

EDITORIAL

Tensions in the Holy Land

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The Six Day War between the Israelis and their Arab neighbors in June of 1967 resulted in far-reaching changes geographically, politically and psychologically. No one is in a position fully to understand, assess and interpret the changes or to project the future. No one can treat the subject with complete objectivity. Christians, for example, differ violently on the subject, some ardently supporting the Arab cause, others just as ardently championing the Israelis. Many Christians are genuinely interested in healing the breach and fostering peace; a few are doing something about it. These include the Sisters of Sion, members of a convent in the Old City of Jerusalem, who are holding language classes attended by both Arabs and Jews. Arabs are learning Hebrew, Jews are learning Arabic, and both groups meet occasionally for fellowship.

MOST OF THE PALESTINIAN ARABS ARE FRUSTRATED

In their frustration, the Arabs' inclination is to blame someone else for their plight. Some Palestinians are convinced that King Hussein is a traitor because he would not give the Arab Legion his full support and thus accounted for its quick defeat. Such a view appears to have no foundation in fact. The most prevalent view among Arabs is that the stunning victory of the Israelis over the Arab armies could only be explained on the basis of massive help, direct or indirect, from the United States and Britain.¹ This view explains why Syria to this day will not permit British or American citizens to enter its borders and why American relations with Egypt and Jordan remain strained. Like many Orientals and like the rulers of Nazi Germany, Middle East Arabs have a tendency

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1. "Nasser's Views on Peace," *Arab News and Views* (Feb. 1969), p. 1.

to place much importance in the spoken word. Consequently, the propagandists and those who listen to them place much weight upon a war of words. Truth does not seem to be a major consideration in this propaganda, but attention is given instead to the effect of words, whether true or false. Thus, in 1964, Arabs in Jerusalem were convinced that a Jew had killed President John Kennedy and were surprised when informed that the Jew involved in the events had killed Kennedy's assassin. This example illustrates the effectiveness of certain Arab channels of communication in the mass media.

The tendency of Arabs to believe that words have an inherent power helps to explain the present volume of hate propaganda and the difficulty the typical Middle East Arab has in accepting reality. The Palestinians of the West Bank, namely that portion of Jordan west of the Jordan River but occupied by the Israelis since 1967, have a peculiar sense of frustration. They have always felt themselves to be quite different from the Jordanians east of the Jordan. The latter they have regarded as essentially Bedouins, while they themselves are farmers, craftsmen and tradesmen. They resent the fact that King Hussein's government rests upon the strength of a Bedouin army. Simply to be returned to the jurisdiction of the government in Amman would not be for them an unmixed blessing.

Since many of them are refugees, their main concern is to regain property within the State of Israel. They are thus sympathetic to leaders like Nasser, who exploit their frustrations and keep alive the hope that the Jews can be driven into the sea. The more realistic among them realize that in open conflict with Jews, they would again suffer defeat. So, in their frustration, they would prefer to see a settlement imposed from the outside rather than one worked out between the victor and the vanquished. They would, for example, welcome seeing all of Palestine placed under the jurisdiction of the United Nations, with Arabs and Israelis forced to live side by side, their safety to be guaranteed by the United Nations. For the typical villager, however, life goes on about the same as before under King Hussein or under the British or under the Turks. They have found the Israeli military governors just in their dealings. They are permitted to retain a large degree of local autonomy. The Arab mayors of Arab villages meet regularly with the Israeli officials who, like the ancient Romans, are interested primarily in "law and order." These Palestinians have never been self-governing except in local affairs.

The greatest hostility against the Israelis is found in places like Jenin, Nablus and to some extent Hebron. It is noteworthy that the least hostility to the Jews is found in the Christian communities of Ramallah and Bethlehem and Tayibeh. Most Arabs have found it possible

to live with the Israelis better than they anticipated. Shopkeepers in East Jerusalem and some of the villages often greet strangers with the Jewish greeting, "Shalom." There have been surprisingly few acts of terrorism or sabotage originating in Jewish-occupied Palestine; most have come from across the borders. Both Jordanian and Israeli currency is used on the West Bank, especially in outlying districts like Nablus. Arab farmers are permitted to carry their produce across the Jordan and sell it on the East Bank. Businessmen in East Jerusalem make regular trips to Amman. Money in the banks of Amman is being released to finish buildings on the West Bank which were started prior to the June war. Visitors to Israel today are surprised at the domestic tranquility in contrast to the impressions gained by listening to the newscasts here in the West. Arab refugees in the Gaza strip were second-class citizens under Egypt during the nineteen years of armistice. Many of them are now employed by the Israelis in road building and other public works, while the products of their craftsmen are being marketed throughout Israel-occupied Palestine. Arab communities within the State of Israel, such as Nazareth, are represented in the Jewish Parliament (Knesset) and are treated like other Israeli citizens except for exemption from military service. Last summer 15,304 students and others from neighboring Arab countries went via Jordan to Israel to visit and then returned to their homelands.² The Israeli government insisted on stamping their passports, but this act did not deter thousands of them from coming.

WHAT ABOUT THE ISRAELIS?

There are deep divisions within the Israeli government as to whether most of these occupied lands should be given back to the Arab neighbors, whether the status quo should be kept indefinitely, or whether these occupied lands should be incorporated into a larger Israeli State, peace or no peace. The same difference of opinion is found among the Arabs, who likewise are divided as to what concessions to make to the Israelis, if any. Israelis have been moving cautiously with reference to the occupied lands. It is against their stated policy to permit archaeological expeditions in areas that were once Jordanian. The only exception is given to those who were authorized by the Jordanians prior to the June

2. C. A. Wardi, Ed., *Christian News From Israel* (Dec. 1968), p. 8.

war in order to prevent the jeopardizing of a final peace settlement.

The Jews are severely criticized for planting new colonies in this territory such as those in East Jerusalem, Hebron, and the Golon Heights in Syria. In practice, such settlements are mostly limited to areas where Jews were residents prior to 1948. This is true of Hebron, of the Mount Scopus area of Jerusalem, and of the Syrian Heights east of the Sea of Galilee. To date there has been no large scale occupancy of territory that had never known Jewish occupancy. The southeast corner of the Old City of Jerusalem is now being reoccupied by Israelis, but this area was formerly known as the Jewish quarter before the Jews were expelled in 1948. Defensive steps recently taken include a new road from Qumran to Engedi, west of the Dead Sea, and fortifications along the Jordan River and the Suez Canal. At times the Israelis have been unnecessarily provocative in dealing with their Arab neighbors. One of the most flagrant instances was the Twentieth Anniversary Celebration of May, 1960, when armed forces paraded through the streets of East Jerusalem flaunting their military hardware. Other instances are those of Israeli tourists, especially young people in miniskirts and shorts, barreling through Arab villages in a manner more arrogant than courteous.

Shopkeepers have been injured by the restriction of goods from other parts of the world and by the high prices they have to pay for products manufactured in Israel. Tour agencies in East Jerusalem have been especially adversely affected, but gradually their hotels and their guide services are being utilized by Israeli tour agencies. Nearly all welcome the convenience of being able to go from Dan to Beersheba and from Jericho to Jaffa unhindered. But the Palestinians resent the fact that their friends in Arab lands cannot visit them as they did before June 1967, and that tourists cannot come into the Holy Land directly from Amman, Cairo, Damascus or Beirut. Israelis are very conscious of their isolation. The Arab boycott is among the most effective counter measures that Israel has experienced. Israel does enjoy normal relations with Cyprus and Turkey and Greece, but all other avenues, North, South, and East are closed. There has been a noticeable hardening of the attitude of the average Israelis during the last two years. They are becoming less responsive to world opinion and less concerned with the relations with their Arab neighbors. They are more inclined to press on with their own "living room" whether the others like it or not.

The Israelis are particularly frustrated with respect to the Christian community at large. Israeli leaders have expressed deep resentment at the attitude of Christian leaders during and after the June war. They feel that the Christian leadership on the whole deserted them in their hour of extremity and showed a lack of concern when they faced possible

annihilation. After noting the criticism they have encountered on the part of Christian spokesmen in Arab lands, they attribute these pro-Arab, anti-Israel attitudes to “vested interests.” They believe that these Christians are influenced against Israelis because of their desire to work in Arab lands and that this “interest” has perverted their perspective. This criticism is directed primarily against two types of Christians. The older Christian communities of the Middle East, they feel, are pro-Arab because of their constituents in Arab lands. They feel that Christian groups of the west are pro-Arab because of Israel’s success in the war and because of the Arab refugee problem. In other words, these Christian leaders, they believe, are pro-Arab on a humanitarian basis, not on the basis of justice or truth.

On the whole, conservative Christians tend to support the Jewish cause more than Christian “liberals,” probably because they are influenced by the Bible prophecies which they interpret as being fulfilled in recent Jewish successes. While the Israelis appreciate this support from Christians, they are tormented by the realization that these same Christians are interested in Israel, not so much on humanitarian and political as upon religious grounds. They realize that these evangelical Christians would like to see all the Jews converted to Christianity, which the Jews believe would mean the extinction of the Jewish State. They would regard such evangelistic efforts as simply a proselytization, and those who became Christians as not only apostates but traitors to the State. Israelis prefer atheists to Christians because the latter are less nationalistic. So the typical Israeli feels extremely isolated, politically, militarily and religiously. He shares with Christians a common heritage in the Old Testament, but many liberal Christians of the world, with the exception of the late Martin Luther King, are more sympathetic to the Arabs because they are the “underdog,” while “Bible-believing Christians” cannot be trusted because they are only interested in converting the Jews. For this reason Christian missionaries among the Jews have greater difficulties than even those working among the Moslems. Practically the only effective evangelism on the part of Christian missionaries in the Middle East is upon nominal Christians of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities.

“Will the Temple be rebuilt?” is a question often asked. Such an occurrence seems quite out of the question in the foreseeable future. In the first place, modern Judaism does not require temples, since it already has synagogues. In the second place, animal sacrifices would not be tolerated in a civilized country, and third, the Temple Mount is now occupied by the most beautiful structure in the Arab world, The Dome of the Rock, which seems likely to remain there indefinitely.

Are recent Israeli victories a fulfillment of biblical prophecy?

Many experts in this field confidently affirm that such is the case. Most of those who do so fail to distinguish between prophecies concerning a return from Mesopotamia in the sixth century and a return in modern times.³ Very few biblical prophecies, if any, specifically refer to the building of the political entity in the twentieth century. At the same time, many events concerning both the return itself and recent Israeli victories can hardly be explained apart from divine providence and purpose. However, those who make these conclusions are hard put to explain why the working of divine purpose should be accompanied by so much violence, hatred and misery. Christians are in a unique position to play a conciliating role by seeking to understand the point of view of each of the contestants and to promote a reconciliation of differences. As never before, Christians need to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” and adjacent areas. The alternatives to peace are fearful to contemplate.

3. W. M. Smith, *Israel / Arab Conflict and the Bible* (1908), p. 84.