

Publishing Editor's column

SOMETHING we take for granted these days is that events in Israel will make the headlines in the media. These words are being written at the end of a month (January) in which events in Israel have twice dominated news bulletins and newspaper headlines. The first was the stroke which has removed Ariel Sharon from the political scene, the second the triumphing of the militant Islamic organisation Hamas in the Palestinian elections. Similar events in, say, an African country of comparable size would probably attract only a paragraph. This prominence of Israel is a truly remarkable sign that we are living in the last days.

Various reasons, all valid, can be advanced for this interest: the religious significance of the Land; the Holocaust; the fact that Britain once ruled it; the fact that Jews are to be found all over the world with many of them prominent in politics, the media and commerce. One factor which has become increasingly important in recent years is that Israel is widely regarded as holding the key to world peace. This view has advanced in prominence since the growth in Islamic terrorism, now aimed not just against Israel, as it has been for many years, but against many nations, especially those of the West, who are regarded as supportive of Israel.

The removal of Jews from the Gaza Strip by Israel last summer is widely regarded as a step towards the removal of Jews from most of the area taken over by Israel in 1967, and the establishment of a fully independent Palestinian state. This, it is hoped, will at last lead to peace in the area. These hopes have been dashed by the recent developments.

Over ten years ago, hopes of peace were similarly dashed by the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, who seemed to be on the road to handing over land to the Palestinians. Five years ago Ehud Barak was quickly voted out of office when he seemed to be moving towards a settlement based on the principle of 'land for peace'.

Now, when another leader seemed to be prepared to hand over large tracts of Judea and Samaria, the core territories of the ancient nation of Israel, he has been removed from the scene. The hand of God is surely at work here, for, as has been pointed out, the Gogian invasion involves coming against a nation in possession of "the mountains of Israel" (Ezek. 38:8).

At the time of writing, world sympathy is with Israel and somewhat against Hamas, but should the election of Hamas result in the election of a hard-line right-wing government in Israel's March elections things would surely change, especially if Hamas adopted a more conciliatory tone. A couple of years ago a poll taken in Europe resulted in Israel being regarded as the greatest threat to world peace, and this view would be reinforced by the election of a more right-wing Israeli government. Israel has been heavily dependent on US support over the years, especially in vetoing the many anti-Israel resolutions passed in the United Nations, but will this continue?

My attention was recently drawn to a report commissioned by a group of Jewish Americans entitled *America 2020: How the Next Generation Views Israel*, which drew attention to widespread anti-Israel views amongst students at leading American universities. It is from the ranks of such that the future policy makers of the nation will come, and the report is surely an indication of a coming time when the US will be less active in supporting Israel, leaving the way clear for those nations desirous of wiping Israel from the map to pursue their evil course.

Though God will ultimately save Israel from being wiped out, there is a time of great trouble coming upon her first. If Israel elects a more hard-line government it will be under the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu, who, as Israel's finance minister under Ariel Sharon until last summer, instituted measures that have given Israel economic growth, but at considerable social cost.

This was shown in an advertisement for a charitable organisation called Ahavas Chesed (sent to me by a reader), which states: "Over 1.5 million Israelis live below the poverty level"; and, "Israel now leads the world in child poverty". Reports recently in the Jewish press have indicated a widening gap between rich and poor in Israel, with very wealthy individuals taking an increasing share of national wealth.

It is a situation reminiscent of the days before the Assyrian invasion in Old Testament times, as portrayed in such chapters as Amos 5 and 6 and Micah 3 and 4. Just as God punished the nation with invading armies then, so will He do with modern Israel.

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