

## From Our Pastor

### 08/18/2018

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

More than two million Palestinians live in close quarters in the Gaza Strip, a territory the size of Detroit - about 360sq km. Gaza has been described as "the world's largest open-air prison." Their borders are tightly kept by Israel on the East, and Egypt on the West. There appears to be little hope of a better life elsewhere for the residents of Gaza. On March 30th another round of protests and skirmishes at the Israeli border began. This phase of the ongoing conflict saw the introduction of "fire balloons" launched into the wind from Gaza and landing in Israeli territory. Largely ignored by the US news outlets, the weekly (every Friday) event included the massing of thousands of protesters along the border fence and hundreds of fire balloons launched. According to one estimate the fires burned over 30,000 acres and did damage to Israeli schools, houses, and roads.

Protesters hurled rocks and burned tires, and attacked troops with pipe bombs, a Molotov cocktail, and a grenade — most of which did not manage to clear the fence and fell in Gazan territory. The army said soldiers responded to the violence with less-lethal means whenever possible but resorted to live fire when protesters crossed the border and threatened Israeli soldiers. The Times of Israel reported August 17, "According to the ministry's figures, 157 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the violent "March of Return" protests in late March. Hamas, the terror group that runs Gaza, has acknowledged that dozens of those killed were its members. Also Friday, the Israeli military carried out an airstrike on a squad of Palestinians in northern Gaza as they flew incendiary balloons towards Israel, the army said. Palestinians said there were no casualties in the attack."

The past week saw an escalation. It began with the death of an IDF soldier on the border last Friday at the hands of a Gazan sniper. Israel responded with widespread airstrikes. The UN and Egypt hurriedly talked both sides into a one-year cease fire. UN mediator Nickolay Mladenov later said the sides had been "minutes from war" before a tacit ceasefire was reached. In exchange for agreeing to the cease fire, Hamas came out well indeed. By any standards, Hamas is being richly rewarded for four months of border protests, fire balloons, and bloodshed.

Thursday, Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese network Al Mayadeen, reported that the terms of the emerging Israel-Hamas deal include a year-long cease-fire, operation of a shipping route between Cyprus and the Gaza Strip, and Qatari funding for fuel in the impoverished enclave. The deal would also entail Qatari payment of Hamas officials' salaries, according to the report, while the sea lane between Gaza and Cyprus would be under Israeli supervision. Other sources also reveal that Hamas and Gaza are also to receive 650 million dollars from the UN, ostensibly for rebuilding infrastructure. The history of billions of dollars of aid given to Gaza and the Palestine Authority over the past 50 years is not encouraging. Little of the money is ever accounted for and most

ends up in private accounts of corrupt politicians. In 2003 the CBS program "Sixty Minutes" and other news sources estimated that Yassir Arafat had squirreled away over four billion dollars during his time as head of the PA.

It is easy to predict that in one year, after this agreement has expired, that there will be more protests, violence, and bloodshed in Gaza. People do what they are paid to do. The cycle of war will repeat itself as it has so many times since 1948.

The inspired words of the prophet Isaiah are true again. "The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace." (Isaiah 59:8) Perhaps even more in line with this recent Gaza agreement are words spoken by Jeremiah, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. (Jeremiah 6:14 & 8:11).

*Rex Sexton  
Pastor, UCG Portland*