

FROM OUR PASTOR

June 24, 2017

Sabbath greetings to everyone,

In 1900 the Turkish Ottoman Empire dominated peoples and land from the Adriatic Sea to India. The Ottoman Sultan ruled over a domain that stretched from the deserts of Libya in Africa to the snow-covered mountains of Armenia and Kurdistan. This ruler controlled the oil fields of Arabia, marshes of southern Iraq and the mountain valleys of Bosnia on the Austrian border. In 1923 the Ottoman Empire came apart. Due to forces such as cultural factions, internal strife, corrupt government at all levels, and lack of identity and purpose, the once mighty empire broke like shattered glass after being on the losing side in World War I.

The world would never be the same. Historyguy.com describes the fallout: "Out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire arose the forces that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the most long-lasting and horrific conflicts to afflict the world since 1914. Both World Wars, the Holocaust, the rise and reign of Soviet Communism in Russia, the Arab-Israeli wars, the various Iraq wars and the terrorism that shook the world on September 11, 2001 are all related. All these events and the world-wide violence that ensued, originated, to some degree, with the death throes of the Ottoman Empire."

The Ottoman Empire was destroyed and replaced by a significantly smaller country simply known as "Turkey." One of the most remarkable and successful leaders of the 20th Century, Mustafa Ataturk, gained control. He abolished the Ottoman Empire and proclaimed the foundation of the Turkish Republic in its place. He was president until his death in 1938. The secularist and progressive government he founded resulted in building a modern nation-state. He made primary education free and compulsory, opening thousands of new schools all over the country. Turkish women received equal civil rights during Atatürk's presidency ahead of many Western countries. The Turkish Parliament granted him the surname Atatürk in 1934, which means "Father of the Turks," in recognition of the role he played in building the modern Turkish Republic.

Since 2014 and the election of Recep Erdogan, Turkey has been rapidly changing. Coming from an Islamist political background his government has been criticized for alleged human rights violations and crackdown on press and social media, having blocked access to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube on numerous occasions. More journalists have been incarcerated in Turkey than in any other country. Political commentators have described Erdogan's increasing executive power as the "fall of Turkish democracy" and the "birth of a dictator." Some have called it, "stealth Islamization by popular vote."

Fallen empires often try to reclaim control. Russian efforts in recent years to take control of former USSR territory are well known. There are numerous reports now from

Jerusalem that Turkey is pouring people and money into that city with the goal of controlling the Temple Mount. Breaking Israel news reported this week, "The Jerusalem municipality's eastern Jerusalem experts have revealed in recent days that Turkey has been competing with Jordan over influence among Arab residents as well as over control of the Temple Mount. The city's experts, David Koren and Ben Avrahami, also revealed that Turkey has begun pouring millions of dollars into non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in eastern Jerusalem, in order to strengthen Ankara's status among the Arab residents, at the expense of Jordan and Israel."

The considerable sums of Turkish money fund a number of Temple Mount activities: Koran reading groups, transporting worshipers to and from the mosque, Ramadan meals, renovations, and cleaning.

It has been over one hundred years since the last Turkish soldier left Jerusalem after conquest of the city by British General Allenby. The Turks have returned in the form of support and cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood elements there. The result is uncertain at best. Does Jerusalem concern us?

King David wrote in Psalm 137:5 "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skills!" Recall the striking words of the prophet Zechariah, "It shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it."

Add to that 2 Kings 21:12, "Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.'"

*Rex Sexton
Pastor, UCG Portland*