

Intervention or Isolation

*“Keep not thou
silence, O God:
hold not thy peace,
and be not still, O
God. That men may
know that thou,
whose name alone
is JEHOVAH, art
the most high over
all the earth.”*
—Psalm 83:1,18

A GENERAL STATE OF chaos and revolution has existed within various countries of the world during the seven decades since the end of the Second World War. This is despite the presence of the peace-making mechanism of the United Nations which came into being as a direct result of that horrific worldwide conflict. Today, the semblance of peace which does exist in many parts of the earth is still maintained, to a large extent, by sheer force of arms on the part of the more powerful nations, rather than by genuine harmony and goodwill among peoples or leaders.

In a most recent example, the United States military in early April intervened in Syria by carrying out missile strikes against that country's Shayrat Air Base. The air base was the supposed origin of an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government against its own people just days earlier,

in which nearly ninety died, one-third of them children. The U.S. action, it is feared by some, may draw the United States into another conflict such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, which have embroiled this country, to a greater or lesser extent, for more than fifteen years. At the same time, however, nearly all condemn the recent chemical gas attack, and admit that something must be done to put an end to the carnage of Syria's civil war, which has raged for more than five years, and by some estimates, has taken the lives of nearly 500,000 people.

INTERVENTION VERSUS ISOLATION

Generally speaking, only under extreme circumstances do the people of any country welcome intervention by another nation, especially by means of armed force. However, whatever these conditions might be, we have seen much in the way of intervention, particularly during the past seven decades, some partially successful and others having disastrous results. To those who are taking military action such as air strikes or placing soldiers on the soil of other nations, the word intervention is oftentimes used to justify their actions which they hope, in the long run, will be good for the people involved. They regard it as being necessary to prevent the complete breakdown of law and order, or control by oppressive and dictatorial leaders.

The history of the United States in this regard, particularly over the past 120 years, has ranged from preferred isolation and general noninvolvement in the affairs of other nations to that of expected intervention throughout the world, ostensibly for the sake of freedom, peace, and order. In the half-century prior

to the end of the Second World War, the United States attempted, though not often successfully, to avoid direct involvement with the conflicts of other nations.

Even our country's entrance into World Wars I and II was not initially contemplated, but ultimately played a major role in their outcomes. President Woodrow Wilson repeatedly vowed the United States would not enter World War I, which began in the summer of 1914. At the end of 1916, two and one-half years later, the United States remained on the sidelines, but was getting pressure from Great Britain to enter the war, as it had become a virtual stalemate, with both sides on the verge of mutual destruction. In April 1917, President Wilson reluctantly committed the United States to the war, and it was over just a year and a half later, in November 1918.

Similarly, the United States, mired in the depths of the 1930's Great Depression, did not want to enter World War II. That all changed, however, on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Though the war raged on for nearly four more years, it was primarily through this country's advanced technological, scientific, and military know-how that the Axis powers were finally defeated.

In the decades since the end of the Second World War, the United States has transitioned into a nation which has intervened—and is often expected to do so—in the conflicts of many nations and peoples. History records that over the past seven decades this country has made such interventions more than eighty separate times, and this number only includes those which involved military operations. Some of these lasted for a day, while others continued on for many years.

WILL GOD INTERVENE?

As followers of the Master and students of the Word of God, it is not within our province to decide who is right in matters of this kind. To us the entire world situation gives evidence that man, with all his technical and scientific knowledge and advancement, is failing to govern himself in a manner to assure peace, security, and happiness for all. Human selfishness has driven man into a situation from which he is unable to extricate himself. Some are trying one method, and some another, but ultimately all human efforts will fail, and we will have the climax in what the Prophet Daniel describes as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1

There are millions in the world who profess to believe in God and in his ability to help them. However, it has evidently not occurred to many of these that God will ever actually do anything to straighten out the tangled affairs of the nations, and of the world in general. They do not understand that God has promised to intercede in human affairs, to do for the people what they cannot do for themselves. For those who do have some awareness of this, rarely is their faith in God’s wisdom and power to accomplish any permanent results strong enough to enable them to believe it. They look at secular history and observe that in the past God has not interfered to establish peace, and they ask why we should expect him to do so now.

PAST INTERVENTIONS

From Bible history, however, we learn that in the past God did intervene in human affairs. An

outstanding example of this was the case of the Flood in Noah's day. Prior to the Flood, as the Bible explains, the world had become desperately wicked. The imaginations of men's hearts were "only evil continually." (Gen. 6:1-5) Divine intervention at that time resulted in the destruction of the entire human race, with the exception of Noah and his family. These, following the instructions of God, were brought safely through the Flood, and formed the nucleus for a new world.

There was divine intervention in the affairs of a nation when God delivered the Hebrew people from their bondage in Egypt. Pharaoh learned that he could not hold out against the God of Israel, although he tried desperately to do so, finally losing his life in the attempt. The reason for this intervention is apparent. The Hebrews were God's chosen people, the children of Abraham. God had promised Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed by his "seed." Since Jesus was that true seed of promise, it was necessary that the descendants of Abraham survive on the earth until Jesus, the Messiah, came. (Gen. 22:16-18; Gal. 3:16) The bondage in Egypt might well have ultimately destroyed this people—hence God's intervention to deliver them.

Many examples of divine intervention on behalf of individuals come down to us from the ancient past. The three Hebrews were delivered from the fiery furnace, and Daniel was saved from the mouths of the lions. (Dan. 3:1-30; 6:1-28) However, God did not intervene to save Jesus from death, because his plan was for his only begotten Son to give his life as the Redeemer and Savior of the world. (John 1:14; 3:16) During his earthly ministry, Jesus, by the

power of God, performed many miracles, and later the apostles also performed miracles—temporarily intervening in the lives of those who were healed.

Although God did not save Jesus from death, even the cruel death of the cross, he intervened powerfully three days later, when he raised him from the dead, and exalted him to his own right hand, giving him the divine nature—immortality. God’s intervention to raise his son from the dead was a vital part of his plan for man’s salvation, for although it was necessary for Jesus to die as a “ransom for all,” his death would have been in vain if he had not been subsequently resurrected.—Phil. 2:8,9; Heb. 12:2; I Tim. 2:5,6; I Cor. 15:13-20

The foregoing examples indicate that God’s intervention, or in some cases nonintervention, in the affairs of mankind, is determined according to the accomplishment of his various plans and purposes. In turn, this is governed by the different “times and seasons” during which certain aspects of his plan are due to be fulfilled. (Dan. 2:20,21; Acts 1:7) In all cases, however, the great Creator’s actions, or a deferring of such actions, are for the ultimate purpose of man’s eventual, eternal blessing.—Rev. 21:3-7; 22:1,2

THE WORLD’S VIEWPOINT

Since the days of the Early Church, neither the world nor the professed people of God have witnessed much in the way of outward demonstrations to indicate that the Lord is interfering in mankind’s affairs. God’s consecrated people, by the eye of faith, recognize his dealings with them along spiritual lines, but they have been allowed to suffer and die even as the rest of the world. For the most part, the

worldly viewpoint, including those of sincere religious persuasion, is that we are not to expect God to ever do anything in a positive way to help mankind out of the chaos and disarray into which human selfishness has plunged it.

As a result, most seem to think that the world will continue to struggle forward indefinitely, with mankind laboring as best they can to rule themselves. Thus, their efforts are to influence governments to enact better laws, and in other ways improve the social and moral tone of society. These have long since discarded the idea of Christ's return and the establishment of his long-promised kingdom. In other words, the people of the world, including those of various religious beliefs, generally do not believe that there will ever be divine intervention in the affairs of men. Man, they say, must attempt to improve his own lot, and that of his fellowman.

LONG SILENCE—BUT NOT FOREVER

Those who do not know the plan of God as revealed in the Bible are not to be blamed for their lack of belief in divine intervention as a solution to the world's problems. After all, as we have noted, it has been a long time since humans have seen much visible evidence of the mighty working power of our God in the affairs of men. The Lord takes this into account when, through the Prophet Isaiah, he says, "I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself." (Isa. 42:14) Likewise, the psalmist in our opening text speaks of God's having kept silent, holding his peace, for a long period of time.

Indeed, God has held his peace and has "been still, and refrained" for a long time from interfering in

human affairs to any visible extent. However, in both the above passages, we are informed that God does not propose to refrain forever from interfering with the downward course of human selfishness. In Isaiah 42:13, just one verse prior to the above reference, the prophet says, “The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.”

While speaking of God’s silence, the psalmist also makes it clear in subsequent verses that this is not to be the case forever, and that in due time, mankind will know that the Lord alone is “the most high over all the earth.” The only means by which such an understanding can come to all the earth is by the miraculous intervention of God in the world’s affairs and activities. Many may feel that God has given up on his human creation, even to the point of “isolation,” and will simply let man destroy himself. This is not the God of the Bible, however, and the abandonment of mankind has no part in his plan.

GOD’S METHODS

God is unlimited in his methods of accomplishing his purposes for man’s ultimate blessing. His intervention in human affairs in Noah’s day was by means of a flood of waters. Through the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, we believe that the closing of another world order is near at hand, to be followed by the establishment of the long-promised Messianic kingdom on earth. God’s intervention in bringing the present world order to a close utilizes different methods than were employed at the time of the Flood. One of these, as indicated in the prophecies

just quoted, is for God to allow nations, armies, and ideologies to pit themselves against each other to a sufficient extent that the imperfect social order of which they are an integral part, but which will have no part in Christ's kingdom, might be brought to destruction.

Another prophecy is one in which the present social order is symbolically described as "the earth." It reads: "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," or zeal.—Zeph. 3:8

This and other prophecies indicate that in the final phase of the "time of trouble" foretold by Daniel, God will, in his own way, reveal his hand in what is taking place, and at that time, the nations will recognize his intervention. In this final phase of the prophetic destruction of the symbolic earth, or present world order, the Scriptures indicate that the people of Israel will figure prominently.

ROLE OF ISRAEL IN GOD'S INTERVENTION

The prophecy of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, indicates that at the time of its fulfillment the returned Israelites will be well established in the land promised to them. Under such conditions, aggressor hordes from the north, under the leadership of a symbolic character named "Gog," will attack them. It will be then, when the situation for his ancient people looks hopeless, that God will intervene on their behalf. Concerning this we quote the following portion of Ezekiel's prophecy.

“It shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him [Gog] throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD.”—Ezek. 38:18-23

As this prophecy reveals, when the horrendous event which it describes occurs, all nations will have their eyes opened to discern that this defeat of Israel’s enemies was accomplished by God. They will then know that the Lord of heaven has intervened on behalf of his people. The prophecy speaks of “an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone,” which God will use to defeat the enemies of Israel. These expressions may well be symbolic of whatever forces the Lord may use at that time. Details of prophecies are seldom understood until

they are fulfilled. However, the important consideration now is that God, at the precise due time, will intervene in human affairs, and when he does, all nations will know the significance of what has taken place.

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

The defeat of Israel's enemies will result in the establishment of Messianic kingdom authority throughout all the earth. This will be the ending climax to the Time of Trouble. Jesus referred to this as a period of "great tribulation," so great that unless it was "shortened, there should no flesh be saved." However, Jesus assured us that this time of chaos and trouble would be brought to an end "for the elect's sake." (Matt. 24:21,22) The thought in the original Greek is that this tribulation will be stopped "through the elect"—that is, through Jesus and those who will be associated with him in the spiritual phase of the kingdom, and who will "reign with him a thousand years."—Rev. 20:6

The Prophet Isaiah provides a marvelous description of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. In this prophecy, the kingdom government is symbolized as being a mountain above all others, and the various mountains and hills of earth subservient to it. The prophecy reads: "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his

paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-3

The Lord’s “mountain,” or kingdom, will be a ruling house, made up of the sons of God. These include Jesus and those who have suffered and died with him that they might live and reign with him. (II Tim. 2:11,12) This ruling house of sons will oversee and govern in all the affairs of men, as denoted by its being established in the “top of the mountains,” and “exalted above the hills.” Through divine intervention this new government will be firmly established to rule over the peoples of the world, and they will voluntarily “flow unto it.”

The peoples of all nations, by that time, will have learned the futility of their own efforts to establish peace and security. They will know that the world cannot go on indefinitely under the constant threats of war, revolution, and weapons of mass destruction. They will learn that an uneasy peace, brought about by the intervention of man and his armaments, is not really a worthwhile peace. They will be “glad and rejoice” for this new government, the kingdom of Christ, to exercise authority over them. It will be this, of which they have unknowingly waited for thousands of years.—Isa. 25:9

The foregoing prophecy quoted from Isaiah 2:2-4 states that people will desire to be taught by the “God of Jacob,” and to learn of his ways. This is because they will know that their own plans and

ways have failed. Seeing the grand results of God's intervention, they will want to learn his precepts, and walk in his paths. The ways of the Lord will then be made plain, and freely available to all. His law shall go forth "out of Zion," and his word "from Jerusalem."—Isa. 2:3

"SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES"

When the people recognize the authority of Messiah's kingdom over them, and seek to walk in his ways, they will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." They will not "learn war any more." (vs. 4) This means that divine intervention in the earth will result in the end of war and the preparation for war, symbolized by the reshaping of swords and spears into farm implements.

How ironic it is that this symbolism of Isaiah's prophecy has been viewed by people and leaders of all nations for nearly sixty years. In 1959, a bronze statue sculpted by a famous artist and sculptor from the Ukraine was donated by the Soviet Union to the United Nations, where it was placed in a garden setting. The sculpture is called Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares. It depicts the figure of a man hammering a sword into the shape of the cutting blade of a plow, representing the wish to end all wars and convert the weapons of death and destruction into peaceful and productive tools for the benefit of mankind.

We look forward to the time, so near at hand, when God, through his Son Christ Jesus and his faithful footstep followers, will intervene in man's affairs "once for all" time, to bring about a "kingdom

not to be shaken.” Therefore, “let us have gratitude—whereby we may be rendering divine service well-pleasingly unto God, with reverence and awe.” (Heb. 12:26-28, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) God’s intervention will bring an eternal solution to the basic human problem of selfishness, for the people will also be reformed in their hearts, and will delight in the ways of the Lord, the ways of love. ■