

## FROM OUR PASTOR

### March 19, 2016

---

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

Winston Churchill understood Russia. He famously stated, "*Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.*" Once again Vladimir Putin is doing as Churchill observed.

BBC News reported on March 15: "***Russian forces have started leaving Syria after Monday's surprise withdrawal announcement by President Vladimir Putin....But Russia will continue air strikes, and keep several hundred personnel and air defense systems, officials said. Peace talks aimed at resolving the conflict are entering a second day. The announcement by President Putin on the very day of the beginning of this round of Intra-Syrian Talks in Geneva is a significant development...***".

Apparently no one seems to know the reason for the withdrawal. One speculation that the war is won--with the Syrian dictator Assad feeling secure enough to defeat ISIS and recover the rest of his country on his own. Other speculations include a rift between Assad and Putin, pressure from neighboring Turkey, and "peace breaking out" due to the ongoing talks. Peace breaking out?

If peace is breaking out between warring Muslim factions, what does that mean? History reveals that it usually means they want to fight a common enemy before taking up arms against each other again. So who is the common enemy and why the timing?

Last week's tepid visit by Secretary of State John Kerry to Israel was marked by Iran launching two missiles labeled "Israel must be wiped off the earth." It was interpreted as a warning message to Mr. Kerry and Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Thanks to the Iran treaty implemented in recent months, Iran now has billions of dollars to resupply and support Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in Syria and Lebanon. The recent buildup of rockets, artillery, and heavily armed terrorists just north of Israel's border is cause for serious concern for Israel. Increased terror attacks by individuals on Israeli citizens are also linked to support from Iran.

To understand the mindset of Israel you need only two locations: Masada and Kiryat Shmona. The mountain of Masada is well known as the last stand of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 68-73 AD. As the Romans closed

in over 900 Jews took their own lives rather than become slaves to Rome. Soldiers in the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) traditionally go to the top of Masada and pledge "Masada will never fall again."

Kiryat Shmona is a town on in the north of Israel where members Yassir Arafat's [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#) took over a school and murdered or wounded nearly 40 children on 11 April 1974.

Three months later I was a passenger on a bus that drove past the school. It was barricaded by fencing, but as we went by our guide pointed out the bullet pockmarks and damage to the school as a result of the firefight with soldiers. He also pointed out the room where children were lined up against a wall and machine gunned to death. I was only twenty years old, but the sight made me sick, as it did everyone on the bus. The school massacre is a terrible memory for towns in Northern Israel that today face an array of enemy just a few miles away. When will the next attack come?

As dangers loom all around the world, we need Jesus Christ to return to this earth and establish His Kingdom now more than ever. We long for the time promised through God's prophet Isaiah when, "*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.*" Isaiah 11:9.

Imagine what that will be like: no more hurt, no more destruction, no more pain or suffering.

Keep praying daily "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done."

*Rex Sexton  
Pastor, UCG Portland*