

The Great Tempest

*“Behold, there
arose a great
tempest in the sea,
insomuch that the
ship was covered
with the waves:
but he [Jesus] was
asleep.”*

—*Matthew 8:24*

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, MAT-

thew has recorded the account of the violent storm that arose when Jesus and his disciples were travelling together in a boat. The Master was asleep and apparently undisturbed by what was taking place around him, but his disciples,

who were experienced seamen, were afraid and very anxious. Concerning them, we read, “His disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”—Matt. 8:25-27

THE TEMPEST

The word ‘tempest’ in our featured scripture has been translated from the Greek *seismos* which means to shake or agitate. The word has been

translated ‘shake’ in Paul’s letter to the Hebrew brethren. “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” (Heb. 12:26) The apostle was quoting from the prophecy of Haggai.—Hag. 2:6,7

The word *seismos* is also translated ‘earthquake’ in the book of Revelation. We read, “There were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.” (Rev. 16:18) In symbolic language, this is prophetic of the great revolution that occurs at the end of this Gospel Age, that removes all selfishness and pride.

STORMY ENCOUNTERS

The great tempest that Jesus and his disciples experienced aptly illustrates the stormy encounters that Jesus’ faithful followers would experience during the long centuries of this age. Jesus questioned his companions’ faith by asking, ‘Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?’ The disciples should have realized that there was nothing to fear when Jesus was with them in the ship. This serves to illustrate the fact that Jesus has promised to be with all of his faithful followers throughout the present Gospel Age. (Matt. 28:20) He thus emphasized the importance of faith as a necessary prerequisite to the safe arrival of the Christ at their ultimate destination.

More specifically the tempest represents the foretold time of trouble that is to occur during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. The severity

of the storm required our Lord Jesus to take miraculous action against the power of the wind and the sea. It was only after he had taken control that a great calm came over the troubled waters. This could very well suggest the manner in which the great time of trouble will end. We also learn from the scriptural account (Matt. 8:28), that the time was near at hand when Jesus and his disciples would reach their ultimate destination.

SUMMER 2010: WIND, FIRE, WATER

We are also witnesses to storms that have brought fear and devastation to earth's inhabitants. Unpredictable and severe weather has occurred in many parts of the world during the summer of 2010. People all over the world have been affected by some of the most destructive storms in decades, and in some cases these storms have broken long-established weather records. For example, there has been intense heat, major drought, and devastating fires. In other places, there have been floods and mudslides that have engulfed homes, businesses, and even whole communities. Throughout the summer valuable cropland has been severely affected or destroyed. Hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes have also uprooted the lives of many innocent people.

This calamity was addressed by Charles Hanley of the *Associated Press*. We quote in part a news report entitled "Wacky Weather no Global Warning—Change is here." published by the *Los Angeles Daily News* (August 13, 2010). He said, "Floods, fires, melting ice and feverish heat: From smoke-choked Moscow to water-soaked Iowa and the High

Arctic, the planet seems to be having a mid-summer breakdown. It's not just a portent of things to come, scientists say, but a sign of troubling climate change already under way.

"The weather-related cataclysms fit patterns predicted by climate scientists, Geneva-based World Meteorological Organization says—although those scientists always shy from tying individual disasters directly to global warming. The experts now see an urgent need for better ways to forecast extreme events like Russia's heat wave and wild fires, and the record deluge devastating Pakistan.

"There is no time to waste, because societies must be equipped to deal with global warming,' says British government climatologist Peter Stott. The United Nation's network of climate science—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—has long predicted that rising global temperatures would produce more frequent and intense heat waves, and more intense rainfalls. In its latest assessment, in 2007, the Nobel Prize-winning panel went beyond that. It said these trends 'have already been observed,' in an increase in heat waves since 1950."

TORNADOS IN THE UNITED STATES

The *Associated Press* (April 26, 2010) published a news item entitled, "Enormous Tornado, Violent Storms Kill Dozen." Quoting in part from the article, we read, "Hundreds of homes were damaged in the tornado, which carved a path of devastation from the Louisiana state line to east-central Mississippi. At least three dozen people were injured. National Weather Service meteorologist Marc

McAlister said the tornado had winds of 160 miles (260 km.) an hour and left a path of destruction at least 50 miles long.

“‘This tornado was enormous,’ said Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, who grew up in Yazoo County, a county of about 28,000 people. He said the twister wreaked utter obliteration among the picturesque hills rising from the flat Mississippi Delta. He estimated at least 100 houses in Yazoo County alone had severe damage, but said his estimate could rise. Hundreds were without electricity while others were left homeless, sifting through what little remained of their homes and bulldozing the rest. Volunteers poured into the hardest-hit areas with four-wheelers, chain saws, and heavy equipment to chop up downed trees and haul away the wreckage as the cleanup began. Mississippi’s Choctaw County had the most confirmed deaths: five, including a baby and two other children. One woman lay dying in a ditch along a dirt road beside the body of her husband. No one could get to her because of the fallen trees blocking the road.

“Tornadoes also were reported in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Alabama. The storm system tracked northeastward, downing trees in northwest Georgia and later damaging an elementary school roof in Darlington, South Carolina. All that remained of Sullivan’s Crossroads Grocery in Choctaw County was a pile of cinderblocks. Owner Ron Sullivan, his wife, and four other people rode out the storm, coming away with only some cuts and bruises. Sullivan had been on the phone, describing the weather conditions to a meteorologist, when the line went dead and the twister hit, tearing the wooden roof

off the store and hurling Sullivan into a cinder-block wall.”

Another weather news article, “Tornado Storms tear through Plains States” reported (May 10, 2010) on the violent storms. In part, we read, “More than 40 tornadoes touched down across Kansas and Oklahoma with hail stones four inches in diameter. Five people were killed and dozens injured as hailstones nearing baseball size fell from the sky. Thousands are left without power across Kansas and Oklahoma.

“Large storm systems that unleash what are called ‘tornado families’ can cause catastrophic damage. Large storm fronts move into Oklahoma and Kansas and in the Great Plains area. There is always the risk of a tornado with any large storm front. Each region comes with unique weather patterns, affected by the regional geography. The Great Plains area is commonly referred to as Tornado Alley, because the region’s unique susceptibility to form tornado-producing storms.”

FIRES IN RUSSIA

Intense heat and numerous fires created havoc in Russia during the summer of 2010. Under the title “Russia Burns in Hottest Summer on Record,” we quote in part from the news report that was submitted by *News Watch* editor David Braun (July 28, 2010). He wrote, “It’s not only North America that is suffering one of the hottest summers on record (*National Geographic News*: 2010 to Be One of Hottest Years on Record). Russia has been enduring weeks of oppressive heat, now worsened by spontaneous peat and forest fires that are pumping

smoke into the air. While millions are gasping, hundreds of people trying to cool off have drowned, and Russia's crops are shriveling.

"According to *Earth Times*, the month of July has been Russia's hottest since records started 130 years ago, with temperatures in the range of 102 F (39 C). The heat has led to devastating fires across the country. An estimated 20,000 blazes have burned down some 400,000 hectares of forest in the last few weeks—the equivalent of more than half a million football fields. Crews across the Moscow region have had to deal with around 60 fire outbreaks. The conditions they are working in are intense, the earth literally smoulders, and the heat of the sun combined with the fires is almost unbearable.

"'The worst smog to hit Moscow in almost a decade has sent pollution soaring ten times above safe levels,' the English-language *Moscow Times* reported. Moscow hit an absolute temperature record recently with 37.4 C and was headed for yet another high. The Times said high temperatures had damaged a third of the land under cultivation, and forced Russia to declare a state of emergency in 23 regions. Grain prices may double this year because of the drought.

"Russia's worst drought in 13 decades became a political issue last week as the Kremlin held an emergency meeting to combat the impacts of a month-long heat wave that is shriveling crops, forcing up food prices, and causing hundreds of drownings as Russians jump into rivers to escape heat funneled up from North Africa. In St. Petersburg, almost on the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska, residents are cooling off by jumping into

normally icy canals. Across Russia, almost 2,000 people have drowned since June, well higher than normal.”

On August 9th, David Braun again reported the worsening conditions under the caption “Russia Chokes as Fires Rage in Worst Summer Anyone Can Remember.” He said, “Deaths in Moscow have doubled to an average of 700 people a day as the Russian capital is engulfed by poisonous smog from wildfires and a sweltering heat wave, a top health official said. The Russian newspaper Pravda reported: Moscow is suffocating. Thick toxic smog has been covering the sky above the city for days. The sun in Moscow looks like the moon during the day: it’s not that bright and yellow, but pale and orange with misty outlines against the smoky sky. Muscovites have to experience both the smog and sweltering heat at the same time.

“Russia has recently seen the longest unprecedented heat wave for at least one thousand years, the head of the Russian Meteorological Center reported. Various news sites report that foreign embassies have reduced activities, or shut down, with many staff leaving Moscow to escape the toxic atmosphere.

“In the summer of 2010, the Russian Federation had to contend with multiple natural hazards: drought in the southern part of the country, and raging fires in western Russia and eastern Siberia. The events all occurred against the backdrop of unusual warmth. Bloomberg reported that temperatures in parts of the country soared to 108 F (42 C). The *Wall Street Journal* reported that fire and drought-inducing heat was expected to continue until at least mid August.

“Not all parts of the Russian Federation experienced unusual warmth on July 20-27, 2010. A large expanse of northern central Russia, for instance, exhibits below-average temperatures. Areas of atypical warmth, however, predominate in the east and west. Some areas extend from eastern Siberia toward the southwest, but the most obvious area of unusual warmth occurs north and northwest of the Caspian Sea. These warm areas in eastern and western Russia continue a pattern noticeable earlier in July, and correspond to areas of intense drought and wildfire activity. It was reported that 558 active fires covering nearly 700 square miles were burning across the Russian Federation in early August. Voice of America reported that smoke from forest fires around the Russian capital forced flight restrictions at Moscow airports in August, and health officials warned Moscow residents to take precautions against the smoke inhalation.”

FLOODS IN PAKISTAN

Beginning in late July, Pakistan experienced devastating flooding which began in the northern part of the country. One flood data report indicated that a two-day rainfall reached at least 16 inches in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A spokesman for the United Nations said that the Pakistan flooding was one of the world's worst natural disasters. He reported that the number of people affected was greater than the combined totals of the 2004 tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake and this year's Haiti earthquake.

Flow of the main flood crest has proven to be substantially higher than what had earlier been

forecast. The extreme high flow of water sent the river over its banks and onto rich croplands of the Indus River flood plain with severe consequences to the food and water supply for its citizens. It also affected the dwelling places and transportation that is vital to millions of people.

Officials explained that the water runoff from most of the north and northwest of Pakistan goes directly into the upper Indus River. This particular area is rimmed by very high mountains which shed vast loads of sediment, and all of this finds its way downhill to the streams and rivers on its way to the sea. When the tributaries reach flatlands the load of sediment chokes the stream beds thus distributing sand, silt and mud in a broad sheet. Crops and human habitation are in harm's way which accounts for the tragic loss of life, the numbers of people affected, and the inundated land along the Indus River basin.

The monsoon rainy season typically begins during July and lasts into late August or early September. This time period is when most of the annual rainfall occurs across the majority of Pakistan, as well as in neighboring India. Residents living in these areas rely on the seasonal rainfall to sustain their crops and livestock, as well as to replenish the water reservoirs. The river is a vital water and food source for most of the population.

At the time of this writing, United Nation officials have stated that more than 1,400 lives have already been lost, with the toll climbing every day. They also said that the flooding has devastated the daily lives of more than 14 million people. The United Nations also indicated that the death toll

from the flooding is less so far in comparison to other tragedies, but that the scope of the number of people affected is much greater.

The geography of the Indus, Pakistan's largest river, is surrounded by some of the most rugged mountains in the world, and steep slopes up thrust along the upper Indus. Its tributaries are thus quickly affected by summer cloudbursts and winter storms. River diking to control flooding is difficult and much too costly for the Pakistan economy, and no protection exists along many miles of the river's plain. Flood control dams are therefore limited to the upper reaches of the country. According to the *Associated Press*, the United Nations estimates that more than 500,000 people in the area have been displaced and that 1.4 million agricultural acres have been destroyed by the raging flood waters.

Parts of Pakistan that had previously been spared from the country's catastrophic floods are now being threatened. Floodwaters have also put cities and towns in southern Pakistan at risk. Heavy monsoon rains have triggered extreme floods in other parts of the country. The situation has caused the worst flooding in 80 years, and has been described as the country's worst natural disaster in generations, and possibly the worst one in its history. Help from the international community cannot keep up with the need as food and water shortages worsen.

CNN World Wire Staff News (August 15, 2010) reported that United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon met Sunday with Pakistan's president. Both men urged the international community to increase their efforts to help the millions of people

that are being affected by flooding in Pakistan. Ban, who arrived in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and President Asif Ali Zardari held talks before visiting some of the areas affected by floodwaters responsible for 1,400 deaths and widespread devastation. Ban said he has visited scenes of natural disasters worldwide, but has never seen anything as bad. He said, the scale of the disaster is so large, and so many people are affected in so many places with so much need.

One in 10 Pakistanis—up to 20 million people—has been directly or indirectly affected by the floodwaters. Thousands of towns and villages have simply been washed away. Roads, buildings, bridges, crops—millions of livelihoods have been lost. People are marooned on tiny islands with the floodwaters all around them. They are drinking dirty water, and they are living in the mud and ruins of their lives. Many have lost family and friends. Many more are afraid their children and loved ones will not survive in these conditions.

One-fifth of Pakistan—or an area about the size of Florida—has been flooded in relentless monsoon rains, according to the United Nations. Millions of people are still at peril as the bloated Indus River is cresting in parts of Sindh province. In some areas, the Indus has expanded from its usual width of one mile to as much as twelve miles. Many areas have been transformed into vast lakes, forcing thousands of flood victims to huddle in sludgy camps or in jam-packed public buildings. Others are sleeping under the stars next to the cows, sheep and goats they rescued from rising waters. When they might be able to return home remains a big question.

As the flooding continues to disrupt the lives of millions of people, the threat of cholera and water-borne diseases is now becoming a serious concern. The World Health Organization said in a bulletin that rumors of confirmed cholera cases are pouring in. The threat from cholera in the flood-affected communities remains high. In order to avoid excess mortality, it is important that all acute cases with severe dehydration have ready and rapid access to standardized treatment covering waterborne diseases, including cholera.

HOPE UNDER CHRIST'S KINGDOM

Amid the turmoil and distress of our changing environment let us turn to the Word of God for understanding and comfort. The Scriptures reveal that our Heavenly Father has not forgotten his human creation, but has a plan for their recovery from the sentence of death as a result of sin. Under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, all will be given an opportunity to obey the divine Law and receive life.

At that time, which is near at hand, earth's environment and weather patterns will be equalized and made subject to the mighty hand of God. The earth also will be restored to perfection as promised by our loving Creator. He will provide showers of blessing to water the land; fruit producing trees will bring forth their abundance; and it will surely come to pass that the earth will yield her increase.

The Prophet Ezekiel has recorded God's wonderful promises for mankind. The whole human family will be given every opportunity to attain the

blessings of life under the administration of Christ's future kingdom of peace and righteousness to live on a restored earth.

A COVENANT OF PEACE

The psalmist speaks of the time when our loving Heavenly Father will say, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."—Ps. 46:10

The Prophet Ezekiel has written concerning the wonderful promises of God. "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them."—Ezek. 34:25-27

PEACE BE STILL

In Mark's account of the tempest that bore down on Jesus and his little group of disciples who were travelling with him, he includes the additional words which the Master spoke to calm the stormy sea. "He [Jesus] arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."—Mark 4:39 ■