

1914 – 2014

A Century of Unprecedented Change

“Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

—Matthew 24:21,22

Political, social, moral, religious, economic, and

AS WE BEGIN A NEW YEAR, 2014 promises to be one of continued distress and uncertainty throughout the world. Heads of state, ambassadors, and leaders within nations will continue to seek ways of easing tensions and resolving problems of every kind which grip the people of all countries. The problems and challenges facing the world in 2014 are indeed as diverse and complex as the population itself.

environmental issues of every imaginable kind plague mankind today.

Compounding the difficulty of dealing with these is that many of today's problems are interrelated. For example, attempts to resolve political conflicts in the world many times have ramifications in both religious and economic affairs. Dealing with social issues facing mankind today bears a direct relationship to the many difficult moral problems in present society, and the extremely diverse, but strongly held, viewpoints on these among the people. Attempts to solve the myriad environmental problems in today's world clearly have significant political and economic impacts.

Another compounding effect of today's problems relates to the availability of information and communication. In the world of 2014, the ability to obtain information and to communicate with others is instantaneous throughout nearly the entire earth. As a result, issues facing even just a small part of the world are given immediate global attention, and have ripple effects that never existed in earlier times—even as recently as the beginning of the twenty-first century.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

This year marks one hundred years since the outbreak of World War I. This properly gives rise to reflections on what has taken place throughout the earth during these ten decades. There can be no doubt that the changes that have taken place in the world from 1914 to 2014 are unprecedented when compared to any other one hundred year period in mankind's history. Added to this is the observation that the world which existed prior to

1914, which in many ways was little changed for centuries, is virtually unrecognizable now.

With the exception of the United States, the world of a century ago was largely one of great empires, with the British Empire being the largest of them all. Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Turkey also had their colonial possessions. The continent of Africa provides a prime example of how this has changed. In 1914, Africa had only two independent countries—Ethiopia and Liberia. The rest of the continent was ruled entirely by various European nations. Today, Africa is made up of fifty-five independent nations, a higher number than on any other continent, and nearly 30% of the total number of sovereign nations on earth.

By contrast, the continent of Europe has experienced the opposite trend during the past one hundred years. In 1914, the countries of Europe comprised a full 50% of the total number of independent nations in the world. In 2014, they make up only 23% of the world's total. In 1914, Europe dominated the world with 25% of earth's total population. In 2014, Europe's population represents a mere 10% of the world's total.

The mighty colonial powers of 1914 were ruled by kings, emperors, and czars. With the exception of Great Britain and the United States, the people had little to say in government. Where parliaments or congresses existed, they functioned largely as “rubber stamps” for dictatorial and despotic rulers.

At the outbreak of World War I the population of the United States was approximately 90 million, and this nation was far from being the leading nation of earth as it is today with a population of over 317

million. However, the United States did play an important role in helping to defeat Germany in that first war, thus bringing it to a close. This was also true with respect to World War II. Together, the United States' role in these two major conflicts in large measure thrust it into the forefront as a world superpower.

Following World War I, rapid changes began to develop in the old European world. There was the communist takeover in Russia, and the rise of dictators such as Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy. Czars and emperors were gone, and while brave efforts were made to establish a republic in Germany, a democratic form of government soon succumbed to the rising power of Hitler. In due course, Hitler and Mussolini joined forces, ostensibly to combat communism, but in reality to bring the whole world under the heel of the rising power of Nazi-fascist dictatorship.

Meanwhile, Great Britain and the United States were helping to arm Germany against attack by Russia, only to find later, to their horror, that the arms were used against the ones who supplied them. Despite all the efforts of the United States and Great Britain, in 1939 the second World War broke out. One of the battle slogans used to encourage soldiers and others in the first World War was that it was "a war to end wars," but in this regard the 1914-1918 war was a dismal failure. Not only did the world witness the most devastating of all wars in the one which began in 1939, but other armed conflicts have been going on in one or more countries continuously ever since. According to recent statistics, a total of 150 wars—some major and others of a smaller scale—

have taken place, or are still occurring, since the end of World War II in 1945.

CHANGES IN WARFARE

One hundred years ago, the first World War was fought largely by soldiers who faced other soldiers, across trenches at times, and at times in open fields. This sort of warfare is less practiced today. In more advanced nations such as the United States, soldiers still take up arms, but many of the major military “battles” are now fought remotely by the use of computer technology. Such technology is able to pinpoint specific targets from far distances, remotely launch rockets, and guide them to hit the targets precisely—all without a single soldier stepping foot on the “battlefield.”

Following World War II, and for several decades thereafter, the biggest fear concerning warfare was the possibility of a full-scale war using nuclear weapons. Indeed, the two major superpowers of that time fought a “cold war” of threats, propaganda, and rhetoric, each knowing full well that they both had nuclear arsenals sufficient to destroy the entire population of the earth many times over. However, when the cold war ended with the fall and breakup of the Soviet Union, now nearly a quarter-century ago, those fears eased. In fact, the superpowers have spent much time and effort in the years since to jointly dismantle their nuclear weapon stockpiles. It is perhaps ironic that today, in 2014, the biggest fears with regard to nuclear weapons are not from those which remain in the hands of the superpowers, but from those of small rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea.

The fears associated with the face-to-face fighting of World War I, the thousands upon thousands of bombs dropped during World War II, and the threat of nuclear holocaust during the cold war, have been replaced during the early years of the twenty-first century by the fears and realities of a new insidious kind of warfare—Terrorism. As we have witnessed with our own eyes, the warfare and horrors of terrorism are unique in many ways. Although weapons may still include guns, anything that causes widespread destruction or loss of life is also a weapon of choice—whether it be hijacked airplanes used as exploding bombs; booby-trapped automobiles; men, women, and even children acting as suicide bombers; or crudely made—but effective—improvised explosive devices (IED's).

Another unique characteristic of terrorism is that it typically does not involve a military objective or even seek military targets. Rather, it targets innocent civilians, and attempts to cause as many deaths, injuries, and as much disruption of society as possible. Additionally, terrorism strikes great fear in man because those who perpetrate such warfare have no regard for human life whatsoever. Certainly they do not regard of any value the lives of their perceived enemies, nor do they have regard for the lives of their own people, families, and even themselves. They are willing to kill and be killed in order to continue waging such warfare.

ECONOMIC CHANGES

The rise of the United States to superpower status during the past one hundred years has not come without severe economic impacts. The Great

Depression of the 1930s had disastrous consequences for millions, and likely would have continued much longer had it not been for the events surrounding the outbreak of World War II. Much more recently, who can forget the near financial collapse of the world's monetary systems in the fall of 2008, and the resulting "Great Recession" which followed? Trillions of dollars in 401(k) accounts, real estate holdings, and stock and bond investments were lost in just a matter of weeks.

Let us consider some comparisons of today with 1914. The United States total national debt in 1914 was a little over \$1 billion. In 2014, it is projected to rise to \$18.2 trillion. To put this in more understandable language, 2014's total national debt will be 18,200 times more than it was one hundred years ago, an astounding increase by any measurement. The buying power of the United States dollar now, as compared with its 1914 value, is a little more than four cents.

While one hundred years ago only a small percentage of the people of this country indulged in buying on credit, it is now the general rule. The whole country does business on a seemingly endless supply of credit. According to recent statistics, total consumer debt in the United States is currently over \$11 trillion, and growing. We may recall the time when a reasonable down payment was expected on the purchase of household appliances, automobiles, and homes, but now many sellers are offering to deliver their goods and close sales transactions without a down payment, even assuring the purchasers that there will be nothing to pay for several months. The

2014 world is truly a world of credit and debt, both among consumers and government itself.

The United States federal income tax rate in 1914 ranged from 1% to a high of 6%. However, these modest rates applied only after a liberal exemption, which left the average worker with no tax at all to pay. In fact, less than one percent of the United States population paid any income tax in 1914. The peak federal income tax rate in 2014 will be just under 40%. The lowest tax rate in 2014 is 10%. Not surprisingly, the attitude of the people toward income taxes of any sort has not changed. The small percentage of people who had to pay taxes in 1914 were just as unhappy paying 1% to 6% as those today paying 10% to 40%.

TRAVEL

In 1914 the world was still in the “horse and buggy” days. The automobile had put in its appearance, but there were very few on the roads. Indeed, there were few roads suitable for automobiles one hundred years ago. So seldom was an automobile seen, especially outside of the cities, that many accidents were caused by frightened horses bolting off the road to get away from these strange, new, and noisy contraptions.

In 2014, in the United States and much of the world, automobiles are the order of the day. In 2010, the total number of automobiles in use throughout the world surpassed 1 billion for the first time, and in 2012, world automobile production exceeded 60 million vehicles. It is no wonder that in many parts of the world, streets and roads are so congested with traffic that movement comes to a standstill on a

daily basis for hours at a time, and resulting air pollution is stifling. New superhighways are being built throughout the world, but the construction of these new roads does not keep pace with the millions of new cars which are appearing each year.

A century ago airplanes were used almost exclusively on reconnaissance missions as the eyes of the armies at war, but not in a commercial way, as there were no commercial airline companies one hundred years ago. In 1914, railroads were the principal means of long-distance travel and for the adequate transportation of freight. While railroads continue to have an impact today in the transportation of freight, airplanes and automobiles have greatly reduced the use of railroads so far as passenger travel is concerned, and transportation of goods by trucks has taken away a large portion of freight revenue from the railroads.

Who could have envisioned one hundred years ago that today there would be thousands of planes in the air at all times, night and day, traveling from city to city, and from country to country at 600 miles an hour? According to the Bureau of Transportation statistics, commercial airline passengers totaled over 813 million people worldwide in 2012, on a total of 9.8 million flights. That is over 2.2 million passengers per day, taking over 26,800 separate flights per day—staggering numbers indeed. Truly the world of travel has changed in the past one hundred years.

COMMUNICATION—THE BIGGEST CHANGE OF ALL

One hundred years ago the telegraph and telephone were the primary means of communicating quickly. The telegraph was relied on mostly for long-distance

messages. Telephones were used largely for local communications. Communication of the news to the general public was limited to newspapers and magazines. Think of how the world has changed in this respect since 1914, or even in the last fifty years! Who could have foreseen in 1914 that fifty years later, in 1964, people generally could sit in their own homes and watch news of important happenings on television—oftentimes the same day that they had occurred.

Fast-forwarding another fifty years to 2014, communications technology has so far surpassed that of even fifty years ago that any comparison to the past is nearly pointless. Men, women, and children, living in even the remotest areas of the planet, have the ability to communicate with any other part of the world literally in the palm of their hand by means of cell phones, smart phones, and a myriad other forms of portable communication devices. Consider these staggering statistics: 2014 will be the first time in history when the number of mobile phones in the world will surpass the world's population. Additionally, as 2014 begins, over 91% of the total population of the earth (this percentage includes children) owns at least one mobile phone of some kind. These are changes of monumental proportions from 1914 to 2014!

UNIMAGINED CHANGES

We believe it would be safe to say that there is no government on earth that has not undergone radical changes in the last one hundred years—even among those nations who have existed throughout this entire period. Think of the changes involving

such countries as Russia, Germany, Italy, France, England, and even the United States, which have taken place since 1914. In the United States, programs such as Social Security and Medicare were not even thought of one hundred years ago, although today they are struggling to survive. Who would have thought, one hundred years ago, that a Civil Rights Bill could be enacted into law in the United States, as occurred fifty years ago in 1964? The current debate in this country over health-care reform and medical insurance coverage was unheard of in 1914, simply because there was no such thing as health insurance at that time. Such changes were unimagined in the 1914 world.

What do all these changes mean? It is natural to expect that the population of the world would greatly increase in one hundred years, but even this has been greatly accelerated by the progress which has been made in medical science, particularly as related to the health of children and infants, as well as huge advances in the treatment of cancer, heart disease, and stroke. In this, as well as in many of the other changes already noted, we have visible evidence of the prophetic statement that “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan. 12:4) Surely, there has never been a hundred-year period in the world’s history like the one from 1914 to 2014.

Many times, when endeavoring to call attention to the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, the remark will be made that everything which is happening now is simply a matter of history repeating itself. There have always been wars, it is said, and revolutions, and upheavals of other sorts, and there always

will be. Yet, most of the outstanding events of the last one hundred years, only a few of which we have briefly discussed in foregoing paragraphs, are quite new and different from anything that has ever happened before. One hundred years ago, many of today's "commonplace" aspects of daily life were unheard of, but today they represent the complex and confusing shape of the hectic, fear-filled world in which we live.

DIFFERENT WORLD SCRIPTURALLY FORETOLD

We are surely living in a different world today than that which existed one hundred years ago. With all the marvelous creations produced by science, invention, and technology, it would seem this should be a much better world than it is. However, greed and selfishness wield such a powerful influence in human affairs that the enjoyment of the good things of the world resulting from the "increase of knowledge" in this "time of the end" is often spoiled by the realization that the progress of this day of science and invention might well lead to the destruction of the human race itself. It is not surprising that thoughts such as this come to the serious-minded who do not know the prophetic meaning of the times in which we are living.

As students of Bible prophecy, we realize that the changed world of today is but a phase of the transition from an old world order into God's new world of tomorrow. While the pre-1914 world has come to an end, what has happened in the one hundred years since is not the complete fulfillment of the Bible's prophecies relating to the end of man's selfish social order. What has thus far occurred is

merely a part of the necessary “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (Dan. 12:1), which eventually will lead to the complete breakdown of human efforts to maintain peace and security. Fallen man’s failure, however, will be followed by divine intervention on his behalf through the establishment of Christ’s kingdom of righteousness.

In this connection, it is revealing to note that while marvelous progress has been made along many lines to make the world in which we live a better place, during the last one hundred years there has been a decided loss in man’s ability to rule himself. Law and order have crumbled on every hand, both within nations and internationally. Crime of every description is rampant in every nation. Internationally, there are almost endless distressing situations for which even the noblest minds in the political world are unable to find solutions. The increase of knowledge has not helped man to rule himself properly, with the result that the spirit of anarchy is increasing. Expanding on the prophetic words of Daniel, Jesus spoke of this time, in the words of our theme text, as a period of “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.” He then assures us that “those days shall be shortened.”—Matt. 24:21,22

Thus, while the world of today is in some respects a better one from the standpoint of its many material advantages over the world of one hundred years ago, it is a crumbling world. The elements of peace, security, righteousness, and respect for fellow man, all of which are essential for the people in any world

society to be truly happy, are lacking. There is a mad rush for pleasure and riches on the one hand, and riotous demands for freedom from inequality and oppression on the other, and very few are satisfied with the results in either case.

THE FUTURE

What can we say about the future? Human wisdom sees the next hundred years as a period in which man must continue his attempts to solve, or at a minimum “patch up,” the many problems of the world if he is to continue to survive. Yet, as the history of the past one hundred years clearly points out, these efforts will simply create more, and likely greater, challenges than exist even now. As one problem is patched, a string of new ones will likely develop. Jesus illustrated the futility of such a course in this way, saying, “No one ever mends an old cloak with a patch of newly woven cloth. Otherwise, the patch put on would tear away some of the old, and a worse hole would be made.” (Matt. 9:16, *Weymouth*) The “old cloak” is equivalent to the old order of things, ruled by sin and selfishness. Putting patches on this cloak only makes the entire garment worse, until eventually it is in rags, with no hope of being saved. Only a completely new “garment”—Christ’s righteous kingdom—will have the qualities and strength necessary to properly “clothe” mankind with the “garment of praise.”—Isa. 61:3

We cannot say what the next one hundred years will hold for mankind. It is very possible that within that period Christ’s kingdom will be established, once and for all doing away with the old, sinful order of things. In this, however, we must “wait on the

Lord,” in faith, knowing that he has all matters well in hand. The Bible does not provide the specific details of year-by-year developments in this chaotic Time of Trouble. Indeed, we do not even know what to expect for the year which we have just entered. The Scriptures, however, assure us that whatever the events of 2014 and beyond may be, they will accomplish God’s purpose, and that the oft repeated prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,” will be answered.—Matt. 6:10

That kingdom, the Scriptures indicate, will begin to exercise its authority in the ancient Holy Land—the land of Israel. Its visible representatives will be the resurrected ancient faithful servants of God, beginning with righteous Abel and ending with John the Baptist. If we think of the marvels of human accomplishments, even in a sinful world, what about divine accomplishments through the agencies and power of Christ’s kingdom? Startling indeed will be the announcement which will one day go out from Jerusalem that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, together with all the faithful of that ancient time, have been raised from the dead, and are assuming the rulership of Israel, and preparing to extend the control of the kingdom to all nations.

Paul asked a Roman governor if he thought it should be considered a thing incredible that God should raise the dead. It should not! The fact is that God’s kingdom plan for the salvation of the human race during the thousand years of Christ’s reign is predicated on the fact that he will restore the dead to life. The death of Jesus would have no

value to redeem the world from death if he had not been raised from the dead. His faithful footstep followers of the present Gospel Age are likewise to be raised from the dead in the “first resurrection” to “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rev. 20:6; Rom. 2:7) In due course, the Ancient Worthies also will be awakened from the sleep of death.

The followers of Jesus will be exalted to live and reign with him in the spiritual, heavenly phase of the Messianic kingdom. The Ancient Worthies will be given authority as the human representatives of that kingdom. After establishing peace among those still living at the close of the great Time of Trouble, there will begin the general resurrection of all the remaining billions who are asleep in death. What a stupendous work that will be, and how the name of the Creator will be glorified as one generation after another is brought forth from the great prison of death, enlightened concerning the true God and his will for them, and given an opportunity to travel over the “highway” that leads to holiness and life.—Isa. 35:8

As students of prophecy, we continue to watch the events that take place in the world in 2014 and beyond, realizing that soon Messiah’s kingdom will be set up in power and great glory, and that through its agencies all the distressing problems of the world will be permanently solved. Soon there will be peace on earth, because God’s good will toward men, having been demonstrated nearly two thousand years ago through the gift of his Son to be man’s Redeemer, will be plainly evident in the establishment of that kingdom which will bless “all families of the earth.”—Gen. 12:3; Acts 3:25 ■