

## From Our Pastor

### February 17, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

Warning have been given for the past two years that the ongoing war in Syria could result in a conflict between the bigger players. The Assad regime has been gaining previously lost ground with the help of Russia, Iran and Hezbollah. One of the insurgent groups fighting Assad is Isis (Islamic State), two of the other anti-Assad groups are fighting both Assad and Isis. Turkey, until recently considered a reliable ally of the USA, is against Assad but has been attacking the Kurds, who are supported by the US in the war against Isis. In order to avoid aerial conflict, the US and Russia have agreed on a "line in the air" across Syria which their planes will not cross, but something has gone awry on the ground.

In an attack on an outpost last week, perhaps over one hundred Russian soldiers were killed by American airstrikes. The New York Times reported, "Four Russian nationals, and perhaps dozens more, were killed in fighting between pro-government forces in eastern Syria and members of the United States-led coalition fighting the Islamic State, according to Russian and Syrian officials. A Syrian military officer said that about 100 Syrian soldiers had been killed in the fighting on Feb. 7 and 8, but news about Russian casualties has dribbled out only slowly, through Russian news organizations and social media. Much about the attack and the associated casualties has been obscured in the fog of war. For reasons that remain unclear, Syrian government troops and some Russian nationals appear to have attacked a coalition position, near Al Tabiyeh, Syria."

Other reports say the Russian losses were almost two hundred. However, as is so often the case in the Syrian conflict, evidence is clouded by information from other sources. The Russians are denying that any Russian soldiers were involved. The Israeli news Haaretz wrote, "Russian fighters were among those killed when U.S.-led coalition forces clashed with pro-government forces in Syria this month, former associates of the dead said on Monday - however the majority of casualties are believed to be hired mercenaries from para-military company Wagner."

American and Russian officials were quick to point out that there had been ongoing communication during the conflict and neither side blames the other nor wants the incident to lead to any further escalation. As the NYT reported, "Coalition officials were in regular communication with Russian counterparts before, during and after the thwarted, unprovoked attack," according to Col. Ryan S. Dillon, a spokesman for the American military. "Russian officials assured coalition officials they would not engage coalition forces in the vicinity."

It appears that, at least for now, a major crisis between the superpowers has been averted. With the various sides, coalitions, and loyalties in the region of Syria almost

impossible to understand, we have to wonder when an unplanned battle will happen again.

Jesus warned his followers, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:14)" Even if we watch world events non- stop on every cable news channel available, we would still not have any long warning when the events of the end time come upon the earth.

It is more important to watch ourselves, and make sure we are faithful to our God and our calling. As we are admonished in 2 Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves." Not one of us can control or influence wars, events or attitudes around the world, but we can make sure we are doing our best each day to "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

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