From Our Pastor
April 21, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to everyone!

The modern state of Israel was born in the midst of war. Few today remember that the war lasted over a year and the existence of the new nation, made up mostly of refugees from Europe, hung by a thread for many perilous months.

Honored as "Remembrance Day," The Israelis call it "The War of Independence" but their neighboring Arabs refer to the conflict as "al-Nakba," or the disaster. On November 29, 1947 the UN passed the partition resolution and the war began. By May 14, 1948 the Israeli's were gaining the upper hand, giving David Ben- Gurion the opportunity to proclaim the new nation established. The next day the regular armies of the surrounding Arab states attacked the tiny nation but were defeated in one of the most improbable victories in the history of mankind.

This past Wednesday Israel celebrated 70 years since the country's foundation, lauding its improbable economic success and military prowess, but facing a range of political and security challenges. The anniversary of the proclamation of the state of Israel by founding father David Ben-Gurion began at sundown on Wednesday according to the Hebrew calendar but falls on May 14 according to the Western calendar. The French news agency, AFP, reported, "At the traditional Jerusalem torch-lighting ceremony kicking off what Israelis call Independence Day, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed what he called "real seeds of peace" he said were beginning to sprout among some of Israel's Arab neighbors. He did not elaborate, but there have been signs of warming ties, particularly with Saudi Arabia which -- like Israel -- sees Iran as a growing threat. "Our hand is outstretched in peace to all of our neighbors who want peace," Netanyahu said in Hebrew.

"And to our enemies who think that we are a passing phenomenon, I have news for you: In 70 years from now you fill find here a country seven times stronger than what we have done so far. This is just the beginning!" He also warned about the "barbaric zealotry of radical Islam" and reiterated warnings about Iran's presence in Syria.

For many Bible students, the modern nation of Israel, which rightly should be called "Judah," is a fulfillment of prophecy and a sign that the return of Jesus Christ is near. The main scripture from which this teaching comes is Zephaniah 2:7 "The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; They shall feed their flocks there; In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the LORD their God will intervene for them and return their captives. "

It is easy to understand why. The nation of Israel is on the coast and is made up of in large part from remnants of large Jewish communities in Europe. They see themselves as "returned captives."

The primary enemy Israel faces today is Iran and her proxy armies. Tehran is backing President Bashar al-Assad's regime and building up Hezbollah forces in Syria and Lebanon. Israel occasionally tries to impede this, such as by an air strike attributed to Israel on April 9 at Syria's T-4 airbase that left 14 people dead, including seven Iranians. Everyone apparently understands that, as soon as the Hezbollah forces feel they can achieve victory, they will attack Israel from the north. If and when that takes place it could start a chain of conflicts in the surrounding areas.

One thing is certain, the coming wars in the Middle East will eventually be finished by the return of Jesus Christ to this earth and the establishment of real peace. The words of Zephaniah just after the "coast" prophecy make that clear, "The LORD will be awesome to them, For He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; All People shall worship Him, Each one from his place, Indeed all the shores of the nations." (Zephaniah 2:11)

On this past Remembrance Day, Mr. Netanyahu predicted that, in 70 years, we will find a country of Israel "seven times stronger than today." Likely the Prime Minister did not understand just how right he was.

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