

Publishing Editor's column

A BROTHER commented to me recently that significant events to do with Israel in modern times have tended to happen in years ending in 7. He had a point; the four most significant stages in Israel's history have all occurred in years ending in 7:

1897 The First Zionist Congress.

1917 The Balfour Declaration and the taking of Jerusalem from the Turks by Britain.

1947 The United Nations resolution partitioning Palestine between Jew and Arab, leading to the independence of Israel in 1948.

1967 The Six-Day War, resulting in the old city of Jerusalem falling into Israel's hands.

The current year also ends with a 7, and is forty years, a significant Bible time period, from the last of the four events above, the conquest of Jerusalem. We used to relate the words of the Mount Olivet Prophecy, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled" (Mt. 24:34), to forty years from 1948, but 1988 came and went without any particularly important event happening. More recently we have wondered if the forty years began in 1967, bringing us to the present year, but it seems rather late for all the things Jesus had previously spoken about in the prophecy to be fulfilled. Though we may have to abandon the idea that a generation can be limited to forty years, we do wonder if we may not be on the edge of very significant events, perhaps the fifth and final stage in the development of modern Israel prior to her enemies combining against her and the intervention of Christ.

Are there any indications that 2007 might be a very significant one for those who watch keenly for signs of Christ's return? Indeed there are. In an article published in the *Spectator* magazine on 6 January last, Douglas Davis, a veteran commentator on Middle East affairs, said, "Within the next 12 months, the Americans or the Israelis, possibly both, are likely to launch military strikes aimed at crippling Iran's nuclear ambitions. Those strikes may come sooner rather than later. And they will probably be nuclear".

In May last year I drew attention to an article in the *New Yorker* magazine by a leading American commentator claiming, on the basis of inside information, that America was preparing to launch a massive air attack on Iran's developing nuclear facilities. Since then the fanatical president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has made clear Iran's

determination to develop nuclear weapons and work towards the destruction of Israel. The hints that are coming out that nuclear weapons will be used against Iran may be intended to indicate to nations which currently support Iran that they should put pressure on Iran, and to the people of Iran that they should overthrow their present leadership or suffer the consequences, but there seems to be no doubt that military action against Iran is being planned, even if it is not nuclear.

Iran is sponsoring Israel's two great enemies on its borders, Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon. In December 2006 the *Jerusalem Post* said, "2007 will be the year of war, both in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. And possibly even against Syria. It could happen in this spring or perhaps in the summer . . . there is a high probability that Israel will find itself fighting at least two wars on two fronts, one against the Hamas army being created in the Gaza Strip and the other against Hezbollah". Such a conflict could, of course, be triggered by an attack on Iran.

The indications are there that war could break out soon. America has moved a second aircraft carrier into the Persian Gulf and has built up its forces in the Black Sea. Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert last autumn appointed a right-wing hawk, Avigdor Lieberman, to a new cabinet post to cover external security issues. European countries involved in peace-keeping roles in Lebanon have stationed more ships off the coast than is needed for this task, indicating that they are watching for hostilities to break out.

However, little attention is being given in the UK media to the threat of war. The more serious newspapers are largely concerned with political intrigue and gossip, the less serious with the scandalous doings of sport and entertainment personalities. Thus people are largely oblivious to the threat of war. Yet we already know that conflict in the Middle East can bring terrorism to nations like the UK in its wake, and the heavy dependence of our society on oil, coupled with the dominance of the Gulf nations in providing it, could mean that retaliation by Iran to an attack will bring the world to its knees. Though we may have the thrill of seeing Bible prophecy fulfilled before our eyes, as in 1967, we may well also have to endure considerable difficulties in our lives before we are called away to judgement.

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