, we cannot afford to be the source of our own undoing from within. All of this has happened before, it will happen again, unless we stand up for Israel now – for a future that it can secure, borders it can defend and a moral position that is unassailable in the eyes of the world and our own conscience.