

From Our Pastor

August 4, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to everyone!

The straits of Bab al-Mandeb lie between Yemen and Djibouti, at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. Most people probably have no idea where these important eighteen miles of water between land are, much less about the potential here to ignite a war.

Yemen has been the site of a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia for over three years. The war has roots going back centuries to conflicts between the Shia (Iran) and Sunni (Saudi) Muslims. In recent days the rebels, supported by Iran, have been using missiles capable of sinking ships in the Bab Al-Mandeb and saying they will shut down the waterway. Last week, Saudi Arabia said it was suspending oil shipments through the strait, on the main sea route from the Middle East to Europe, after Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis attacked two ships in the waterway. The price of oil has been going up as a result of the conflict and potential effect on shipping of oil.

Ships bound for Israel, mainly from Asia, pass through the waterway to Eilat, or continue through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean Sea. Ships bound for Jordan's Aqaba port and for some Saudi destinations must also pass through the strait. The straits are crowded with ships. Nearly five million barrels of oil flow through the straits each day. Many of the ships in the narrow straight are going to or coming from Israel, so keeping the straits open is critical for that small nation. Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, responded predictably:

"If Iran will try to block the straits of Bab al-Mandeb, I am certain that it will find itself confronting an international coalition that will be determined to prevent this, and this coalition will also include all of Israel's military branches," Netanyahu said at a passing out parade for new naval officers in Haifa. He did not specify what other nations would be part of the "international coalition" confronting Iran.

So, the almost-almost-almost war between Israel and Iran may explode in a narrow body of water away from both nations. Iran would certainly not take that step until they are confident that their proxy armies in Syria (Hezbollah) could sweep in from the North, and their proxy army in Gaza (Hamas) could sweep into Israel from the West. The wait and see game continues.

Iran is in the same location as a great ancient nation named Persia and claims to be Persia reincarnate. Persia is spoken of twenty- nine times in the Bible. It is a nation referred to as having a "prince"--or demonic power--over it. Daniel 10:13 gives a statement from an angel from God, saying that he was withstood twenty-one days by this "Prince of Persia" in a spirit realm. Some historians define this time as the time frame of a great battle between Persia and Greece. Perhaps.

What is obvious is that animosity is still there and growing. With the US media focused on political election issues, real news about the geopolitical conflicts around the world is at times difficult to come by.

The prophet Ezekiel warned about prophesying peace for Jerusalem. "... the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 13:16)." While many hope for peace and are looking forward to a time of lasting peace for the region, the near future does not look promising.

The conflict in Yemen has brought an odd alliance--Israel and Saudi Arabia--together. Not a real togetherness of purpose, but at least together in the common cause of keeping the Bab al-Mandeb open for sea traffic. This could result in some interesting event chains in the future.

The last days of this society are on the march. As we are reminded by the Apostle Peter, "...the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. (1 Peter 4:7)."

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