

Hitherto—No Further

*“Who shut up the
sea with doors,
when it brake
forth? . . . When I
made the cloud the
garment thereof,
and thick darkness
a swaddlingband
for it, . . . and set
bars and doors,
And said, Hitherto
shalt thou come,
but no further: and
here shall thy
proud waves be
stayed?”
—Job 38:8-11*

AS THE WORLD ENTERS

the year 2015, there is an increased feeling of uncertainty about the future. The volatile events of recent years have manifested how weak the fabric of our society is, and how subject it is to sudden, unanticipated change. One senses, as never before, that in the year ahead our world will continue to plunge with even greater uncertainty into the future, with no viable solutions to its myriad problems

and perplexities. Is the world truly reeling out of control? From man's outlook, it appears so. What is God's perspective, however, and just as important, what is his plan for the resolution of mankind's many troubles? Is God in control of Earth, and man's place in it?

God spoke the words of our theme text to Job, who he had permitted to be tested to the extremity of his endurance. After all the wisdom of men had been spent, as expressed in his friends' pointless words, the Lord drew Job aside and began to speak to him. Only God's answer fully satisfied the mind and the heart of his servant.

In this text we have a statement the Lord made concerning creation. At the time when Earth was being prepared as a habitation for man, he limited the "waters," which had previously covered the entire planet, by gathering them together, thus allowing dry land to appear. (Gen. 1:9,10) When we have watched in awe as a terrifying storm with violent wind descends over the ocean, perhaps the thought has entered our minds of the devastation that would occur if no limits had been put upon the fierce and powerful waves stirred up by the tempest. What if they should break forth from the invisible barrier which holds them in place and engulf the shores along the seacoast, or worse—if they would only stop when the highest mountains contained them? The Scriptures assure us that the Heavenly Father himself controls the seas. Though storm clouds may gather and waves may boil and fume, they have had their boundaries set. Even in rare and extreme cases when the seacoast is breached, they can go no further than what is allowed by the laws of nature which God has enacted. We thank him for the assurance of our text, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

When we study God's Word we find that in all aspects of life he has full control. This was true in his dealings with his people of the past, and it is

true even today. The Lord has set bounds, and bars, and doors to everything. Anything that may attempt to go beyond the boundary which he has set for it will fail, including any and all efforts by the great Adversary—Satan.

MATERIAL UNIVERSE

Our solar system—including the sun and its circling planets—all move within their decreed orbits. The earth cannot approach nearer to the sun than the Lord has declared. Similarly, each of the planets which revolves around our sun has its own boundaries set—“Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.” There is no power in the universe which could swerve any of these planets one fraction of an inch outside God’s decreed orbit. Scientists are aware of this accuracy and dependability attested to by the heavens, and they utilize it for measurements with complete assurance of its correctness.

We recognize the fact that the Creator has not only set the bounds for the movements of our own solar system, but also for the countless number of solar systems that make up the galaxy in which we are located. Consider also that there are countless galaxies in the vast expanse of the universe, and that they are all moving within the limits of a set course. Pondering these things, we will realize that one who could create such a multitude of worlds is certainly also powerful enough to control them. The galaxies move through the heavens silently, beautifully, and accurately, to such an extent that their positions can easily be calculated for thousands of years. Never an interruption or deviation occurs from the set bounds the Lord has mandated.

POPULATION OF EARTH

When God created Earth, he made it just the right size for his purpose. “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else.” (Isa. 45:18) When he placed our first parents in the Garden of Eden, God told them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. (Gen. 1:28) This process has continued ever since, and billions of people have lived and died. As we enter 2015, the world’s population is presently 7.3 billion people, and is growing at a rate of over 150 people each minute of every day.

The population explosion occurring in our day has become a matter of deep concern to many people. Alarm has gripped the minds of men as they grapple with the many issues associated with the unprecedented number of people living on planet Earth. Many predict that present trends are bound to manifest themselves in extreme food, housing, and employment shortages to be experienced in most parts of the world.

Even today in this country, current statistics claim that over 50 million people, or 1 in 6, struggle to have food on the table. In many third-world countries, the situation is astronomically worse. All of this is the case despite the paradox that there are billions of dollars’ worth of foodstuff stored worldwide, and millions of dollars spent in building and maintaining more storage space for this food surplus. One recent estimate claims that there is presently enough food available in the world to sufficiently feed over 10 billion people, 40% more

than Earth's current population. Yet, because of various political, economic, and social failures, millions upon millions do not have access to sufficient food, and remain hungry. Those who study world developments fear that if the population continues to increase, even at a somewhat lower rate, the situation will worsen, and there will be severe, worldwide shortages of food by the middle of this century.

From man's viewpoint there is good reason to be concerned about the increase of the earth's population in these, our days. In 1979, China enacted a law in which families were limited to one child, and any children begotten after the firstborn were aborted. Although that requirement was eased in 2013, we feel certain that our Heavenly Father has a better solution than this heartbreaking one. We can have confidence that our Heavenly Father has set the bounds and the bars in this matter of great importance to the human family. He has decreed the total, perfect number of people who will occupy planet Earth.

When God's kingdom—for which we continually pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)—is established, not only will those who are alive at that time have many needs to be met, but additionally, those awakened from the sleep of death will have the same requirements. The Bible assures us that everyone who has ever lived upon this earth, every child of Adam, will return from death. (John 5:25,28; Acts 15:16,17; 24:15) These will have both immediate and continuing needs that must be supplied.

As we study the Scriptures, and read about the unfolding of God's plans and purposes as they will operate during the Messianic kingdom, we find many texts which describe that glorious day. However, we do not find even one text of Scripture which in any way indicates that overpopulation will be one of the problems which will require special resolving at that time. Even in this matter the Lord will allow the offspring of our first parents to increase thus far, "but no further." He has prepared this earth to house a particular number of Adam's children, and when his plans and purposes are fully completed, we will see that just the right number were born. It will be just enough to "fill the earth," to inhabit this planetary paradise in joy and plenty and comfort. No more or less than this will be brought forth.

DISPENSATIONAL FEATURES

The length of the different ages and dispensations in God's plan were designed by him to be a specific number of years in length, and no longer or shorter. The period from Adam's creation to the Flood was 1,656 years long. The Lord decreed that the first dispensation would end just then—not earlier, and not later. It accomplished God's purpose in his permission of evil, and then a new dispensation began to teach its particular lessons. One of the primary lessons of the first "world" was that angels could not solve the problems caused by man's fall into sin and death without God's help. In fact, the first "world" became so wicked as a result of the angels failed intervention that God destroyed it in the great Flood.—Gen. 6:5-7; II Pet. 2:4,5; 3:5,6

We find that the succeeding ages have also been precisely as long as God wishes them to be, in order to accomplish his purpose for that period of time. The age of the Patriarchs was long enough to record the great covenant that God made with Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) It was confirmed to Isaac, and then passed on to Jacob. That age also recorded the great faith of these "fathers," as an example to those with whom God would deal in future ages. Following the death of Jacob, whose name God changed to "Israel," the descendants of his twelve sons became the newly formed nation of Israel, and another new age began.

The Jewish dispensation continued for many centuries with its important "types" and "shadows." (I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 8:5) It illustrated new and greater works of God still to come, and ended at precisely the right time in God's plan of the ages. With the First Advent of Jesus, whom God provided as man's Redeemer, the Gospel Age opened up and began the fulfillment of the types and shadows of the Jewish Age. This new age also brought with it the invitation to walk in Christ's footsteps. It arrived, as we should expect, on time, just as foretold by the prophets of old. (Dan. 9:25-27) God, as it were, has stated to each age and its work: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

PERMISSION OF EVIL

We see this principle so beautifully exemplified in the permission of evil among men. With the entrance of sin into the world, and its corrupting influences upon mankind, we have a clear picture

of the miserable result of wickedness. Yet, we firmly believe that Satan has never had complete mastery over the minds of the human race. As we study bits of history we find that often wonderful principles came to the fore, even if only for brief periods of time. Good, kind leaders arose and ruled to the best of their knowledge and ability.

Sometimes in the past, and still in our day, an exceedingly corrupt regime comes upon the scene, casting the people into an abyss of oppression. Yet even these evil rulers are permitted to exist only for just so long. In Daniel, we read, “The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” (Dan. 4:17) In some instances this has been the method utilized in the providential overruling of the great Creator—to serve the particular purpose he has in mind, and to teach a specific lesson. The principle, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further,” still applies. How happy we are to recognize that it is the “most High” who actually rules among the children of men, though he sometimes permits even the basest of individuals to hold sway in one part of the globe or another, for a particular purpose, and for a limited amount of time.

Man, who was in the beginning created in the image of God, became impaired to a greater or lesser degree by his fall into sin, but rarely has that original image been erased completely from his mind and heart. The Creator would not permit this, because he had a plan—a purpose—which centered in man’s restoration to perfection. When given a full chance during the Messianic reign of

Christ to return to mental and moral perfection, by far the majority will choose to accept the opportunity to turn to righteousness. Having learned that sin is “exceeding sinful” through many painful, tragic, and unforgettable experiences throughout the past six thousand years, mankind, when placed under the favorable administration of a “new heavens and a new earth,” will rejoice to walk in the way in which they can serve the Heavenly Father in righteousness, peace, and fidelity.—Rom. 7:13; II Pet. 3:13; Isa. 2:2-4

FALSE CHURCH SYSTEM ALSO LIMITED

During the middle centuries of the Gospel Age, when the false church system held Europe and its monarchies in its death grip, Satan’s real intent was to have their power exercised to “wear out the saints of the most High.” (Dan. 7:25; II Thess. 1:4-12) The message is clear in Daniel, Thessalonians, and in Revelation, that God planned to allow that power to continue unabated only for a limited amount of time. During that period of great trial to the Lord’s true followers, the question was asked, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10) If this experience had been permitted to continue much longer than it did, it would seem that all the saints would have been “worn out”—completely destroyed, by the persecuting power of Satan’s arrangement.

However, after many long centuries of the saints’ bitter persecution, allowed by God to test his true saints in the crucible of trial, a leader came on the scene in Europe who had certain qualities the Lord

could use to bring to an end the “wearing out” of the saints. This new leader—Napoleon—was ambitious and wanted to become a great military man who would rule the entire world. For a short while he made strides to reach his goal, and it was through him that God brought to an end the persecuting power of the false church system. The revelator tells us further that soon that system will be completely destroyed, and “the blood of his [God’s] servants” will be “avenged.” (Rev. 19:2) The question, “How long, . . . dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?” will be fully answered. Here, again, will be expressed God’s power and control over all things. He has “set bars and doors.”

LIMITS TO THE “TIME OF TROUBLE”

In the severity of the Time of Trouble which we are presently experiencing, we find that the same principle also operates. In Matthew 24:21,22, we read, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be [again]. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake [through the elect] those days shall be shortened.” The Lord is permitting the angry waves of world unrest, wars and rumors of wars, economic calamities, political upheavals, terrorism, crime, drugs, and disease to almost totally engulf the whole earth, bringing it to the very brink of complete disaster. He says, “Except those days should be shortened.” Indeed, except for the bounds, the bars and doors, set up by God himself, man would push himself over the precipice of everlasting destruction. However, the

Lord will calm the sea—the storm of human strife and passion—saying, “Peace, be still.”—Mark 4:39

Through the elect those days shall be shortened. “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.” (Isa. 49:8) Although the elect—the Christ, head and body—will intervene to prevent the total annihilation of mankind and his earthly home, they will inherit a “desolate heritage.” However, planet Earth will indeed abide forever. (Eccles. 1:4) It will be the church’s inheritance, and they will have the privilege to “establish the earth”—to bring it back to the original perfection enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The “great tribulation” spoken of by Jesus is also to have special impact upon the nation of Israel, God’s chosen people “for the fathers’ sakes.” (Rom. 11:28) Concerning those who will come against Israel, God, through the prophet, says, “Thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. . . . And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. . . . Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD.” (Ezek. 38:16,18,23) Once again it will be true, “Hitherto

shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” When the Lord steps into the fray to save Israel from utter destruction, and fights for them “as when he fought in the day of battle,” the forces of Gog and all nations who come against her will be stayed. They will be powerless against God.

VISION FOR AN APPOINTED TIME

The Prophet Habakkuk (see article on Habakkuk later in this issue) wrote these words many centuries ago: “The LORD . . . said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Hab. 2:2,3) The great vision which inspired all God’s holy prophets since the world began—the establishment of the kingdom of Christ upon earth—has indeed seemed to tarry. Why is this so?

God has a reason behind the “tarrying.” This age must continue until the work designed by him has been completed. Then he will say, “Hitherto, . . . but no further.” The Gospel Age will continue until the completion of the Christ, head and body, and the culmination of the Time of Trouble in Armageddon. Then, the establishment of Christ’s kingdom here upon earth will usher in the new age—the Messianic age. Even though it seems to tarry, we are to wait for it patiently. In reality “it will not tarry,” but will bring with it all the joys and blessings of life, peace, health and happiness the perfect human heart could desire.

OUR TRIALS ALSO LIMITED

In our personal experiences, there are many tests of one kind or another that the Lord permits to come upon us to try our character. God will determine by our reactions whether we are prepared for the place he has in mind for us in the kingdom, or whether we need still more lessons, or guidance, along a particular line. Some of these experiences are permitted for a short time—others are of longer duration—as our needs may be. This is the measure used by God to determine what trials and testings are necessary for us to endure. When our need and God's purpose has been fulfilled and satisfied, we can rest assured that easement will come to us. "Hitherto, . . . but no further," is God's promise to his elect children.

Every consecrated believer is precious to the Lord, and he deals with each on an individual basis. Indeed, he also works with us as ecclesias of his people as we assemble to worship him at our various meetings and conventions, pouring out upon us his Holy Spirit of truth, revealing to us more of his Word, and inspiring us to greater love and good works. (Heb. 10:23-25) However, the basis upon which we will ultimately make our calling and election sure is individual faithfulness to our vow of consecration.

God suits our trials and tests according to our individual needs. Just as a builder shapes a stone or a piece of wood to fit into a specific spot in the home he is constructing, so God has a particular place in mind for each one in his "temple." (I Cor. 3:16) A carpenter or stonemason does not randomly form a piece of building material, and then hunt

for a place for it to fit. Rather, it is cut, shaped, sanded and planed, or is hewn and carved, so that it will exactly fit the place for which it is intended.

At times our trials may seem so oppressive and difficult to bear, but if we remember that we are being shaped for the Master's use, and by his magnificent design, we will have the fortitude to be submissive and learn the lessons he has for us in the experience. Sometimes audibly, but more often inwardly, our cry goes up, "How long, O Lord?" Let us take comfort in God's promise: "You have been put to no test but such as is common to man: and God is true, who will not let any test come on you which you are not able to undergo; but he will make with the test a way out of it, so that you may be able to go through it."—I Cor. 10:13, *Bible in Basic English*

Our all-wise Heavenly Father decides—and his decisions are perfect—when our trials have accomplished the development of the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and of perfecting the character he is looking for in each New Creature. The great God of the universe, who has all things under his control, is directing every one of our daily experiences. They will never be permitted to go so far in our individual lives that we would be damaged by them. Only "hitherto" will our ordeal be permitted to continue, and "no further." How precious this thought is to those whose hearts and minds are stayed upon the Lord.—Isa. 26:3 ■

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.—Eph. 5:15,16