

The Nations Healed

“He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

—Revelation 22:1,2

is learned in coming weeks, such a heinous crime as was committed in Orlando sadly underscores the mental and moral sickness of the world today—

Preface: Shortly after this article was completed, we and the entire world learned of the tragic events which took place at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida during the early morning hours of Sunday, June 12th. Forty-nine people died and dozens more were injured in a mass killing, making this horrific act of violence the worst of its kind in modern United States history. At the time of this writing, law enforcement and other government officials are only in the early stages of investigating the motive and other details surrounding the killings. Regardless of what

the focus of this article. How thankful we are, however, that God has an eternal remedy for this sickness—his kingdom of righteousness, which will accomplish the healing of all peoples and nations. We continue to earnestly pray for God's kingdom to soon come, and bring to an end this sick and weary nighttime of sin and death.

WE ARE LIVING in a sick world. It is a sickness unto death which began when our first parents fell from perfection in Eden through disobedience, and today it has reached crisis proportions. The chief diseases which have brought about this condition are sin and selfishness. Sin is a flouting of the laws of God, and selfishness is an inordinate seeking of one's own interests regardless of what the consequences to others might be. Some of the symptoms of these fatal diseases are pride, hatred, and a lust for power which tolerates no interference, even at the cost of murder.

One of the most vivid descriptions of this fatal sickness of human society is the one given to us by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote, "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."—II Tim. 3:1-4

At the present time, the earth, sea, rivers, lakes, and atmosphere are all being polluted by man's inability to properly use the resources which God has provided for him. Yet, the worst of all defilements

is the pollution of the human mind and heart by sin and selfishness. Since Adam's disobedience in Eden, these pollutants have been abroad throughout the earth, plaguing mankind and the various societies he has tried to create. However, now in these "last days," the situation has become acute, for as we look about us, the cancer of sin and selfishness is now reaching unimaginable and calamitous levels.

DILEMMA FORETOLD

The present chaos and distress which have come unexpectedly upon the world are not a surprise to the Lord. There are many prophecies of his Word which have forecast such a condition. One of them, presented in symbolic language, is found in these words from Isaiah: "Behold, the LORD will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant."—Isa. 24:1-5, *Revised Standard Version*

The words "earth" and "world," when used in the prophecies of the Bible, such as in the above passage, often denote a social or civil structure which exists at any given time, one of the important

parts of which is the people. However, the planet Earth is also often referred to in the prophecies, and sometimes there is an intermingling of both the symbolic and literal in the same prophecy. An example of this is Psalm 46:6,10. Verse 6 reads, “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.” (*RSV*) In this verse the earth “melts,” but in verse 10 the earth still exists, and God’s name is exalted in it. We quote: “Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!”—*RSV*

In this prophecy of the time in which we are now living, it is the symbolic “earth” that melts, whereas the literal planet Earth remains. Indeed, by divine decree to the raging nations, peace is brought to mankind, and God’s name becomes exalted among the people. Likewise, in the prophecy quoted above from Isaiah 24, we find the symbolic earth “twisted” and “polluted,” and in it we see a leveling of all segments of human society. All of this is to the great consternation of the worldly-wise.

GOD’S PLAN FOR MAN’S RESCUE

As pointed out in Psalm 46:10, in the Lord’s due time he will say to the raging nations of earth, “Be still, and know that I am God.” This suggests divine intervention in the affairs of men at a juncture when, if left to their own devices, the sin-sick and selfish people of the earth would utterly fail in their efforts to solve the problems which they have brought upon themselves. Thus, in our approach to this subject, we should keep in mind that the great Creator is still interested in his human creatures, and will deliver them. Man will not be permitted to

destroy himself, either by weaponry, pollutants, or any other catastrophic forces.

God's wonderful plan for the rescue of mankind from the results of sin and selfishness is presented to us in the Bible in various ways. The outline of one of these begins with the narrative of the Garden of Eden. We read that in this garden the Lord provided "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden."—Gen. 2:9,10

THE ORIGINAL PARADISE

The "garden" area prepared for man in Eden was evidently a most beautiful and wonderful paradise. The idea of paradise for mankind has often been associated with some sort of spiritual existence far removed from this planet. However, God's intention from the beginning was that the earth was to be man's paradise. Eden, that small section of land which God prepared especially for our first parents, was but a sample of what the whole earth was to be, and yet will be, when God's glorious design concerning man has been fully accomplished.

In Eden much emphasis was placed on beauty. In describing the trees of the garden, those "pleasant to the sight" are mentioned first, and then those which were "good for food." We conclude from this that God not only made preparation to sustain the lives of his human creatures, but he wanted them also to enjoy their lives through appreciation of the beautiful environment which surrounded them. God was delighted with his human

creation, and he wanted them to have joy in him by being constantly reminded of his love and care.

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The Garden of Eden, in addition to its life-giving trees, contained one called “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” It is not necessary that we know the nature of this tree. The important lesson for us is that our first parents were forbidden to partake of it, and the death penalty was attached to violation of that commandment. (vss. 16,17) During the long centuries since Adam and Eve’s disobedience, the human race has been acquiring a “knowledge of . . . evil.” Correspondingly, during the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom they will have the opportunity to acquire a “knowledge of good.” Man’s experiences with both “good and evil” will enable them finally to make a fully informed choice between the two.

In the Garden of Eden there was also a river, which “went out of Eden to water the garden.” Thus, we are told in that original paradise setting were life-giving trees, and a river was there to provide water. However, because our first parents disobeyed God, they were driven out of that garden into a land full of “thorns . . . and thistles,” in which they would exist by toil and sweat, until they died. (chap. 3:18,19) The record continues, “The LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”—vss. 23,24

The Apostle Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23) Death was the penalty which was inflicted upon man. The banishment from Eden and its trees of life to thorns, thistles, and toil were the means used by the Lord to inflict that penalty. How efficient these “executioners” have been. For six thousand years man has been a suffering and dying creature, unable to overcome the hazards of his natural environment, and the failure of his fallen mental and moral behavior. Hence, he is still a dying creature, with no ability to escape that certain fate.

THE REMEDY FOR MAN

While throughout the centuries all human plans and efforts to better the condition of the fallen race have proven unsuccessful, God has a plan which will not fail. It is centered in his Messianic kingdom. In brief, this plan is, through Christ, to reestablish divine authority in the earth. It is suggested in the prayer which Jesus taught to his disciples, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) Man is in his present and ever-worsening dilemma because of disobedience to divine law, and only by obedience to the Creator’s law will he be able to enjoy peace, health, and life.

This kingdom remedy for the many ills of man which have been brought on by disobedience is presented to us in many ways in the Bible. One of these is contained in the words of our opening text, Revelation 22:1,2. These verses speak of a “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The “throne” of God suggests the exercise of divine authority in the earth. The “Lamb” is also mentioned, which

reminds us that the exercise of God's authority will be through Christ, the "Lamb of God" who died for the "sin of the world." (John 1:29) Thus will be made possible the reestablishment of the divine will among the world of mankind, for whom Christ died.

THE "RIVER"

In some places in the Bible water is used to symbolize a cleansing agency in the heart and the mind—a cleansing by the Word of truth. (Ezek. 36:25; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22) In our opening verses, however, it represents life—"a pure river of water of life," which is "clear as crystal." While this is a symbolic river, as we read about its purity and clarity, we are reminded by way of contrast how man has greatly polluted the natural rivers of the earth. Instead of being life-sustaining agencies, quite the opposite is the case in many parts of the world. How hopeless would be the outlook for man's future on this earth but for the wonderful provisions the Lord has made!

Verse 2 of our opening text says, again in symbolic language, that on "either side of the river" was "the tree of life." When our first parents transgressed God's law they were driven out of Eden in order that they might not be able to partake of the tree of life which the Lord had planted there. As previously quoted, God "drove out the man" from the garden, and placed "Cherubims" and a "flaming sword" at its entrance in order to guard the "way of the tree of life."—Gen. 3:24

Thus God ensured that man would have no opportunity to perpetuate his life. He had sinned, and now the penalty—"Dust thou art, and unto dust

shalt thou return”—fell upon him. (Gen. 3:19) There was to be no way of man’s getting himself out from under this penalty. God, however, still loved his earthly creatures, and in due time made a provision for their escape from death. That provision was Jesus, who in the symbology of the prophecies became the “Lamb of God,” the “Lamb that was slain,” for the sin of the world.—John 1:29; Rev. 5:12

Now, in the verses of our lesson, we find the “Lamb” empowered with governmental authority. From the Lamb’s throne, and the throne of God, is flowing the water of life. It is not symbolized as containing a limited supply, such as a pond or lake, but as a flowing river, and on either side of this river is the “tree of life.” It is as though in the outworking of God’s plan instructions are to be given from the “throne” that the Cherubims should no longer keep the people away from the tree of life, but that the time had now come for them, through obedience to the laws of the kingdom, to return to God’s favor and have free access to the source of life of which they had been deprived due to sin.

AN ABUNDANT FRUITAGE

Concerning that future tree of life, the prophecy states that it will “bare twelve manner of fruits,” and that it will yield fruit “every month.” This language is interesting, in that it suggests a continuous, never-failing source of life-giving fruit. It is symbolic language, but serves as a reminder of how miserably man has failed to provide even the basic necessities of life.

It is true that in certain areas, such as North America, and in many parts of Europe, food is in

plentiful supply, and we may be prone to think of the entire world from the standpoint of our restricted surroundings. The truth is that on the earth as a whole many millions are starving, and a significant portion of humanity never gets enough to eat. We speak of our society as relatively affluent, but let us remember that our “world” represents a very small part of the planet, so great a part of which is hungry and starving.

We do not know the details of how the Lord will supply an abundance of food for the billions who will ultimately fill the earth in keeping with the divine decree, but we know that he is fully able to do it. While we need not think of the fruit on the symbolic “tree of life” as representing literal food, we know that man will need food, as did our first parents in the garden. Mankind will be supplied in the kingdom with all the wholesome food that is needed, and through faith and obedience, the symbolic fruits of the tree of life will also be available. Such abundant provisions will enable man to live forever.

Our text further informs us concerning “the tree of life” that its leaves will be “for the healing of the nations.” In another prophecy of “the river of life,” where it is shown flowing from the temple, or sanctuary of the Lord, we read, “On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”—Ezek. 47:12, *RSV*

How great will be the need for the nations to be healed! This will be true of the people of all nations,

not only those which exist now, but those who have suffered and died throughout the ages. As the life-giving reign of the kingdom begins, the people of all nations will be, as it were, wounded and bleeding, in a symbolic sense. Only the provisions which the Lord has made will heal their wounds, and restore them to life, peace, and happiness. It is this ultimate condition that will be attained by means of the “river of water of life” and its “tree of life,” provided by the “throne of God and of the Lamb.”

THE NATIONS

Promises and prophecies of the Bible which give assurance of health and life in the kingdom are often misapplied to what it is believed conditions will be like in heaven. For example, Revelation 21:4 assures us of a time when there shall be “no more death,” and when all tears will be wiped away. Many fail to note the wording, “no more death,” which implies that this is a provision of the Lord for people on earth where, for six thousand years, death has been constantly present. There will come a time when death “no more” affects those dwelling on the earth.

Thus, when we read that the nations will be healed, we should remember that the sick nations exist, not in heaven, but on earth. It is here on earth where the refreshing blessings of the river of life will flow out to the people. Nationalism will not exist in the kingdom, but all nationalities of earth will have an opportunity to receive the life-giving blessings of the river of life and its tree of life. This is one of the beautiful, symbolic pictures of the

fulfillment of the promise which God made to Father Abraham when he said to him that through his seed, which is the Christ, all the families, or nations, of the earth shall be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16,27-29

Abraham was unable to know when God made this promise to him that, by the time it would be fulfilled, the families and nations of the earth would be scattered to inhabit all its continents and the isles of the sea. Indeed, it is doubtful if Abraham had any idea of the broad expanse of this beautiful planet. It is this Earth, however, which God proposes to transform into a paradise for the eternal joy of all the willing and obedient of mankind who, under the rulership of the Messianic kingdom, will turn to him in obedience and faith, and be among that multitude who will be healed and have their tears wiped away.

THE “BRIDE”

In Revelation 22:17 there is a further reference to the water of life. It reads, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”—that is, “without price.” (*RSV*) Revelation 19:10 informs us that the testimony of Jesus is the “spirit of prophecy.” Hence, it could well be that the reference to the “Spirit and the bride” refers to Jesus and his “bride.”

In Revelation 19:7 we are told of the time when the “marriage of the Lamb is come,” and that “his wife hath made herself ready.” In Revelation 21:2 we have a reference to the “holy city” coming down

from God out of heaven, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." In the 9th and 10th verses of this chapter, the Apostle John further writes, "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God."

There is abundant testimony in the Scriptures to indicate that this prophetic "bride, the Lamb's wife," will be composed of the complete number of Christ's faithful followers from Pentecost to the end of the Gospel Age. The expression, "hath made herself ready," is vital to every Christian who aspires to be of this special company of favored ones in the kingdom. It reminds us that those who will be of the bride class have yielded themselves to the molding influences of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and by this means have become like Christ, and suitable to be part of his "bride." Much suffering and many tests of faith have been involved in this. As all have finished their preparation, having fully laid down their lives in sacrifice as Jesus did, following the raising of the last members in the "first resurrection," they will become united with him as his bride in that great "holy city" arrangement of the future.—Rev. 20:6

Many have mistakenly supposed that the invitation to "Come . . . take the water of life freely," has been going out to the world ever since the First Advent of Christ. However, this could not be, because during all those centuries there has been

no “bride” of Christ to say “Come.” Rather, this age has been set aside by God as a period in which the bride makes “herself ready.”

The making ready of the bride will not be completed until the last member has finished his course in death. Then the “marriage of the Lamb” will take place. Then there will be a bride. Then the “Spirit and the bride” will say, “Come.” This is a bright prospect for the future. Not only will Christ and his bride say, “Come,” but all “that heareth” this invitation will have the privilege of joining in the blessed work of saying, “Come,” extending it to others, until all the people of the earth are reached.

This will be the work of God’s kingdom, under the rulership of Christ. Satan will then be bound, and no longer able to pollute men’s minds with all sorts of delusions concerning God. (chap. 20:1,2) The one who has deceived all nations will no longer be permitted to deceive. Thus, the “knowledge of the LORD” will quickly fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

This is God’s remedy for all the problems—political, economic, environmental, religious, social, and all other kinds—which have come about because of sin and selfishness, and which now threaten the very existence of the human race. What a wonderful solution it is! When fully activated, it will lead to peace, happiness, and everlasting life among all nations, for they will be healed. The refreshing waters of the river of life will restore the people to that God-provided heritage which, through sin, they lost awhile, but because of God’s love, will have been regained. ■