

The Struggle for Peace

“Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”
—*Psalm 46:8,9*

THE VAST MAJORITY OF mankind has, throughout history, yearned for conditions in their life to include that of rest of soul, contentment of being, self-sufficiency, and peace among their fellow men. Most, however, who have these otherwise noble desires, have gone about seeking the attainment of these conditions after the fashion of their inherited fallen and sinful nature. Indeed, most of these efforts have not been according to God’s instructions as found in the Scriptures. In this month’s issue of *The Dawn*, we will examine these four related themes: rest, contentment, sufficiency, and peace—comparing fallen man’s ways with God’s all-wise methods.

Our first subject of examination is that of peace—specifically, man’s struggle to attain and maintain this condition with his fellowman and

fellow nations. Indeed, for man to achieve within his own being any measurable and satisfying peace, rest, contentment, and sufficiency, he first must be able to attain peace and harmony with his neighbor—his fellow human beings.

MAN'S EXPERIENCE WITH WAR

As our title suggests, man has greatly struggled for peace among peoples and nations. Civilized people throughout the ages have looked upon war as an evil. Yet, generally speaking, the majority have considered it a necessary evil, and have reluctantly participated in it. In some instances, professional militarists have abhorred war, and have hoped and prayed that some way to universal and lasting peace could be found. In the 1950s, President Eisenhower, a much-praised and leading general during World War II, in the face of the increasing hideousness of war, called upon nations to unite in an effort to develop and promote nuclear energy for the betterment of man rather than for destruction. In the sixty years which have passed since he issued that call, while there has been no war using nuclear weapons, there is still the continued threat, particularly from smaller “rogue” nations which perhaps feel that they have little to lose by developing and even using such weapons.

During the opening years of the new millennium, the struggle for peace has taken on even greater challenges, perhaps, than the threat of nuclear war. Terrorism, and the war against it, has been the focal point of conflict between nations and peoples during the dawn of the new century. Some nations and extremist groups, rather than choosing to wage

war with “conventional” weapons such as guns, tanks, ships, and bombs dropped from airplanes, have chosen to use implements such as car, road-side, and suicide bombs. “Improvised explosive devices [IEDs]” are widely used also, which, as the name suggests, utilize any materials commonly available to create an explosion powerful enough to kill or maim as many people as possible. In addition, there has been the increased threat of, and preparation for, possible biological and chemical warfare.

OPINIONS AND STATISTICS

Scholars who have studied man’s experience with war down through the ages have expressed varied opinions as well as provided many statistics on the subject, some of which we will note here. Noted British historian John Keegan has stated his belief that war is a universal phenomenon whose form and scope are defined by the society that practices it. A different argument suggests that since there have been, through the centuries, societies in which war did not exist, human beings are not naturally disposed to engage in warfare, and that it emerges only under particular circumstances. Despite this argument, some experts believe that approximately 90-95% of known societies throughout history have engaged in at least occasional warfare, with some having fought almost constantly. According to one source, approximately 14,500 wars have taken place between 3500 B.C. and the end of the 20th century, costing 3.5 billion lives, with only about 300 years of peace during that 5,500 year period.

Of the ten most devastating wars in human history in terms of loss of life, six have taken place within the past two hundred years. These six wars alone claimed an estimated 150 million lives, with World War II accounting for nearly half of that number. Shortly after that most costly of all wars, and upon seeing the rapidly increasing destructive consequences of modern warfare, Dr. Albert Einstein famously stated, “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” How chilling should such a thought be to the human heart and mind!

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program, a resource recognized by the United Nations, states that, as of the beginning of 2012, in addition to many other “small-scale” conflicts, there were ten ongoing wars in the world, causing at least one thousand deaths per year. It is interesting to note that eight of the ten on this list were (and still are at this writing) taking place on the continents of Africa and Asia. Lest Americans should feel completely isolated from these threats, however, the ongoing war with the highest loss of life during 2010-2011 has been right next door—the Mexican Drug War. The median length of time that these ten ongoing wars have been fought is eight years, and one of them has gone on continuously for nearly fifty years.

SCRIPTURES PROVIDE HOPE

With all of the history of warfare and conflict, and the ongoing wars of today, it would seem perhaps that man has almost completely lost any concept of the value of human life. Yet, research done by a

former brigadier general found that, on average, only 15-20% of American riflemen in World War II combat actually fired at the enemy. Similarly, a noted American Civil War historian states that of the 27,574 discarded muskets found on the Gettysburg battlefield, nearly 90% were still loaded—having never been fired in the battle. These interesting statistics perhaps provide a ray of hope, that one day man will have had enough of war, and lay down forever his swords and spears. Indeed, it is through the promises of God contained in the Bible that such a hope not only exists, but will surely come to pass in the not too distant future.

In keeping with our opening scripture, the prophecies of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-4 give us an assurance that peace will ultimately be enjoyed by man. These prophecies reveal that when the nations look to the Lord to be taught his ways, they will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks,” and will learn war no more. There will be no aggressors then—none to “hurt nor destroy,” for “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

These prophecies point up one of the main objectives of the great Messianic purpose of God as expressed by the angels on the night Jesus was born: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14) This chorus of the angels was in keeping with the promise of Jesus’ birth, which stated that he would be “The Prince of Peace,” and that of the “increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The Prophet David also foretold the blessings of peace which would come to the nations under the administration of Messiah's kingdom. "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness"—by obeying the righteous rule of Christ's kingdom, which all will be obliged to do.—Ps. 72:3

It will then be demonstrated that righteousness and peace are companion principles, both of which reflect characteristics of the loving God of the universe, and that war is an offspring of unrighteousness, being spawned by sin and selfishness. Through the kingdom of Christ will come the fulfillment of the poetic prophecy of Psalm 85:10-12, which reads: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase."

THE DIVINE PURPOSE

Because the fulfillment of these many promises of peace and goodwill among men has been so long delayed, many, even among the peace-loving, have come to think of them merely as statements of high ideals. Such believe that they are beautiful phrases to be quoted on suitable occasions, but lacking vital meaning as being expressive of actual conditions which will one day exist on this earth. A proper understanding of the divine purpose reflected in these reassuring promises leads to a different conclusion—the conclusion stated by the Prophet Isaiah, when he said, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:7

One of the blinding errors of Christendom is that the Lord is largely depending upon man to fulfill his promises for him. This view assumes that the main purpose of the many promises of God is to set forth what conditions ought to be in the earth, and that it is the responsibility of his people to see that these righteous conditions are established.

However, in Isaiah's promise of the birth of the Messiah, he said, "The government shall be upon his shoulder," that is, it is his responsibility to fulfill the purpose of God pertaining to the Messianic kingdom. That purpose cannot be legislated by fallen governments. It cannot be attained either by wars of aggression or of defense. It will be accomplished only by virtue of the fact that in his own due time, through Christ, "the God of heaven" shall "set up a kingdom."—Dan. 2:44

PARABLE OF THE NOBLEMAN

The disciples of Jesus correctly believed that he was the promised Messiah, the one appointed and sent by God to fulfill his promises to establish righteousness and peace in the earth. Shortly before he was crucified, he related a parable to them concerning a "certain nobleman" who went into a "far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." (Luke 19:12) The disciples understood that Jesus referred to himself as the "certain nobleman" who was to go away, so realized that there would be a delay in the establishment of his kingdom.

However, they did not realize that he would go away in death, and were confused and discouraged when he was taken from them and crucified. Shortly, though, he was raised from the dead, and when

meeting with them for the last time before going to the “far country” of the parable, they boldly asked him about the promised kingdom: “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”—Acts 1:6

Jesus merely told them that the “times and seasons” of the divine plan were not yet to be known by them. They were to tarry at Jerusalem until begotten with the Holy Spirit, and then they were to be his witnesses throughout Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. (vss. 7,8) A little later they did receive the Holy Spirit, and entered with zeal upon their mission of witnessing for Jesus. They witnessed concerning his death and resurrection as the Redeemer and Savior of the world. They also witnessed concerning the fact that he would return from the “far country” and set up his kingdom, as God had promised.

The Holy Spirit refreshed the memory of the disciples concerning another great truth which he had taught them—namely, that if they suffered and died with him, they would, through the resurrection, live and reign with him. Therefore, they understood that it would not be their preaching of the Gospel which would set up his kingdom. They knew that the promised government of righteousness must wait until their Lord and Master returned, and that their faithfulness as his witnesses would prove their worthiness to then live and reign with him.

CHOSEN OUT OF THE WORLD

Jesus explained to his disciples that he had chosen them out of the world. (John 15:19; 17:6) He had said to them, “In the world ye shall have

tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) They understood this to mean that they were to take the same attitude toward the world, and all worldly things, as Jesus had taken. The servant was not to be above his Lord, or in any way exempt from obeying the precepts of righteousness which governed him.

They would have noted that Jesus did not campaign against the social order of his day, in the sense of trying to change its customs and practices. On the other hand, he gave instructions to “render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21) The Apostle Paul caught the spirit of this admonition, and to the Christians at Rome wrote that they were to be subject to “the powers that be.”—Rom. 13:1

The witness of the Gospel which Christians were enjoined by Jesus to carry worldwide was not designed to convert the world. It was merely to attract those in the world, who, appreciating the truth of God’s plan of salvation and his design for establishing world peace, would be willing to forsake all and follow the Master. The chief aim of all these has been to be loyal to God, and to his Son, Jesus. By doing so, they are thus proving worthy to live and reign with Christ in his kingdom of peace and righteousness when it is established in power and great glory throughout the whole earth.

CHRISTIANS’ ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR

While the vocation of every faithful Christian has been to serve the Lord, the avocations of all bring them into contact with the world and with its

institutions and governments. This means that they are compelled to make decisions as to what their attitude should be under various circumstances. Ofttimes these decisions call for great courage, for frequently they place one in an unpopular position in the eyes of the world.

One of the decisions which many Christians have had to make has been with respect to what attitude they should take toward participating in war. This is a matter which each follower of the Master must conscientiously consider for himself. Probably very few fully consecrated followers of Jesus throughout the age have voluntarily participated in war. The real problem has arisen for those living under governments which conscripted their citizens to serve in the military. Over the centuries, this has been the case in practically all the countries where the Gospel of Christ has been preached. Historians indicate, however, that Christians kept themselves as free as possible from military service. They note that few Christians, if any, served in the Roman army during the first century and a half A.D., and even as early as the third century, there were Christian conscientious objectors. These objected not only to participation in war, but also to being in the military at all, because they might be called upon to take the life of another.

As the church, however, became more and more allied with the world and with worldly governments, many professed Christians began to abandon their conscientious objection to war. They increased in wealth and civil power, and as they did, objection to war began to decline. The conversion of Roman

Emperor Constantine to Christianity virtually made the church the agency of the state.

History indicates that during the Middle Ages various views and practices were adopted pertaining to Christian participation in war. Priests and monks, theoretically, were supposed to abstain from the shedding of blood, even though laymen might be called upon to do so in a "just war." That raised the question as to when a war was just, with the church-state governments of the time deciding.

For the most part, from the time of Constantine's conversion down to the present time, it has been only the minority groups which have taken such a strong stand against participating in war. However, due partly to the general increase of knowledge through the more widespread education of the masses, and because some of the prejudices of the past have been forgotten, many church groups now recognize the right of their members to be conscientiously opposed to war.

GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION

Governments in some countries of the world, most notably the United States, now make increased provision for the rights of individual conscience, especially with respect to obedience to God. They allow that conscientious allegiance to God has first claim in the life of a true believer, and that the laws of men should not attempt to set aside this claim.

In this country, many church groups today have established committees to assist any of their young people who may be conscientiously opposed to war, and to work with government agencies in connection with their stand in the matter. The

Dawn has cooperated for many years with the Bible Students National Committee For Religious Conscientious Objectors, as they work together with the young people of our fellowship, as well as the government, concerning these matters.

GREAT TRIBULATION—THEN PEACE

As we have noted, there are probably very few who do not recognize that war is an evil—a plague which blights humanity whenever and wherever it strikes. Noble-minded rulers and statesmen throughout the centuries have doubtless wished that some way could be found to abolish war. No theme has ever captivated the minds of men more than has the peace song of the angels.

Truth-enlightened Christians throughout the age have delighted to proclaim the message of Christ's coming government of peace, under the administration of which the Lord will "make wars to cease unto the ends of the earth." (Ps. 46:9) They have known that their message would not change the present course of the world with respect to war, or otherwise. They have known that the principle set forth by Jesus when he said to Peter, "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," would be verified at the end of the age by the "kingdoms of this world" being overthrown in a time of trouble such as the world has never seen.—Matt. 26:52; John 18:10,11; Dan. 12:1

The global nature of this "great tribulation" which Jesus said would, except for divine intervention, result in the destruction of all flesh, has been made possible by the prophetic increase of knowledge in this "time of the end." (Dan. 12:4)

While, however, because of human selfishness, this rapidly increasing knowledge leads to much destruction, it is also awakening some to realize that better things are purposed. As a result, there is not only an incessant clamoring for real and fancied rights, but also attempted, and at times actual, progress along humanitarian lines.

The minds of the people are being prepared for the blessings of the kingdom which is now so near. The awakening to the barbarity of war, and the legal provisions being made for those who are conscientiously opposed to it, are a part of this general pattern. The people are thus being prepared to welcome, even more wholeheartedly, the kingdom program of education, when the nations will learn war no more. It will be then that the long struggle for peace on the part of the peace-loving will end in an era of universal and everlasting freedom from war and conflict.

“BE STILL”

This will not be accomplished through human efforts, but because “the God of heaven” will “set up a kingdom”—a government in which divine authority will be declared and enforced. As God foretold, he will then say, “Be still, and know that I am God: . . . I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:10

Meanwhile, we continue to proclaim the Gospel of the coming kingdom, rejoicing in the assurance of God’s promises, being assured that it is “at hand” in a very real sense. We are to rejoice also in our “witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:4) The “weapons of our warfare are not carnal,” nevertheless, they are “mighty” through Christ in

the pulling down of strongholds of error which may have been entrenched in our own minds and hearts. They are “mighty” also in “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”—II Cor. 10:4,5

When the laws of his kingdom become operative “every knee should bow, . . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:10,11) This will be in fulfillment of Isaiah 45:22,23: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not re-turn, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Then there will, indeed, be peace! ■