

# Publishing Editor's column

**S**OMETHING you have to get used to as you grow older is that things you remember happening years ago actually took place longer ago than you think they did. Thus I have difficulty in realising that it is now forty years since the Six-Day War of June 1967, and that many readers of this magazine are too young to remember the exciting events of those times. Looking back, we see that in the war Israel triumphed over the forces of surrounding Arab nations and took over Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Palestinian occupied territories west of the Jordan. It all looks so straightforward in retrospect, and our attention today has been focused instead on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians that has resulted from this victory, conflict that has spread across the world in the form of Islamic terrorism. In 1967 most of the world cheered as plucky little Israel triumphed over the overwhelmingly superior forces of the surrounding Arab nations; today Israel is widely regarded as a domineering bully, trampling the oppressed Palestinians under foot.

It must be difficult for those who were not around at the time, or were not old enough to take an interest in what was happening, to appreciate how exciting it was to listen to the reports of Michael Elkins, the Canadian-Jewish BBC correspondent in Jerusalem. On the evening of the Monday when war broke out it was he who first broke the sensational news to the world, and to brethren and sisters waiting to find out what was happening to God's people Israel: "Less than 15 hours after the fighting began at dawn this morning, there was every evidence that Israel has already won the war . . . Israel has today created the nearest thing to instant victory the modern world has ever seen". We were enthralled as the story unfolded over the rest of the week, just as previous generations of Christadelphians were enthralled when the British took Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917 and the State of Israel was declared in 1948.

The buildup to war had its effect on the Brotherhood. Baptisms quadrupled in Britain, as the ecclesial news in the *Christadelphian* for July 1967 shows. Attendances of brethren and sisters at meetings improved. Afterwards, special lectures were held which attracted many visitors, with what permanent results I know not. Presumably in 1917 and 1948 there was a similar

effect. There was, however, a significant factor in 1967 which differentiated it from 1948 and 1917: Israel already existed as a nation and was being threatened by surrounding nations, with Russia in the background apparently prepared to join in. It was this, I believe, that caused many who were on the verge of baptism to make the commitment before, as they saw it, it was too late.

The anticipation in 1967 that the long-expected Russian invasion of Israel was about to happen was, of course, misplaced; important developments in prophetic fulfilment have taken place since then. I recall attending a fraternal in 1966 at which several speakers spoke on the signs of the times, and I recall one speaker declaring that nothing remained to be fulfilled before Christ returned, so we could expect him at any time. Such an attitude has always existed in our community; I recall being told of an elderly sister a hundred years or so ago who was so convinced that Christ was about to return that she did not bother to order coal for winter. More recently, a notice about a forthcoming Bible School, now past, said something to the effect that, though we fully expect Christ to have come before it is held, in the event that he has not the arrangements will be thus and so.

It is unrealistic to be so certain about the nearness of Christ's return, for we can never be sure that there is not some unforeseen aspect of prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled. More worrying, however, is the tendency to think, "My lord delayeth his coming" (Mt. 24:48), and to behave in ways unfitting for a servant of Christ. One thing we should always be aware of is the warning of our Master in the same chapter: "be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (v. 44). This surely means that when there comes that time of crisis for Israel that will conclude with the return of our Lord, we will not be around in our homes and ecclesias to see it, but will have been taken away for judgement in a time of peace. Events such as the Six-Day War strengthen our faith in God's hand at work in the nations, warn us that things will not always continue as they are and give opportunities for preaching, but our readiness for our Master's return for us his saints is something we must have whatever the state of things in the world.

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