

Where Is God in Our Troubled World?

***“Be still, and know
that I am God: I
will be exalted
among the
heathen, I will be
exalted in the
earth.”
—Psalm 46:10***

THE QUESTION OF OUR

title is a most compelling one, especially to those who claim faith in the Bible. As we have recently entered 2017, men and women in high places continue to spend much thought and effort in their attempts to resolve the problems, perplexities, and threats of our present world. In the United States, the people wonder what future events may take place as a consequence of the new incoming presidential administration. Some have hopes of better days ahead, while others have fears that dangerous times lay before us. Only as the coming weeks, months and years pass by, and as national and world events unfold, will we know the realities of how present conditions in our country and abroad will change going forward.

All will likely agree that we live in a troubled country, which is part of a troubled world, full of difficult and confusing problems. Complex immigration issues, threats of terrorism, loss of industries and jobs overseas, escalating racial tensions, deteriorating moral standards, ongoing economic uncertainty, fears of inflation and daily violence of every kind, are but a sampling of the many troubles which plague just the United States. We can now add to that the disturbing matter of cyber-terrorism and “hacking,” even at the highest levels of government. The resulting mixture of dilemmas and challenges is immense, to a point nearly beyond comprehension, much less resolution.

To those who believe in an all-wise God, who created man in his own image, it is certainly fair-minded to ponder the question of what his objectives are in permitting all these troubles to come upon the earth. Truly, the rational mind says there must be some reason for present circumstances, even if we cannot understand what it might be. We suggest, however, that God’s purposes in allowing these can be understood, for the same Scriptures which describe our wise and loving Creator also vividly portray his eternal plans for man’s ultimate good and everlasting blessing.

GOD’S WORD CONCERNING WARS

Looking at the matter of wars and armed conflict—just one of man’s many problems—God has specifically promised to intervene in his “due time” and end this tragedy of man’s history. Among many such prophetic assurances, we will cite two. The psalmist provides these words concerning God’s

purpose: "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." (Ps. 46:9) This positive statement of God's future imposed disarmament of man is immediately followed by our opening text, which declares that, as a result of his actions, God will then be "exalted" among mankind.

The second Scripture presents the same assurance, but enlarges upon what God's further purposes are following this disarmament. We quote: "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it." (Mic. 4:3,4) The concluding phrase of the prophecy, which states that this promise is from "the mouth of the LORD," gives us a special guarantee. This is because, in Isaiah 55:11, God states to the prophet that the words which "goeth forth out of my mouth: . . . shall not return unto me void, but . . . shall accomplish that which I please, and . . . prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Hence, when God states that the "mouth of the LORD of hosts" has spoken it, it becomes his special guarantee.

TROUBLE STARTED LONG AGO

Other prophecies of the Bible provide similar assurance of God's plan to end earth's many additional troubles. When thoughtful people read these promises of God's intervention, and his plans to stop

the trouble, they may wonder why he allowed it to start in the first place. Here too, it is only by the Scriptures that we can ascertain why sickness, death, and trouble began, and upon what basis God can stop them. First, we quote the words of Paul: "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) This verse describes the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Because of that disobedience so long ago, we were all condemned to death while we were yet in the loins of Adam.

The account in Genesis informs us that Adam and Eve were created perfect and placed in a garden of perfection in Eden. None of us has ever seen a perfect human being, but we can somewhat visualize what such would be like. Imagine a young man in his early twenties with the well-formed body and supple grace of an athlete. Not only would a perfect man be noble of feature physically, but of even greater significance there would be perfection of intellect. Occasionally, we observe or read of a virtuoso in music, mathematics or some other line of endeavor. Adam had mental capacity beyond all these, and in every field of thought. Eve, his counterpart and helpmate, was equally intelligent.

Adam was told that if he obeyed God he would live, but if he disobeyed, "Thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17) Although Adam and Eve were perfect in form and substance, and had perfect mental capacity to understand all things, including God's instruction, the one thing they lacked was experience. This proved to be a matter of vital importance, as they disobeyed God, perhaps not fully realizing the dire consequences of their actions to themselves and to

all their future progeny. Nevertheless, the word of the “mouth of the LORD” was sure, and our first parents were expelled from their garden home to begin the long and painful dying process.—Gen. 3:23,24

THE EARTH CURSED

When our first parents disobeyed, God also said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” (vs. 17) The statement that the ground was cursed “for thy sake” at first seems strange. However, when we give it thought we can understand what God meant. We recognize that man in his undone, sinful condition is better off when busy. The fact that he, for nearly the entire time of his existence on earth, has been busy toiling and struggling to provide for himself, is one reason why he has continued to survive, albeit for only a few short years. In addition, the “experience” man sorely lacked in the Garden of Eden, he has been getting in untold measure in the ages since. Thus, it is truly for man’s “sake,” or ultimate benefit, that God permitted these circumstances to come about.

The “curse” upon planet Earth is clearly evident. Nearly every continent has its vast desert regions, dense jungles, uninhabitable climates, and non-arable land. Storms, earthquakes, floods, droughts, wildfires, extreme weather of all kinds, along with pollution of air, land, and water, have all had their part in fulfilling God’s pronouncement of a curse upon the Earth. This, too, is part of the experience man has gone through, and continues to endure, as the result of sin. The “mouth of the LORD” tells us, however, of the time when “there shall be no more curse.”—Rev. 22:3

GOD'S LOVE NOT CAST ASIDE

Although God turned his favor away from the human family because of Adam's disobedience, his love was still operative. This becomes manifest when we read the familiar words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) When Jesus stated that God loved the world, it meant that he had devised a plan by which man would be released from the sentence of death. God's arrangement for this release is clearly stated by Paul: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:21,22) That is, by Christ's death and resurrection, Adam's condemnation was offset in God's sight, and an opportunity to regain life, by obedience, will be provided to all mankind, because all are "in Adam."

In another place, Paul said, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:5,6) The word "ransom" is translated from the Greek word *antilutron*, which could be more properly rendered, "a corresponding price." This definition helps to make the matter clear. The entire race was condemned in one man, Adam, who fell from perfection—"In Adam all die." This was a just sentence of God, and could not be rescinded unless there was another perfect man, a corresponding price, or equivalent, to Adam, to take his place in death. God was prepared to accomplish this by giving "his only begotten Son," who was willing to be the instrument used for his Father's loving

purpose. Thus, God entered this arrangement, and by his power transferred the life of his Son from heaven to Mary's womb.

This transfer of life was necessary because the one who would die in Adam's place had to be a ransom, or corresponding price—that is, a human being, “born of a woman.” (Gal. 4:4, *Revised Version*) It was so essential that this requirement be fulfilled in every detail, that Jesus could not offer himself until he was thirty years of age. The Jewish Law decreed that a male was not counted as a man until he reached the age of thirty. How harmoniously these thoughts are brought together by quoting Galatians 4:4 in its entirety: “When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”

A knowledge of these truths from God's Word gives us the answer to the question previously raised: Why did God allow the world's trouble to begin in the first place? It started because of Adam's disobedience and subsequent condemnation. It will be stopped because Jesus took Adam's place in death. A recognition of this perhaps causes one to ask further—if Jesus provided a ransom price for Adam two thousand years ago, why have men continued to die?

“IN DUE TIME”

The verse quoted earlier from I Timothy 2:6, which speaks of Jesus as a “ransom for all,” continues by saying that this ransom is “to be testified in due time.” This phrase suggests a specific plan to become operative at a particular time, when the benefits of Jesus' death will be provided to all mankind. The reason for the seeming delay in man's receipt of

these benefits is that during the interim God has been selecting from among mankind a class who will reign with Jesus.

In the Bible, this group is described in various ways. They are called “disciples,” the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” the “body of Christ,” his “joint-heirs,” a “little flock,” the “church,” as well as by other titles. (John 8:31; Rev. 21:9; I Cor. 12:27; Rom. 8:17; Luke 12:32; I Tim. 3:15) These, who walk by faith, and who are tested and tried, are changed to the spirit nature in the “first resurrection,” and share with Christ Jesus in the work of restoring the remainder of mankind during his thousand-year kingdom reign.—Rev. 20:6

Consequently, from these Scriptures we see the plan of God taking form. Many centuries after Adam was condemned, including all of mankind yet unborn in his loins, Jesus was transferred to earth to die in Adam’s place. Subsequent thereto, and until the time to release mankind from death, God has been performing a special work of choosing coworkers for Jesus—namely, his church.

RESTITUTION PROMISED

The return of our Lord at his Second Advent is for the purpose of restoring mankind to life, based upon Jesus’ ransom sacrifice. With his church, they will together assist the willing and obedient to return to the perfection possessed by Adam prior to his fall. This will include the additional benefit of experience with the terrible results of sin—something Adam lacked. Note how plainly the Bible states that Jesus’ return is to restore that which was lost by Adam. We read, “He [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto

you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

The phrase “times of restitution” refers to the kingdom reign of Jesus and his church. Its object is the resurrection of all mankind from the dead, and their return to perfection. The word restitution denotes a restoration of that which was lost. That which was lost through Adam’s disobedience was perfect life, and dominion over a perfect earth. At his First Advent Jesus came as a man to die. At his Second Advent, he comes as a glorious spirit being to bring health, life, and happiness to the willing and obedient of mankind. Thus, we understand that the prophecies which describe the dark troubles of today also promise that afterward will come the restitution blessings.

TROUBLE—THEN BLESSINGS

Hear the words of God’s holy prophets concerning present troubles: “Nations have roared, Kingdoms have tottered, He hath uttered his voice, Earth melteth. . . . Come! View the doings of [the LORD],—Who hath set desolations in the earth.” (Ps. 46:6-8, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Then comes the “afterward,” citing words previously quoted: “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. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”—vss. 9,10

Another of God’s prophets similarly speaks first of the trouble: “Therefore 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.” Now notice the afterward: “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:8,9

It is evident that man’s technological advances, which were no doubt designed to better the world, have had the opposite effect. Such “progress,” coupled with selfishness, moral decay, and a general disregard of justice and mercy, has instead resulted in unprecedented trouble, and threatens man’s destruction unless God intervenes. We quote another example of pictorial language describing this troubled time, and the blessings afterward. “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. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools.” Now notice the blessings to follow: “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”—Isa. 42:13-16

In another prophecy, God likens the trouble to the shaking of a great earthquake, but again follows

with a kingdom picture. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations." How beautifully the next phrase describes the kingdom which follows: "And the desire of all nations shall come." (Hag. 2:6,7) What a beautiful thought is given here, that in the restitution kingdom, which comes because Jesus died in Adam's place, the "desire of all nations shall come."

MANKIND'S DESIRES

For most of mankind, their desires are very fundamental and proper. They desire food and nourishment. Millions today are hungry and undernourished. In part, this is due to much of the Earth's land surface being unproductive because "cursed is the ground for thy sake." Isaiah describes prophetically the time of the kingdom, stating that then "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water." (Isa. 35:1,6,7) Another prophecy which describes the earthly kingdom and promises that the land will yield abundantly reads: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; . . . Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us."—Ps. 67:4-6

High among the desires of man is that for health. How few there are who truly feel healthy and strong, and how short is man's life even among these,

especially when we consider that it was God's desire that man live forever. Notice, though, what God has promised to man when the kingdom is established. "The LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. . . . The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." (Isa. 33:22,24) In the last book of the Bible, as part of the description of the kingdom reign of Christ, we read that "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." To specially strengthen our faith that such shall be so, notice the assurance which follows: "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

Having food and health is mostly meaningless, however, unless another of man's great desires comes to fruition. Man rightly desires safety, security—peace. When God's kingdom is established in the earth, man's yearning desire for peace will finally be realized, but it will not come because of his own efforts. Instead, the Bible makes clear that it will be safety, security, and peace brought about by the intervention and power of God. This is shown in the prophetic words quoted near the beginning of our lesson, but which bear repeating: "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any

more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:3,4

A recent statistic shows that, in 2015 alone, over 1.6 trillion dollars was spent worldwide on defense, war, and the military. Think of the benefit to mankind if this enterprise and energy were turned to good things. Micah’s prophecy promises this very thing, stating that the resources once used for armament building will be directed to proper avenues of benefit to mankind. The making of swords, spears, guns, knives, bombs, and all other devices of warfare will cease, and be replaced by production of those things which will help provide for man’s blessing and benefit. This is the silver lining to the present worldwide trouble, and is a source of great comfort to those whose faith is in God’s Holy Word.

DEAD RAISED TO LIFE—MAN’S GREATEST DESIRE

The Scriptures indicate that the kingdom of peace and life will not be just for the people living at the time of its establishment. We recall again the Apostle Paul’s statement: “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:21,22) All who were condemned in Adam shall return from the sleep of death to receive their opportunity for a full resurrection—or re-standing, as the Greek text indicates—to life. The fact of the resurrection is difficult for many to accept, including some who believe in the Bible.

The Apostle is forceful, however, in stressing this doctrine, as noted in verse 13 of the same chapter, and states: “If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.” Those who appreciate the power and wisdom of God stagger not at the thought of so great a being remembering and awakening all who have died. If imperfect man can devise hand-held devices capable of storing nearly limitless facts for instant recall, God can surely, at the speed of thought, know the face, form, and character of every being who has ever lived since Adam.

Psalm 147:4,5 states: “He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.” Although it is not possible to truly know, some astronomers estimate that there are 10 trillion galaxies in the universe, containing a total of 100 octillion stars—which, in notation, is a 1 followed by 29 zeros. If God created a multitude of stars even approaching such a number, named them, placed them in groups, and ordered their precise pathways, we cannot doubt his wisdom and power to bring back the dead.

The kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray—“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth”—shall come. (Matt. 6:10) The “mouth of the LORD of hosts” has promised it, and how we long for its establishment, wherein, according to another of God’s prophets, “They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:34 ■