

Our Aging Population: A Mounting Social Problem

*“The days of our
years are
threescore years
and ten; and if by
reason of strength
they be fourscore
years, yet is their
strength labour
and sorrow; for it
is soon cut off, and
we fly away.”*

—*Psalms 90:10*
were fashioned.

THIS PSALM IS A PRAYER

of Moses, the man of God. In it we are given a sobering account of the human family's depth of sorrow because of sin and its sentence. It also speaks of the allotted portion of time they have been given, and their inevitable death when the elements of their bodies return to the dust of the earth from which they

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

The wonderful purpose of God was realized in the creation of an environment wherein man could dwell peaceably with his Creator, and the psalm's author provides an important perspective when he wrote, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born

Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust And say, ‘Return, O children of men.’”—Ps. 90:1-3, *New American Standard Bible*

The magnitude of divine wisdom and power is also brought to mind, “For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away. For we have been consumed by Your anger And by Your wrath we have been dismayed. You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence. For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?”—vss. 4-11, *NASB*

NUMBERING OUR DAYS

The psalmist encourages those who would seek to know our loving Heavenly Father, and this has been especially true during this present Gospel Age. His faithful people take every opportunity and set aside their time to serve him and to fulfill their consecration vows. “So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.” (vs. 12, *NASB*) The Apostle Paul has admonished,

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom. 12:1,2) We thus count the time, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.”—vs. 11

From another perspective, we note the humbling words of Job, who wrote, “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” (Job 14:1-4) The psalmist spoke of numbering our days, and Job wrote, “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.”—vs. 5

THE DEATH SENTENCE

From the scriptural account, we are given the record of man’s creation. “The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—Gen. 2:15-17

Our Heavenly Father's commandment to his earthly creation was made clear, and if Adam obeyed God he would live. However, he was not obedient and brought not only himself, but the whole human family, under the divine sentence of death. The Apostle Paul addressed this very point in his letter to the brethren at Rome. He explained to them, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."—Rom. 5:12

CREATION OF EVE

Soon after Adam was created, God provided him with a wife, and she became his earthly companion. Concerning Eve we read, "The LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Gen. 2:18) We also learn the details of her creation. "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."—vss. 21-25

DYING THOU SHALT DIE

Further to God's commandment that Adam would die if he disobeyed the divine law, we previously noted, 'But of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ The *Marginal Translation* of this verse reads, ‘dying thou shalt die’ and provides an important perspective concerning the divine sentence. The words ‘dying thou shalt die’ more clearly identify the dying process that would take place, and the gradual nature of the death sentence that would be carried out. In Adam’s case, he did not die immediately, but began a process that took 930 years to accomplish before he actually died and entered the grave.

Adam and Eve were witnesses to the world’s first murder that took place when their son Cain killed his brother Abel. Jealousy had arisen in Cain’s heart when God accepted Abel’s offering of a first year sheep from his flock, but did not accept his offering of the fruit of the ground. The scriptural account records the events as they took place.

“Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother:

and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."—Gen. 4:2-11

From the terrible events that took place on that day, and even to the present time, the whole sin-sick human family has succumbed to the divine sentence of death. For six thousand years, all have entered the grave which is common to all, whether by sickness, war or accident.

FORMER TRADITIONS

In former times, families were often larger than they are today. Therefore, they were more likely and able to provide essential care for their parents, grandparents, and perhaps other family members when they became too old, sick, and unable to take care of themselves. This relationship was based on principles established by the Word of God, and addressed by King Solomon, when he wrote, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."—Prov. 23:22

This traditional old way of life that was common even a century ago has been upset by the faster moving pace and rapidly changing world of our day. This has greatly affected the infirm and those of advanced age, and it has put the burden of their care on others. Statistics show that there is now a declining birth rate, and that it is coupled with the

increasing longevity among the world's elderly people. This situation has upset the more traditional balance of life that existed in former times. During the closing years of this present Gospel Age this situation is being reversed, and the burden of caring for the rapidly growing number of elderly people is now beginning to outnumber the younger generation.

POPULATION TRANSFORMATION

Population figures indicate that in 1800 approximately half of the people living in the United States were 16 years old or younger. In 1900, older people comprised about 4 percent of the entire population, or one senior citizen for every twenty five potential workers. Since 1950, the number of Americans aged 65 or older has doubled, and those living to 85 years has quadrupled. It is estimated that by the year 2015 there will be approximately 43 million children under the age of 10 years, but 47 million people who will be over age 65. On average, these senior citizens are expected to live an additional 19 years, and will become totally dependant on the working population to support their pensions, and provide their health care and housing costs.

BABY BOOMERS

Following World War II, there was an enormous increase in population in many places throughout the world. Those who were born during this period of sudden growth were referred to as the baby-boomer generation. In the United States, it was unique in both size and duration. Between the years 1945 and 1964, there were 76 million children

added to the population. Since 1965, the fertility rate has plummeted dramatically.

The first of the 76 million baby boomers are now reaching retirement age. This overwhelming number will soon become part of the dependent group who will be needing services of all kinds, and will be one of the greatest challenges this country has ever faced. Senior citizens are the fastest growing group in the country. Analysts who study population figures point out that major changes, both publicly and privately, will be necessary to cope with the challenges that lie ahead.

PROFOUND CHALLENGES

At the present time, health care costs in America have reached nearly \$2 trillion a year, and a large percentage of this expense goes to provide care for the aged and infirm. Improved care and more efficient facilities for treating age-related and chronic diseases has increased the life span of elderly people, and is expected to rise dramatically in the future. This situation, however, is leading to the looming question of who is going to pay for all of this additional care?

It is now possible for the aged and the infirm to live a longer life. However, because there are now fewer children being born there is a greatly increased financial and social burden being placed on the working class population. It is foreseen by analysts that by the year 2030 the ratio of workers to the elderly will be about one to one. This means that every worker will be expected to support their own family, and also to share in caring for one other elderly person. This will create an enormous worldwide

problem that cannot easily be dismissed and will have to be addressed now to prevent a huge burden on the children and grandchildren of the present generation.

The accelerated number of older people poses great challenges to public institutions that must adapt to the situation. This problem is compounded by the shrinking number of workers who must support the system. In most developed countries this is placing an increased pressure on social security programs. In the United States, the social security system is facing a profound crisis if no radical modifications are soon enacted. This will inevitably result in cuts to benefits being received, lower cost-of-living adjustments, establishing later retirement ages or tax increases on the working population. Perhaps a combination of these and other factors, will make it necessary to find new ways to sustain the public retirement programs such as Medicare and Social Security.

With more senior citizens, the prevalence of disability, frailty, and chronic diseases is also expected to increase. The aging of the population is indeed a global problem that requires international coordination, and the implementation of national and local actions. The United Nations and other international organizations are considering various recommendations that are intended to lessen the adverse consequences of the aging population. These include a reorganization of social security systems, changes in family policies and the promotion of more active and healthy life styles among our older people. These agencies state that there must be more cooperation between the governments in

resolving the social, economic, and political problems of the elderly. The status of many older people can be improved by encouraging them to live more active and productive lives.

ELDER ABUSE

As the number of individuals 65 years of age and over has increased, so has the incidence of elder abuse. Unfortunately, the prevalence and nature of this growing problem has generally remained hidden from public view. It is necessary for professionals and lay persons to become more aware of the scope and the many issues surrounding this sensitive topic. The issues surrounding detection of elder abuse and ways to prevent it are being discussed.

Every year in America it is reported that countless numbers of our senior citizens are being abused. This may take place in their own homes, in the homes of relatives, and even in facilities that are designed and responsible for their everyday care. They are often being harmed physically or emotionally by a neglectful or overwhelmed caregiver. Some of these unfortunate people are also being preyed upon financially. Because of the rising number of these incidents, it is important to recognize some of the signs and symptoms of elder abuse, and how to act on behalf of a particular person who is being abused.

Abuse of our elderly citizens tends to take place where the senior person is living. This may occur in the home where the abusers are adult children or grandchildren, or the spouses of elders. Institutional settings, especially long-term care facilities, can also be sources of abuse. There are many different

forms of this type of abuse, some involving intimidation or threats, others involving neglect or financial trickery.

Physical abuse is the use of force against an elderly person that results in physical pain, injury, or sometimes impairment. It not only includes physical assaults such as hitting or shoving, but the inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, or confinement. In emotional or psychological cases, others may speak to or treat elderly persons in ways that cause emotional pain or distress. Verbal forms of abuse may be made through intimidation, yelling, or threats, and humiliation or ridicule. Nonverbal abuse may include ignoring the elderly person, or isolating them from friends or activities.

Neglect, or abandonment, by caretakers constitutes more than half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It can be either intentional, or unintentional, and may be based on factors such as ignorance or denial.

Financial exploitation involves the unauthorized use of an elderly person's property, either by a caregiver or others. It may involve the misuse of personal checks, funds, credit cards, or accounts. In some cases, the older person's signature may be forged, or certain household properties may be taken from them.

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE AGED

Except for those who die at a young age, everyone must face the inevitable difficulties and uncertainties of growing old. Throughout the approximately six thousand years since Adam disobeyed the divine law and brought death upon himself and

the entire human creation, our loving Heavenly Father has been developing a grand and long-range plan for the human family. His ultimate purpose for the sin-sick human creation is to deliver them from the sentence of death and to provide them with reconciliation. After sin had been introduced into the world, the Heavenly Father spoke, "Unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."—Gen. 3:17

THE CURSE LIFTED

When all disobedience will have been removed during the future reign of our Lord Jesus and the faithful members of his bride, the human creation will be taught the ways of truth and righteousness, and will have opportunity to receive the wonderful gift of life here on a perfected earth. John the revelator wrote of that time, and proclaimed, "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."—Rev. 22:1,2

The curse, which had been instituted because of disobedience to God, will be taken away by the Christ, "There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him."—vs. 3

FRESHER THAN IN YOUTH

In the writings of Job, he spoke of that glorious scene and used the word ‘fresher’ [to rejuvenate, Hebrew] to describe the state of perfection that mankind would attain under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom. We greatly rejoice to read, “If there is an angel as mediator for him, One out of a thousand, To remind a man what is right for him, Then let him be gracious to him, and say, ‘Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom’; Let his flesh become fresher than in youth, Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.”—Job 33:23-25, *NASB* ■