

“The Morning Cometh, and Also the Night”

*“He calleth to me
out of Seir;
Watchman, what of
the night?
Watchman, what of
the night? The
watchman said,
The morning
cometh, and also
the night: if ye will
enquire, enquire
ye: return, come.”
—Isaiah 21:11,12*

OUR TEXT IS TAKEN FROM a prophecy of Isaiah that speaks of the darkness of night and the dawning of a new day. The watchman proclaims that the dark night of sin and death over the earth would ultimately give way to the morning time of increasing light that is associated with the approaching kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Dark-

ness conveys to our minds the chilling effects that sin and death have had over mankind, while light indicates blessings of truth and righteousness.—Isa. 60:1-3; I Pet. 2:9

The history of the world has been a dark night indeed, with sin, suffering, and death as its chief characteristics. To those who by faith have walked

with God, however, it has not been a nighttime without hope, for they continue to be sustained by the promise that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5) It is this morning of joy that is referred to in our text by the statement of the watchman that the morning indeed cometh. There is to be a glad new day when human experience will be changed from sorrow to joy; from war to peace; from sickness to health; from death to life; thus fulfilling the psalmist’s promise that “joy cometh in the morning.”

The Scriptures reveal the manner in which this nighttime that has been experienced by the human race will be changed into a morning of joy. They further show that it will be the result of the Second Advent of Christ and the long-promised establishment of his kingdom. Another of the prophecies relating to this time likens Jesus to the light of the rising sun. “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) We note that this prophecy addresses those who fear, or reverence, God’s name and who have exercised faith in the promises of God, in anticipation of their fulfillment, faithfully watching for the “Sun of righteousness” to arise.

THE WATCHERS

Those who have looked for the return of Christ and for the establishment of his long-awaited kingdom, are represented in Isaiah’s prophecy by the “watchman.” Jesus also admonished his disciples to watch. (Matt. 24:42) His disciples had asked concerning the time of his return and second presence, but he explained at that time only the Father knew when

this would be, and that they all were to diligently watch. (Mark 13:31-33) The implication was that none of the watchmen would know in advance the time of these events, but if they watched faithfully until God's due time for making it known, they would at that time recognize certain signs, while the world in general would yet be unaware of the importance of what had occurred.

The Apostle Paul understood the meaning of Jesus' prophecy. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, he wrote, "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." (I Thess. 5:1,2) Here Paul provides further detail for us in that he associates the invisible, thief-like return of Christ with the coming of the Day of the Lord. (Matt. 24:42-44; II Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15) Paul knew that this special day would break upon the world as a result of the promised return of Christ.

Paul continues to unfold the fuller meaning of this prophecy by explaining some of the characteristics of the Day of the Lord and that it would come upon the world "as a thief in the night." He said, "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (I Thess. 5:3) We are thus reminded that the Day of the Lord will not at first be a peaceful and happy period, but rather, a time of severe trouble which will bring about the destruction of the present world order.

The apostle further writes, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you

as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (vss. 4,5) Paul is explaining that the Lord’s footstep followers, because they would be spiritually awake and watching the events of the day unfold, would understand the meaning of that which was to come upon the world as a “thief in the night.” They would recognize that our Lord was carrying out the will of the Heavenly Father in connection with the great “time of trouble” that would come upon the world at the end of the present Gospel Age.—Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22

There is an important similarity between our featured text and the apostle’s statement concerning the Day of the Lord. When asked about the “night,” the watchman replied, “The morning cometh, and also the night.” This implies a dark night of trouble that would be associated with the return and invisible presence of our Lord Jesus. In this connection, we note that Paul explains that with the dawning of the Day of the Lord there will also be “sudden destruction” which will come upon the world as “travail upon a woman with child.”

In our opening text, Isaiah draws our attention to Mount Seir, the geographical setting of his words. It has been observed that when the sun begins to rise in this particular region, its intense heat often causes a rapid evaporation of the moisture that has settled in the valley during the night. The resulting dense mist blocks out the light of the rising sun, resulting in a short period of darkness even after the sun has begun to rise. This characteristic perhaps is alluded to in the prophecy as the “night also” that is seen by the watchman even as the “morning cometh.”

Mount Seir was the inheritance of Esau, whose name was changed to Edom after selling his birth-right to his brother Jacob. (Gen. 25:30-34; 36:1,8; Josh. 24:4) In the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the fall of Edom [Seir] corresponds to the destruction of symbolic Babylon foretold in the book of Revelation.—Isa. 63:1-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 35; Rev. 18:2-10,21-23

It is in keeping with this thought that Paul speaks of the Day of the Lord resulting in destruction and trouble. This, in some respects, would be even more distressing to the world than the darkness of the night of sin and death that has occurred during the past 6,000 years of human history. This nighttime condition would become so dark, and its destruction so great, that Jesus said, "No flesh would have been saved; but because of the chosen, shall those days be shortened."—Matt. 24:22, *Young's Literal Translation*

The Prophet Joel also identifies these same characteristics as belonging to the dawning of the Day of the Lord. He wrote, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations." (Joel 2:1,2) From these prophetic descriptions, it becomes increasingly apparent that the watchmen must identify the dawn of the new day largely by the signs and events which are associated with the destruction of this present evil world, or social order.

DISTRESS OF NATIONS

We observe, in keeping with this, that when the disciples asked Jesus about the signs of his coming [Greek: presence], he answered them by pointing to the trouble which would come upon the world at that time. He said, "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and 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: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." (Luke 21:25,26) These are the conditions which the watchmen were to look for as signs of the times just preceding the establishment of Christ's kingdom of righteousness upon the earth.

There should now be no question about this foretold distress of nations. Truly men's hearts are beginning to fail them for fear. In Joel's prophecy, he said, "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble," and we see evidence that this trembling is all about us today as never before. This, we believe, is all in fulfillment of the Master's prophecy concerning the time of his return and second presence. The Lord's people, as the watchmen, recognize this as one of the unmistakable signs that "the morning cometh, and also the night." They also know that this short, but dark, period in mankind's history was prophesied to occur just before the full blaze of the morning sun begins to warm and heal a distressed and dying world.—Mal. 4:2

The Apostle Peter indicates that the prophecies are to be our guide in watching for the light of the new day, saying, "We have also a more sure word of

prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn.” (II Pet. 1:19) The “sure word of prophecy” is more illuminating to the watchers now than ever before. The Prophet Isaiah also foretold the impending destruction of the present social order, and indicates that the nations would make an effort to prevent that destruction by banding themselves together. “Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought.”—Isa. 8:9,10

The watchmen are witnessing the fulfillment of this prophecy as the nations’ leaders fail to bring peace to a world filled with violence and turmoil and are unable to eliminate the increasing fear that is gripping the people. The Lord’s watchers, however, do not fear these things, for they know the greater meaning of what is occurring, that this Day of the Lord will shortly emerge as one of glorious light, peace, and joy. As the prophet indicates, we do not fear as the world fears, and neither are we afraid. (vss. 12,13) The psalmist wrote, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”—Ps. 46:1,2

PEACE WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE

The watchmen, alert to notice the signs which portend the dawning of day, note the prophetic statement which declares that even in the midst of

the destruction of the great Time of Trouble men would be saying, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace." (Jer. 8:11; I Thess. 5:3) We see, too, that this is in process of fulfillment by all the various efforts of the worldly-wise who attempt to safeguard the tenuous threads of peace which still exist.

The nations continue to be engaged in a dangerous armament race that now includes, not only nuclear, but also biological and chemical weapons with which to wage war and cause widespread havoc and destruction. Many say this is being done in the name of peace, the claim being that the only way to secure peace is by developing more deadly weapons and to be prepared for war. Here again, the watchmen see the fulfillment of prophecy which traces further the pattern of events in this Day of the Lord. The prophet writes, "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." —Joel 3:9,10

HEAVENS AND EARTH PASS AWAY

The current social order is symbolized in the prophecies as the present heavens and the present earth, the heavens being pictorial of the powers of spiritual control while the earth pictures the more materialistic phases of the crumbling social structure. Both of these structures are to pass away in this time of destruction, but thankfully we are promised that they will be replaced by a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." —II Pet. 3:10,13

In this connection, it is particularly significant to the watchmen that the religious controls over the people are losing their power. Jesus foretold this, saying, "The powers of the heavens shall be shaken." (Matt. 24:29) The time was when these powers of the symbolic heavens crowned and uncrowned the kings, but this is no longer so.

Both the civil and ecclesiastical elements of the present social structure are melting "with fervent heat," Peter says. Not only are they losing their cohesion to each other, but the increasing friction that is developing between them is causing their disintegration, as the people lose confidence in the former standards and arrangements by which this world was governed. As the elements melt, they are, as the apostle also predicted, passing away with a "great noise."—II Pet. 3:10

THE ROARING OF THE SEA AND THE WAVES

When Jesus said that there would be upon the earth "distress of nations, with perplexity," he illustrated this condition by likening it to the roaring of "the sea and the waves." (Luke 21:25) The Prophet Isaiah also spoke of this, saying, "Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind."—Isa. 17:12,13

It is clear from this prophetic explanation what it was that the Master meant by the roaring of "the

sea and the waves.” It is representative of the restless, discontented masses of the people clamoring for their rights, whether real or only fancied, as they lash against the bulwarks of the old social order, causing its governments or “mountains” to shake and falter.—Ps. 46:2,3

These destructive elements are now well organized and in place. As the watchmen see these forces at work and encompassing the earth, they recognize it as another sign that the nighttime of the Lord’s new day is already upon them. (Joel 2:3-11) They also see, however, that the new day of righteousness is ever closer to being established in the earth.

THE MORNING COMETH

Not all the signs of the new day have to do with the destruction of the old order. The “morning cometh,” and while the confusion of today’s world is causing fear, chaos, and disintegration, there are, nevertheless, evidences which have more directly to do with the new day at hand. One of these is the manner in which the Lord is dealing with his ancient people Israel.

The Jewish nation is symbolized in the Bible by a fig tree. (Jer. 24:1-9) In Jesus’ great prophecy concerning the signs of his return and subsequent presence, he said that when his watchmen would see the “fig tree” giving evidence of life, then we would know the kingdom of God was near. True to the Lord’s words, the State of Israel was re-established in 1948, and now, merely seventy-five years later, it is ranked as the 10th most powerful nation upon the earth.—Luke 21:29-31

As watchmen, our faith should be strengthened by such events, confident that the morning cometh. It is as yet obscured by clouds of trouble, war, and the commotion of a crumbling world society. However, the watchers see in the present symbolic storm clouds, thunderings, lightnings and storms convulsing today's world, evidence that the new day is drawing near. Soon the storms will have been scattered and the warming and healing rays of the "Sun of righteousness" will give health and life to all mankind.—Mal. 4:2

The joy of Christ's kingdom will be so complete that it will result in the wiping away of tears from off all faces. The prophet writes, "In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:6-9

John the revelator joins in proclaiming the blessings that will accompany Christ's kingdom. "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.”—Rev. 21:4,5

All the causes of darkness will be removed, and the reign of sin and death will be over. Jesus died to pay the penalty of sin, and the human family will be restored to that which was lost. (Heb. 2:9; I Tim. 2:5,6; Luke 19:10) Paradise, with its billions of ransomed, resurrected and restored humans, will become worldwide. What if the clouds do for a moment hide the blue sky where morning appears? Soon the bright Sun of righteousness will rise to shine over all the earth. ■