

The New Year:

A Time of Anxiety and Uncertainty

“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.”

—*Zephaniah 1:15*

marks the closing features of this present Gospel Age. The time in which we are now living was long ago prophetically foretold to be filled with trouble, distress, wasteness [destruction], desolation, darkness, gloominess, clouds, and thick darkness.

The prophet again proclaimed, “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.” (Zeph. 3:8) The fire of God’s indignation will ultimately burn

AS THE WEARY AND SIN-

sick human family enters the new year 2011, they do so with various stages of anxiety and uncertainty. In our featured scripture, the Prophet Zephaniah has used several descriptive words that well illustrate the tumultuous and violent day that

up and destroy all unrighteousness, iniquity, and false teachings. Peter explains, “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”—II Pet. 3:7

OUR DAY IN PROPHECY

Jeremiah also spoke of this time in prophetic terms, when he wrote, “Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about: all ye that bend the bow, shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she hath sinned against the LORD. Shout against her round about: she hath given her hand: her foundations are fallen, her walls are thrown down: for it is the vengeance of the LORD: take vengeance upon her; as she hath done, do unto her.” (Jer. 50:14,15) The Prophet Isaiah confirms, “It is the day of the LORD’s vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.”—Isa. 34:8

ANXIOUS TIMES

The foregoing scriptures, together with many other prophecies, speak of our distressing day that the Prophet Daniel identified as a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) It is a time filled with a multitude of troubling issues, and there is increasing violence and turmoil among earth’s people. There is no peace, and the world yet awaits the long-promised establishment of Christ’s future kingdom of righteousness that will bring life and peace to all who will be obedient to God’s divine law.

Space allows but a few brief examples of the present distress of nations, but it serves to mark

our day as we turn a new page in the history of man and enter the first year of a new decade. The world's statesmen and religious leaders seek answers, and ways to curb the rising tide of discontent that now dominates the everyday scene of our time.

POPULATION GROWTH

One of the most difficult problems that will face the poor groaning creation in 2011 will be the rapid acceleration of earth's population. Analysts who study these trends report that an average of 79,000,000 people are being added to the world's population every year. They point out that this is about 200,000 per day, and these facts have taken into account the average daily surplus of births over deaths. This is equivalent to adding a country the size of Germany every year to earth's population. From a human standpoint there is no remedy to provide the necessary resources to feed, house, and care for so many people. The fact is that the bigger the numbers become, the faster the numbers grow. We believe that this is another evidence of the closing features of this present Gospel Age, for without God's intervention this situation would be out of control.

To emphasize the dramatic reality of this increased rate of growth, it is estimated that the world's population reached 1 billion in the year 1804. It then took 123 years to reach 2 billion, in 1927. From that time forward the rate accelerated more rapidly, and in 1960 only 33 years later, records show that it was 3 billion. It only took another 14 years to grow to 4 billion in 1974, 5 billion in 1987, and 6 billion in 1999. It is expected to reach 7 billion

sometime in the next year or two. To this is added the sobering statistic that population growth is occurring faster in the poor and undeveloped nations of earth.

These facts present a formidable problem because they make all other problems in the world even worse and more difficult to deal with. Population experts warn that if this growth cannot soon be brought under control, future population will be limited by drastic means such as mass starvation, pandemic disease, or nuclear warfare. We can hardly imagine facing starvation on a scale never before seen, diseases that are out of control, or to experience a war that threatens to annihilate the entire human family. Yet, each of these projections are now a possibility and we will briefly consider them—mass starvation, pandemic diseases, and annihilating warfare.

STARVATION

Experts in the field of agriculture report that the world's alarming growth rate is creating a perfect storm of circumstances that is now gathering momentum. These factors could lead to a worldwide food crisis of unprecedented magnitude if not quickly addressed and acted upon. Simply stated, worldwide food producers are barely able to keep up with the increasing demand of this exploding increase in people.

One of the contributing factors relates to the changing climate and weather patterns that are taking place. Weather statistics indicate that record-setting droughts, disease plagues, and crippling crop failures are occurring in all parts of the world

on increasingly dangerous levels. These and other factors are coming together to set the stage for a potentially devastating food crisis in the near future. Extreme drought conditions and record-breaking heat waves have been reported in many of the traditional agricultural areas throughout the United States during the past summer. This is coupled with new diseases, and farmers all over the country are reporting very poor harvests for the year.

NEW THREATS

Agricultural scientists now fear that ‘Ug99—a devastating wheat fungus also known as ‘stem rust’—could wipe out over 80 percent of the world’s wheat crop as it spreads from Africa to all other parts of the world. Most Americans have never heard of this fungus, but it is considered by experts in the field to be a very serious threat to the world food supply. It is called stem rust because it produces reddish-brown flakes on wheat stalks. It is very deadly and there is no known cure for it. In a world already on the verge of a massive food crisis, this is frightening news.

It is not just the United States that is experiencing serious problems in growing food, because the news from the rest of the world is also very troubling. Rick Ward, coordinator of the ‘Durable Rust Resistance in Wheat’ project at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, reports that a significant humanitarian crisis is inevitable. Apparently, Ug99 has already jumped the Red Sea and has affected areas as far as Iran. This wheat rust is also poised to enter northern India and Pakistan, and the wind will inevitably carry it to Russia, China, and even to

North America. It moves in the air, and it can move in clothing on an airplane. He says it is only a matter of time before the wind carries it to North America, if it doesn't arrive here some other way first.

DISEASE

The second projection that could cause great numbers of people to lose their lives is disease on a pandemic level. The best recent example of pandemic disease was during the 1918-19 influenza outbreak, known as the Spanish flu. Statistics show that it killed an estimated 20-40 million people, and has been cited as the most devastating epidemic in world history. More deaths were recorded in a single year than occurred during the Black Death Bubonic Plague of 1347-51.

One fifth of the world's population was infected. It was the most deadly for people aged 20-40 years, which was unusual because it would normally affect the elderly and young children. Figures indicate that 28% of Americans were affected and 675,000 died. Of the 43,000 United States soldiers who died in World War I, half were due to the epidemic. It was an unforgettable year of suffering and death.

NEW THREATS

A recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO) states that the world is now facing a new and deadly threat on the scale of Aids, Sars, and Ebola, and warned that diseases are spreading more quickly than at any other time in history. New diseases are emerging at an unprecedented rate of one a year, and are becoming very difficult

to treat. The WHO paints a bleak picture of future health threats, with science struggling to keep up as diseases increasingly become drug resistant.

One important factor cited for this threat is worldwide passenger flights that now number more than 2 billion a year. The report explains this is a powerful mechanism for spreading diseases rapidly across continents. New diseases that pose a sudden warning in one part of the world are but a few hours away from becoming a reality somewhere else. They point to profound changes that have occurred in the way humanity inhabits the planet, said Margaret Chan, the director general of the WHO. She said, "The disease situation is anything but stable. Population growth, incursion into previously uninhabited areas, rapid urbanization, intensive farming practices, environmental degradation, and the misuse of antimicrobials, have disrupted the equilibrium of the microbial world. The rate of emergence of new diseases, in one year, is historically unprecedented." The WHO report identifies 40 diseases that were unknown a generation ago, and reveals that during the past five years they have verified more than 1,100 epidemic events worldwide.

WARFARE

The third projection concerning population growth is warfare. The history of the twentieth century was dominated by war, revolution, and atrocities on a scale never before seen, and the most murderous ever recorded. It is estimated that the total number of deaths caused by, or associated with, its wars during this time period is 187 million people. Many students of the Bible believe that

gentile rule over Israel ended in the year 1914, and since that time we have witnessed a century of nearly unbroken warfare, with only a few brief periods without organized armed conflict somewhere in the world.

As we contemplate the terrible carnage that could take place during any future war with the use of weapons of mass destruction, we may compare it with the total casualties suffered during the two World Wars that have taken place since 1914. During World War I, there were approximately 37 million casualties. Although the figures vary, it is estimated that there were about 16 million deaths, and 21 million wounded. This includes both military personnel and civilians. It is further stated that the allied powers lost about 6 million soldiers, while the central powers lost about 4 million.

As appalling as these estimates of human tragedy and carnage are, they pale in comparison to those for World War II. The total number of killed is thought to be in the range of 50 to over 70 million people, making it the deadliest war in the history of the world. Civilian dead are believed to be from 40 to 52 million, including 13 to 20 million from war-related disease and famine. The total number of military dead is from 22 to 25 million, including deaths in captivity of about 5 million.

NEW THREATS

Most people will agree that we are now living in very dangerous times. It is the great ‘time of trouble’ spoken by Daniel the prophet, and Apostle Paul referred to the ending of this present Gospel Age as “perilous times.”—II Tim. 3:1

The United States is now conducting two wars in the Middle East, one in Iraq, and the other in Afghanistan. The situation in Pakistan, which is a nuclear nation, continues to grow worse, and Iran has been engaged in developing nuclear weapons. There seems to be no easy solution to the many serious issues that confront the nations.

At the time of this writing, news reports confirm that North Korea has fired scores of artillery shells at its neighbor South Korea. It was the heaviest attack since the Korean War ended in 1953. South Korea fired back and sent a fighter jet to the area, a disputed island near the divided border. Tensions remain high as diplomats and military personnel in South Korea and the United States meet to discuss the most positive and effective way to respond to the provocation. North Korea has developed and tested nuclear weapons, and is aggressively pursuing the design of long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads great distances.

There are new and disturbing reports related to the increasing nuclear cooperation between North Korea and Iran. Iranian missile experts were recently in Pyongyang to attend a military parade, where new intermediate-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads more than 3,000 km were put on display. North Korea also revealed that it has built a hitherto undetected centrifuge plant to enrich uranium. Reports indicate that it bears a striking resemblance to Iran's centrifuge plant at Natanz.

North Korea already has a stockpile of plutonium sufficient to make between four and eight nuclear weapons. The start-up of a uranium fuel cycle will

give it alternative bomb-making material for its own arsenal, or to sell. A North Korean analyst based in Seoul said, it's a protection racket. Their message is that we can make a lot of trouble, so it's much cheaper to pay us off. Siegfried Hecker, former head of the Los Alamos nuclear weapons laboratory in the United States said the risk of North Korea exporting weapons material was more troubling than the country's own possession of nuclear bombs. He said they had 2,000 centrifuges, or about twice as many as Iran, and that he was worried about their cooperation with Iran. He urged the present United States administration to set three red lines for the North Koreans: no new bombs, no bigger bombs and no exporting of nuclear material. Hecker also said a military attack is out of the question, that tightening sanctions is at a dead end and that the only hope appears to be engagement.

The deepening ties between Tehran and Pyongyang however, make it very likely that North Korea's demands will be very high. The nuclear power and missile research institutes in North Korea and Iran are acting essentially as one body. North Korean nuclear and missile scientists are in Iran, and Iranian scientists are in North Korea. They share everything. Thus do we read, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."—Luke 21:26

AMERICA'S POLITICAL SCENE

The midterm elections that were held in the United States in November, 2010, indicate that many American citizens, perhaps motivated to

some extent by the so-called Tea Party activists, had become disillusioned with their new president and his administration. President Obama's program was to change the direction of the country, but, as a result of the voters' decisions, he suffered a major political defeat and the loss of a great deal of power.

Political analysts recall that as a candidate for president two years ago, Obama campaigned on a promise of change. At that time, his supporters believed that this included immediate action to turn the failing economy around and to prevent a major financial depression. Instead, they say, he became preoccupied with implementing his radical liberal agenda as quickly as possible, and that took precedence over everything else.

These experts explained that many of his supporters began to openly express surprise and dissatisfaction that he was not acting more quickly on his campaign promises. Others began to believe he was not capable of making serious and definitive decisions on many important issues. Thus, his vision of a new postpartisan and postracial era became bogged down in controversy from within his administration. Some say that he is becoming more and more like all of the other politicians that he claims he is not like, and that he must find a way to work with Republicans to get things done for the American people.

They also point out that at both the federal and state levels in the midterm elections there was a political upheaval as Republicans won races at an historic level. Critics say that Americans believe their government is becoming too intrusive in their

lives, and that his policies have only increased the national debt. According to these, the midterm election results reflect a rejection of the president's legislative agenda that include healthcare, Cap-and-Trade, massive bailouts, a wasteful stimulus bill and an anti-energy agenda. To some, it also points to a failure to recognize the increasing threat of Islamic terrorism on American soil, and a foreign policy that is less favorable to America's traditional allies, such as Great Britain and Israel, while appeasing its enemies.

CHRIST'S FUTURE KINGDOM

There is little doubt that many of this country's political leaders are upright individuals whose aim is the welfare of the American people, but they are unable to overcome the many obstacles to success. President Obama also is dedicated to his policies which he believes are for the betterment of the nation. However, we know that our loving Heavenly Father has the ultimate program that will provide life and blessings to all people.

Students of the Bible point to God's great "Time Clock of the Ages" that continues to mark off the dramatic and foretold closing events of this present Gospel Age. Soon the complete number of those who have responded to the heavenly calling will be brought together and will share as members of the Christ in blessing all the families of the earth.

At that time, the prayers of his faithful will be answered, and the glory of his power will be manifest in the overthrow of all unrighteousness and human institutions based on pride and selfishness.

Under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, there will no longer be any fear to find solutions for too many people, or that mass starvation, pandemic diseases or nuclear warfare will destroy the earth and its people. God has all things under control, and through his Prophet Isaiah has promised, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."—Isa. 40:4,5

As we enter another new decade, let us renew our consecrations and increase our faith in the wonderful hope of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Let us keep before our mind's eye the wonderful vision that inspired John to write, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."—Rev. 21:1,2

John further wrote, "I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."—vss. 3-5

