

Publishing Editor's column

WE CHRISTADELPHIANS have always had a keen interest in modern Israel, believing that the Scriptures teach that there will be a return of the Jews to the Land prior to the return of Christ, and that the Kingdom which he will establish will be based on the Old Testament kingdom of Israel restored. Our nineteenth-century brethren and sisters were thrilled when a few Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to Palestine, as it was then known, and began to cultivate the land. The founding of the Zionist movement in 1897, and the taking over of Palestine by Britain in 1917, caused great excitement, opening up the way for many more Jews to return.

After that, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the consequent development of the nation into a strong military power and a significant economic force in Middle East terms, were a great source of interest to us. It is fair to say that the developments that have occurred during the last century have been far beyond anything envisaged by our early brethren, and we should never cease to be thrilled by them.

During its fifty-six years of history there has been a shift in the general perception of Israel, from that of a plucky little nation surrounded by enemies to that of a powerful nation oppressing the Palestinians. Furthermore, different perspectives are to be found in the media; one outlet will concentrate on Jews killed and maimed in a suicide bombing, another on Arab children killed by Israeli military action. These different perspectives go back to the origin of the nation; one source will speak of heroic Jewish resistance to invading Arab armies, another of Palestinian villagers uprooted, even killed, by Jewish forces seeking to establish the nation. All this makes it difficult to take an objective view of both the history of the last few years and the current situation.

It is fair to say that the standard Christadelphian stance regarding Israel today is to accept the favourable side. There are, however, voices emerging in our midst who take the Arab perspective, and go on to argue that we should attach no Biblical significance to what has happened in our times, apparently on the basis that the conduct of the State of Israel has been such that its existence cannot be the work of God. Furthermore, it is even said that the Jews should

not any more be regarded as God's special people nor Israel His special land. This view is, of course, the standard view in Christendom, though there are many, especially in America, who take the Bible at face value, as we do, on this issue, and are supportive of Israel as a result.

There are two basic points that should be borne in mind on the matter. The first is that there are many prophecies of Jewish restoration in the Scriptures that are expressed unconditionally and are linked with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. It is true that much of what is prophesied requires the return of Christ to occur before it can be fulfilled, but to deny that what has happened regarding the Jews in recent times has no relation to God's purpose with the earth does not make sense.

The second point is that, although in view of the prophecies the establishment of the State of Israel must be regarded as the hand of God at work, this does not mean that its conduct is in accordance with God's will, just as the nation of old was established in the Land but did not behave itself in ways pleasing to God. A majority of its Jewish population are not religious, and those that are perpetuate the empty formalism so strongly condemned by Jesus. Its politics are beset with political infighting and claims of scandal and corruption. It is increasingly becoming like any other Western nation, with growing problems of drug abuse, family breakdown and crime. These things are apparent from Israel's own English-language media. We should not feel obliged to defend every action taken by Israel, though we will naturally feel concerned when its conduct is unfairly maligned or its very right to exist challenged.

In view of these two points, whatever the conduct of modern Israel there is no reason to abandon our belief that its existence is God's work and a significant sign that Christ's return is near. Bible prophecy leads us to expect the nations generally to be against Israel, and this may in part be caused by Israel's conduct. Let us, however, always remember that the Israel of the future will not be the Israel of today. The latter will be overthrown by hostile nations and replaced by a nation which, under its Messiah, will at last truly fulfil God's purpose in calling the descendants of Jacob to be His own people.

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