

The Earth: Reeling To And Fro

*“The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.”
—Isaiah 24:19,20*

LOOKING DOWN THE LONG stream of time to our present day, the Prophet Isaiah wrote about a time when conditions in the earth would deteriorate and its institutions become so unstable that it could be described as a drunken man reeling ‘to and fro.’ This accurately and vividly portrays today’s social, political, financial, and ecclesiastical structures of earth that are breaking down, being removed, and dissolving before our very eyes. These institutions that have existed for centuries are now being destroyed, and will never rise again.

The reference to a drunken man well describes

the uncertain course of those who are attempting to guide the faltering and dying world of our day in prophecy. A drunken man is not only uncertain on his feet, but grasps for almost any object in sight, or which he thinks is in sight, in order to support his faltering steps. This is the position of world leaders at the present time. No matter what is done, the accumulated sin of the world defines it as unworthy of continued existence. The determination of the Heavenly Father is to punish and destroy earth's institutions because of their transgressions.

DESPERATE TIMES

During the closing years of this present Gospel Age, even these alarming thoughts and words come far short of telling the whole truth of what is now really happening. Words and terms fail to portray the extreme dangers that now face the world and its inhabitants. The hearts of the people, and especially the diplomats and political leaders who are in positions of authority, are now being filled with despair and increasing anxiety.

Luke, the providential Bible historian, provides yet another glimpse of the level of distress among the nations. In symbolic language, he wrote, "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."—Luke 21:25,26

NO SOLUTIONS

International statesmen rush about in an effort to seek solutions and to cope with the deteriorating

situation, but with little success. Man's feeble attempt to avert the rising tide of discontent and anarchy and to find solutions to the various problems falls far short. There are festering trouble spots in many parts of the earth, any one of which could suddenly erupt and precipitate further chaos, confusion, and uncertainty. We are now witnessing the culmination of six thousand years of sin, violence and death, and the world is out of control because of hatred, pride and selfishness. As conditions grow more desperate by the day, even the leaders of the people do not agree as to how best to handle the various complex and perplexing problems that face the human family.

The psalmist also spoke about the distress of our day that would have the world's leaders at wit's end as they endeavor to seek solutions. "These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end."—Ps. 107:24-27

SHAKING FOUNDATIONS

If outward peace could be established in one region, there would still be many other trouble spots somewhere else. No matter which way the nations may turn they are faced with increasing violence. This is symbolically described by the prophet. "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the

midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.”—Isa. 24:17,18

LITERAL AND SYMBOLIC TERMS

The word ‘earth’ has been used in many prophecies, and it is important to recognize whether it refers to the literal planet earth, or whether it may have a symbolic application.

We are assured, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.” (Eccles. 1:4) The turbulent events that were foretold and are now coming to pass, will take place on the literal earth.

This is brought to our attention by the psalmist, who wrote, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.”—Ps. 46:1-3

These prophetic words present a graphic description of present world events, referring to the earth as being ‘removed,’ and that it is also melting. The prophecy carries us through this present time of trouble to the time when Divine intervention in human affairs will take place. Through the psalmist, we learn the will and ultimate purpose of the Heavenly Father concerning his human creation. “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.”—vss. 4-6

As we continue to examine this wonderful psalm, we are further informed, “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. 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. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.”—vss. 7-11

We are thus assured by the wonderful promises of God that the literal planet earth upon which we all live, will survive the LORD’s judgments that are coming upon the world’s evil institutions which were established on pride and selfishness. These structures of earth’s society have existed for many centuries. The psalmist has used symbolic terms to describe the earth being destroyed and the mountains being carried into the midst of the sea. The earth’s removal speaks of Satan’s world that will ultimately be destroyed. The mountains that are being carried into the midst of the sea points to the nations of this world that are being removed to make way for Christ’s kingdom of Truth and righteousness. The rising tide of anarchy that is becoming more apparent will ultimately accomplish this destruction.

Mankind does not need to fear as they look ahead to this inevitable destruction, even as the writer of Psalm 46 has proclaimed: God is our refuge and strength throughout the world’s present

turmoil, and in the glorious kingdom of Christ that will soon be established over all the literal earth.

DAYS TO BE SHORTENED

Jesus said that these days of trouble would be shortened. Matthew recorded this important prophecy. “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, . . . 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.” (Matt. 24:21,22) Mark also records our Lord’s words, when he said, “In those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect’s sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.”—Mark 13:19,20

Our Lord was speaking of the symbolic earth—the present social order that will be utterly destroyed. The human family will survive and live through the troublous time. This fact is assured, and is recorded by the Prophet Zephaniah, “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. 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

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

The Prophet Micah also wrote in symbolic terms pointing to Christ's future kingdom and its establishment over all the earth. He prophesied, "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it." (Mic. 4:1) The prophet was speaking of a future time when the Lord's kingdom will yet be established over all the nations, and that earth's people will be blessed under its righteous rule. "Many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (vs. 2) The people will be taught the ways of Truth and righteousness through the two phases of the kingdom. Zion represents the spiritual kingdom of Christ and his faithful followers from which the laws of God will be administered. The earthly representatives of the kingdom will consist of those worthies of old who will teach the people the ways of Truth and righteousness.

We then read, "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. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name

of the LORD our God for ever and ever.” (Mic. 4:3 - 5) From these prophetic words, we know that man will no longer learn and practice the awful arts of war, but each will learn to love his neighbor and walk in the ways of God and righteousness.

RUSHING WATERS

Another of God’s prophets has written in symbolic terms concerning the events of our day, saying, “Woe to the multitude [noise, *Marginal Translation*] of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.”—Isa. 17:12,13

Isaiah points to the mountains being carried into the midst of the sea, which graphically illustrates one of the signs that we should expect to see during the present ending of the Gospel Age, and during which time Satan’s world is melting. This is taking place in many parts of the world. Based on the Word of God, we cannot expect that the mountains will be rescued from the sea, and will escape the rising tide of anarchy. These chaotic events help bring about the final dissolution of all earthly governments, and the sea will become a raging lawlessness which will cause the complete destruction of this present evil world.

PERVERTED ORDER

The present social order is being more and more perverted. Its bulwarks are crumbling, and its standards are being demoralized. Economic ruin and decay

are manifested on every hand, while selfishness and irresponsibility are eating like a cancer at the vitals of a dying civilization. This is affecting all classes of people, the rich and the poor alike, and the religious and the nonreligious elements as well. Concerning this, the prophet wrote, "It shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him. The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word."—Isa. 24:2,3

EARTH'S TREASURES

Conditions throughout the earth are now beginning to fulfill this description of distress upon all classes. The Apostle James wrote, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days."—James 5:1-3

The rich are not the only ones to suffer in the last days of Satan's world. Earth's economy has become chaotic and all classes are suffering. In many parts of the world, the economic conditions have become intolerable. Abject poverty and near starvation are the common lot of the masses, and with no ray of hope insight. "The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish."—Isa. 24:4

FIERY JUDGMENTS

The Apostle Peter also wrote concerning the great time of trouble that is now bringing about the melting, or disintegration of the symbolic institutions of earth. He described it in his second epistle, where he wrote, "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (II Peter 3:7) Fire is a powerful symbol of destruction, and identifies the fiery judgments of the all-wise and loving Heavenly Father.

The judgments of God will come upon the earth unexpectedly. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (vs. 10) The various elements which form the present social structure are now melting under the intense heat.

As we witness these events taking place, we do not fear as do other people. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."—vss. 11-14

Our main interest at the present time is to recognize the manner in which the prophecies written

many centuries ago are now being fulfilled. Satan is the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4) and his empire is being overthrown. It will be replaced by a new and glorious world order established under the future kingdom of Christ.

LASTING PEACE

The Divine purpose in the destruction of the present evil institutions of this world is addressed by the Prophet Haggai, who wrote, “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, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Hag. 2:6,7) One of the longing desires of all the people of earth is for peace, and that it may be lasting and universal. We are assured by the wonderful promises of our loving Heavenly Father that when the melting process has been accomplished and the selfish and proud institutions of men destroyed, the desire of all nations shall then surely come.

NECESSARY JUDGMENTS

The necessity for the desolating judgments that God will carry out in the earth are in reality incidental to the destruction of Satan’s world. This will be recognized by the people when they realize that the way is being cleared for Christ’s kingdom to be established over the earth. How wonderful is the assurance that the noise of the multitude of the people which is as the rushing of many waters will be silenced, and that, through the far-reaching agencies of the righteous messianic kingdom, the LORD will then 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 prophecies reveal that still more distress, trouble and destruction is necessary to humble the nations and prepare them for the glorious kingdom of Christ that we believe is near at hand. It is interesting to note the frequent use of the term ‘earth’ in the prophecies when describing the many aspects of the destructive trouble which is now upon the nations. It is apparent that the nations have not yet been sufficiently humbled by their failures to establish the future kingdom.

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

When the kingdom of Christ is established, earth’s people will readily respond to the blessings that will then become available to them for their obedience to the Divine will. “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.” (Isa. 2:2) Mankind will learn to walk in the ways of the LORD, “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 pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:3,4 ■