

Let Us Give Thanks

*“When thou hast
eaten and art full,
then thou shalt
bless the LORD thy
God for the good
land which he hath
given thee.”*
—Deuteronomy 8:10

GOD HAD PERMITTED HIS

servant Moses to bring his people to the very doors of the promised land, but he who had led them with such fortitude throughout the forty years of the wilderness journey was not to enter the land himself. Realizing this, he rehearsed in the presence of the children of Israel all the various laws and commandments of the Lord which were to guide them while they dwelt in the land, and which were designed to keep them in the Lord's favor. He also reminded them of the good things that would be theirs to enjoy in that bountiful land: “The LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are

iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.”—Deut. 8:7-9

How lovingly and how generously the Lord had provided for his people! Then Moses gave them two admonitions: they were ever to give gratitude and thanks to the Lord for his goodness to them, and they were to remember and keep his commandments. The first of these admonitions is contained in our opening text, while the second admonition is found in the words directly following: “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day.”—vs. 11

In view of all God had done for them, surely these requirements were not too burdensome. Indeed, it was for their own blessing and happiness that they should keep God’s righteous commandments. Moses knew that the very act of regularly rendering praise and glory and thanksgiving to God would serve to keep alive in their hearts an appreciation of his great goodness to them, and thus encourage them to walk obediently in his ways. However, their carnal hearts betrayed them, and they did not always remember their God with grateful hearts. They disobeyed his commandments, and thus failed to gain the fullness of the promised blessings.

ANOTHER BAND OF PILGRIMS

The words that Moses used to describe the blessings of the land which the Israelites were to possess might well be used to picture the rich bounties of that new world on the shores of which another, but smaller, band of refugees first set feet during the

harsh winter of 1620. These, also, had fled from bondage—religious bondage—and hoped to find liberty and happiness for themselves and their children in the new world across the ocean. That first winter was difficult, and many died, but the following year, when the harvest was in, the survivors gathered together to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Though the harvest was meager, and their baskets not full, they rejoiced in their good fortune, and remembered to give thanks to their Creator.

These were the humble beginnings of what was to become a mighty nation, and that simple celebration on the shores of Massachusetts Bay almost four centuries ago was the origin of our present Thanksgiving Day. In keeping with custom, each year the fourth Thursday of November is proclaimed by the President of the United States as a day of thanksgiving. Surely one would suppose that the people of this most prosperous nation in the world would have much for which to be thankful.

We ask, however: What is happening in this “good land,” this land of plenty, of “liberty and justice for all?” What is the mood of the people? True, there is relative abundance in this land, and the people enjoy a large measure of freedom. Yet, along with the plenty there is still poverty for many. Along with the freedom there is frustration, injustice, discrimination, and general dissatisfaction with the status quo. Social and moral sickness is also poisoning the land, the symptoms of which are revealed in lack of accountability, loss of work ethic, widespread immorality, and increasing disregard for the rule of law.

The world's financial and economic ills seem to defy all attempted remedies by the best efforts of their leaders. Even at this writing, the government of the United States has had to shut down many of its offices and departments, due to a lack of cooperation among lawmakers to overcome the federal budget impasse. While all this is going on, social unrest continues and wars kill and injure thousands in many parts of the world. Growing discouragement and hopelessness among many are heightened by the general feeling that there is no way out of these problems. Indeed, it appears that the solution of any given problem seems merely to beget new ones, or heighten other existing problems.

CAUSE FOR THANKFULNESS?

Under these conditions the mood of many, not only in this country, but in the whole world, seems to be one far from thankfulness. Certainly, for many in the world, as a result of the great increase of knowledge during the last century and a half, the standard of living and general well-being has been substantially improved. However, many in the world have not been the beneficiaries of this increased knowledge. The dwellers in slums and ghettos, the malnourished and ill-housed, the families of those whose sons, brothers or husbands are fighting and dying in war, mothers in third world countries striving to comfort their undernourished children, the enslaved of entire nations existing precariously under the cruel heel of oppressive leadership, and the untold, unhappy millions around the world—these may well ask, for what have we to be thankful? Even the sentiment of many whose lot has been

most improved does not seem to be one of gratitude for the good things they now enjoy, but of expecting and demanding still more.

Not all, however, who dwell upon planet Earth share in the hopelessness and confusion that besets so many of the world's inhabitants. As the Lord's true people view the events of the world in the light of God's Holy Word, their hearts are lifted up in faith and hope. To be sure, they are not unmindful of mankind's sorrow, nor unaware of their despair. Yet, the very events that cause discouragement and even unbelief in the hearts of the world's multitudes bring hope to the Lord's people, while increasing their faith in God and in his promises.

What we are witnessing today is not evidence that God is dead, or that he does not care about his human creation, as some suggest. Rather, it is proof that God is very much alive, and that he is, according to his sure Word of truth, taking an active hand in the affairs of mankind. What we are witnessing, in fact, is the death of an evil world order—an order under the rulership of Satan. The tribulations of this time of trouble in which we live betoken the imminent demise of Satan's evil and oppressive rulership, and the establishment of the kingdom of God with its promised blessings of life, health, peace, and security, for all the families of the earth.

CAUSE FOR TRUE THANKFULNESS—GOD'S KINGDOM

During his ministry, Jesus constantly referred to the coming of the kingdom of heaven which would bring blessings to the people. Having this in mind, and greatly desiring these promised blessings, the

disciples came to Jesus as he sat on the Mount of Olives, and said, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek *parousia*: presence], and of the end of the world [Greek *aion*: age]?” (Matt. 24:3) After reciting the events that would occur in the world leading up to the end of the Gospel Age, prior to the establishment of the kingdom, Jesus said, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.”—vss. 21,22

The account given to us in Luke’s Gospel of this same period at the end of the age, provides some additional information about these troublous times. There our Lord tells us, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And there shall be . . . upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” (Luke 21:24-26) The Scriptures reveal that the “times of the Gentiles” is a period during which the dominion of earth would be given over to Gentile powers. It began with the overthrow of Israel’s last king, Zedekiah.

This lease of power in the hands of the Gentile nations came to an end in 1914, when virtually all the nations of what has been known as Christendom became embroiled in World War I. This war wrought great devastation upon those ruling houses representing the exercise of Gentile power in the earth. Later, World War II served further to weaken

the economic and social fabric of the remnants of these nations. How accurately Jesus had foretold the “distress of nations, with perplexity [Greek *aporia*: no way out].” These conditions have continued, and are even now still plaguing the whole world. How vividly was the present mood of the masses described by Jesus as the roaring of the sea and the waves!

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Notice how the prophet Zephaniah describes this day in which we are now living: “The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD.” (Zeph. 1:14-17) The prophet here gives us not only an accurate portrayal, in symbolic language, of the trouble in the world today, but he also tells us why it is occurring—“Because they [the nations and their rulers] have sinned against the LORD.”

The prophet continues, “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” (chap. 3:8) Then, after thus

describing the utter destruction of all the evil systems and institutions that presently plague the earth, he tells us of that wonderful time when God's kingdom is established in the earth, when all the world will honor and praise and glorify his holy name: "Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."—vs. 9

The Prophet Isaiah gives confirmation of the trouble that shall come on the earth in this day, and shows that its purpose is forever to destroy wickedness and sin. "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. . . . And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. . . . Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger."—Isa. 13:6-13

A NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

The Apostle Peter also describes the time in which we are living as the day of the Lord which is to bring about the destruction of "this present evil

world" (Gal. 1:4), prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. It is this work of destruction by the Lord that is bringing the distress upon the nations, with perplexity. This time is also called "the day of his preparation" (Nah. 2:3), leading to the establishment of God's kingdom, which Peter describes as that "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II Pet. 3:13

Surely, here is cause for thankfulness on the part of groaning humanity. The whole world should rejoice in and welcome a reign of righteousness, under a just and merciful king. Peter tells us, however, that the world will not understand the meaning of the momentous events in which they are engulfed. The day of the Lord will come as a "thief in the night," he tells us. (vs. 10) Although the very culmination of God's great plan of the ages for mankind's everlasting happiness and blessing is at the threshold, they do not know what is taking place. "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (I Cor. 2:9) Man cannot hear the glad tidings which herald the coming kingdom, because of the din and uproar of the day of the Lord, and so the troubles through which the world is passing seem to them to be no cause for thankfulness.

UNTO YOU IT IS GIVEN

God's people, however, do understand these things, for he "hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." (vs. 10) They remember the words of Jesus when he said, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption

[deliverance] draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:28) They look up to the Lord, and lift up their heads in thankfulness and rejoice, not simply in their own approaching deliverance, but in the promised deliverance of the groaning and travailing world of mankind. They rejoice, not in the troubles coming upon an evil world, but in the fact that just beyond the destruction of this day of the Lord will come the glorious kingdom of God—the everlasting kingdom of peace, in which they will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:6) They are thankful, not merely in their exaltation to power and glory and honor, but because that righteous kingdom will bring “the desire of all nations.” (Hag. 2:7) It will be the time when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:4

As the “present evil world” spins drunkenly on its way to destruction, what a comfort to the Lord’s people is the complete understanding of his plans and purposes, of his times and seasons. Although the meaning of these events is a mystery to the world, it is not so to the consecrated followers of the Lord. “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”—Matt. 13:11

How blessed we are in this knowledge—and how thankful! We recall how greatly the Prophet Daniel desired to know of these things. Daniel was used of God to describe events that would mark the Second Advent, or Presence, of Christ. He said it would be a “time of trouble, such as never was since there

was a nation even to that same time: . . . many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." It would also be during Christ's Second Presence that the world's dead would be awakened from their "sleep in the dust of the earth." (Dan. 12:1,2,4) Daniel, like all others, had many loved ones and friends sleeping in death. He longed for the day when they would come forth, and so he said, "O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" It was not the due time, however, for this to be known, and the answer came, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."—vss. 8,9

Even the disciples of the Lord were not apprised of the timing of events in the outworking of God's plan for man. In answer to their question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" the Master said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:6,7) Although they but dimly understood the development of God's plans, they knew that the grand purpose was to bring blessings to all men, and they longed for this blessed time to come. It was not for them to know the details of these times and seasons, but by God's grace unto his people, who are living at the end of the age, it is given to know.

We alone, of all the people of the earth, understand why the world is in turmoil. As a result, we are not of them whose hearts are failing them for fear as we observe those things that are happening all about us. From the lofty vantage point of the revealed Word, we see the mighty power of God, in the hands of our present Lord, directing the course

of peoples and nations for their ultimate blessing, and our hearts are lifted toward him in thankful praise. We, like Daniel, the disciples, and all the unhappy and unknowing multitudes of earth, look with longing hearts for that wonderful time to arrive. We look forward to it with the eye of faith—a faith that is based on the sure Word of prophecy, for through his Word God has revealed to us that “the time is at hand.”

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

God’s plan for mankind in general is a restitution to perfect life on earth for all those who prove obedient in heart and in deed to the righteous laws of his kingdom, for Jesus Christ came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” (Acts 3:20,21; Luke 19:10) To the faithful followers of Jesus, however, the Heavenly Father has something far more wonderful in store. To these he has made heavenly promises. Peter tells us something of these, saying, “His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:3,4) Later, in this same epistle, Peter tells us of the work to be accomplished in the day of the Lord. (chap. 3:7,10,12) Finally, having these wonderful promises in mind, Peter asks a heart-searching question, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation [conduct] and godliness?”—vs. 11

The troubles of the day of the Lord primarily constitute a judgment on the nations, but it will also be a special time of trial to the Lord's people. In his earlier epistle, Peter writes, "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:6,7) The Apostle Paul also brings this fact to our attention: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. . . . Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire [of trials]; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward."—I Cor. 3:11-14

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH

These admonitions are directed to the footstep followers of Christ. They strongly suggest that the Lord's people should give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, and that they should be attending to God's Word. They should be making the Truth their own, and building on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. It is only as each has done so that he will be able to stand in this evil day. It is also the privilege of each of the Lord's consecrated ones to continue faithfully to tell forth the glad message of the kingdom. By so doing, at the very least, we shall be able to bring some measure of hope and comfort to one here or one there of the travailing world of mankind.

Not many of the world see any present cause for thankfulness. However, when the day of the Lord has done its work; when the church is finally complete and the kingdom established; when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as the waters cover the sea; when the righteous judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth—then all who are in heaven and in earth shall see and appreciate the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of their merciful Father. Together, they will unitedly raise their hearts and voices to their loving Creator in everlasting, thankful praise. Then will come to pass the beautiful words of the Psalmist David, “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”—Ps. 100

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