

A World-Shaking Event

—Largely Ignored

*“Unto you is born
this day in the city
of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the
Lord.”*

—*Luke 2:11*

AS THE YEAR 2012 DRAWS

to a close, we see many things taking place in the world that may, as they develop further, become what might be termed “world-shaking events.” Among these are the ongoing turmoil and tensions in the Middle East—involving countries such as Libya, Syria, Iran, and Israel. Then there is the continued bloodshed of war in Afghanistan and the growing instability of its neighbor, Pakistan. The uncertain economy of the United States and the even more fragile economic conditions of the “Eurozone” are continually in the back of everyone’s mind as potentially world-shaking. Increasing the economic volatility and uncertainty is the looming “fiscal cliff,” which some say could send this country back into another severe recession.

At the time of this writing, our country's Presidential election has just taken place, with President Obama winning re-election to another four-year term. This, too, will no doubt factor largely in shaping many events of 2013 and beyond. Even natural disasters, such as the recent "super" storm that plowed up the eastern seaboard, flooding the nerve center of banking and commerce in New York, carry the potential of having a great impact on the world scene. Only the passage of time, of course, will reveal clearly to us which events currently at the forefront of the news will truly be "world-shaking," and which will end up being of relatively little consequence to the majority of the world. In either case, however, the myriad and tumultuous events shaping our world as the year draws to a close fit well with the prophetic words of the Apostle Paul, who likened the events of our day to variously severe spasms of trouble, "as travail upon a woman with child."—I Thess. 5:3

There is yet another event which has a vital bearing on the world situation today, although it is one which is given virtually no consideration in the diplomatic and political deliberations of the nations. There is one, a leader and statesman such as this world has never known before, who will soon establish a worldwide kingdom. He will restore political, social, and economic order worldwide, and establish genuine peace that will be not merely for "our times," but for all times. This leader was born more than twenty centuries ago, lived to the age of thirty-three and one-half years, and then was crucified by pagan Roman authorities in response to the clamorous demand of his brethren, the Jews.

He was called Jesus, and we join with all those who reflect on his birth and life during this season of the year. It is, in fact, the event of his birth which we gladly proclaim as truly being “world-shaking,” and which will eventually bring blessings to all the families of the earth. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning “Savior.” The Scriptures, so familiar to many, say that Jesus’ birth was announced by an angel to a little group of shepherds watching their flocks by night on the Judean hills. These shepherds, evidently somewhat alarmed by the sudden appearance of that which they recognized as supernatural, were bidden by the angel that addressed them to “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:10,11

Then suddenly a multitude of angels, supplementing the announcement of glad tidings, in unison sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (vs. 14) Whether or not these shepherds were sufficiently well acquainted with the testimony of their prophets to realize that this announcement of the birth of Jesus signaled the beginning of the fulfillment of what had been foretold concerning a new kingdom that was to be established, and a new day that would dawn for the blessing of the world, we are not able to say. Nevertheless, the prophets had foretold the birth of this Savior, Prince, and King, and had pointed out the scope of work designed by God for him to do.

PROPHETIC TESTIMONY

For example, Isaiah declared, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

This prophecy, if inspired alone by the enthusiasm of a Hebrew prophet, would be a very ambitious one indeed. It envisions the deliverer of Israel in the combined role of Counselor, Father (or life-giver), a mighty God, and a Prince of Peace. The pharaohs, kings, and princes of empires such as Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and others, had endeavored, by force and trickery, to extend their domains far and wide throughout the then known world. Yet this humble, but enthusiastic prophet, foretelling the birth of a future Israelite king, was bold to assert that there would be “no end” to the sphere of influence of “his government and peace.” Furthermore, he claimed that—being worldwide in its administration—it would also be established “with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.”

In view of all the shocking escapades of selfish men that history reveals, and in view also of the present world of tumult in which man lives, we might justifiably feel that Isaiah, while a commendable ideologist in his outlook, had closed his

eyes to reality when he penned his description of a future utopia of righteousness and peace. Even well-wishers in countless generations of human experience have had reluctantly to admit that his words have not yet been realized. There is a statement in this prophecy, however, which we should not overlook—one which should form a basis for the reexamination of all the facts related thereto—namely, that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

GOD IS ABLE

God is able! This is the belief that followers of Christ the world over have professed for twenty centuries. Upon the basis of this belief, the human mind can readily conceive of the untold possibilities of accomplishment in a distraught world if, indeed, there is a God who is as able and willing to oversee and carry out such a plan. That our God is willing to do for man what man cannot do for himself is abundantly attested by the many prophecies and promises he has made of his intention to perform—“the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

The angelic message to the shepherds announcing the birth of the one who had been promised makes it clear that these promises had not been forgotten hundreds of years after they had been made. However, the question remains today. Have the promises relating to the accomplishment of these things been forgotten? Is the birth of Jesus, now so widely celebrated every year, merely a legendary incident—part of a series of fairy tales? Do these promises, while supposedly backed up by an

all-powerful and loving Creator, have any real foundation in fact? Do they contain evidence of genuine divine inspiration?

This is the great challenge to many today who profess belief in Christ. It is a challenge now more than ever before, because there is seemingly less evidence in the world than ever before to indicate that the kingdom of righteousness and peace, which the prophets foretold, will ever be established by the one born in Bethlehem so long ago. Throughout the ensuing two thousand years, there has been no genuine or lasting peace and goodwill in the earth. Wars and rumors of wars have marred the hopes of peace for each generation. The fact that aggressor nations sometimes have labeled their acts as “holy wars” has made these no less bitter and devastating in the hearts and lives of those affected.

Nevertheless, “hope springs eternal in the human breast,” and is not easily destroyed. Millions, throughout this entire period, have believed that Jesus was born, and that he is the Prince of Peace. They continued to sing their anthems of praise to this King of glory, despite the roar of cannons and the shrieks of the dying on battlefields supposedly made hallow by the misguided prayers of church leaders. Meantime, there was always the hope of a better time coming. The “heroic dead” of each generation, it was hoped, would make, by their sacrifice, future generations safe for peace. The realities of today’s worldwide troubles, however, continue to cloud such hope. As never before, believers in Christ as the Prince of Peace are challenged to show cause for persisting in their belief in a hero

who was crucified, and whose cause in the earth has been, apparently, so utterly defeated.

JESUS' VIEWPOINT

Perhaps the most logical avenue of approach in meeting this present-day challenge to those professing to follow Christ is to consider Jesus' own viewpoint. What were his expectations? Did he realize that twenty centuries from his day the world would be in the dilemma it is in today, with no serious consideration being given to his teachings by the leaders of any nation, while an increasingly greater part of the world considers his followers their enemies? Did Jesus expect this apparent defeat of his cause in the earth? Does the prophetic vision which tells of his birth and ultimate glory as King of earth include and explain the many historic developments of past centuries which, to the casual observer, belie the enthusiasm of the prophets? If the answers to these questions are "no," then we might properly wonder what is to become of Christianity.

Jesus, as well as the prophets and the apostles, did foresee and foretell the utter collapse of what, to many, appears to be the cause of Christ in the earth. For example, concerning the time of his Second Coming, Jesus raised the question as to whether or not there would then be any faith in the earth. (Luke 18:8) In answering questions put to him by the disciples as to what would constitute signs of his return and Second Presence, Jesus outlined a series of events culminating in what Daniel the prophet describes as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1;

Matt. 24:21) Other scriptures give evidence that it is this very “time of trouble” that is to bring about the collapse of the present order of things, including the various religious systems of today, both Christian and non-Christian. Indeed, then, the present increasing defeat of manmade efforts to establish peace and goodwill in the earth has not come as a surprise to the Lord. Most importantly, it does not indicate the failure of his cause in the earth.

COUNTERFEIT KINGDOM FORETOLD

One of Jesus’ parables of the kingdom is that of the wheat and tares. The “wheat” in this parable—sown by Jesus himself in the establishment of the Early Church—he declares to be the “children of the kingdom.” The “tares”—imitation, or counterfeit wheat—represent the “children of the wicked one.” “While men slept,” that is, after the apostles and other faithful ones in the Early Church fell asleep in death, these “tares” were sown.—Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43

These imitation followers of the Master soon became more numerous than the true wheat class—the children of the kingdom. Soon they set upon the task of establishing Christ’s kingdom themselves, without waiting for the return of the King, as they should have done. Lacking the necessary power requisite to the functioning of a real kingdom, the tare class united with the arm of the state. Thus, through the unauthorized union of church and state, a pseudo-kingdom of Christ was established, and for hundreds of years endeavored to function as the real kingdom.

In the parable, Jesus explains that the true children of the kingdom and those of the counterfeit kingdom were to be permitted to grow together until the “harvest.” This would be, he declared, in “the end of the age.” Then both the wheat and the tares would be dealt with. The tares, the Master declared, would then be destroyed—burned up. This would not be literally, and not as individuals, but rather symbolically as tares. That is, the true identity of the tares would then become generally recognized, and the counterfeit kingdom arrangement they represented would be destroyed. The wheat, on the other hand, the Master explained, were to be gathered into the “barn,” which he interpreted as meaning that “then shall the righteous [the wheat] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

TRUE KINGDOM PROMISED

In the parable of the wheat and tares, therefore, we have a clear indication from the Master that the establishment of the true kingdom of God would not be until “the end of the age,” and meanwhile counterfeit “children of the kingdom” would grow up in the field. It is the fulfillment of this prophetic parable that has caused much confusion in the minds of the people generally. The counterfeit has been taken for the real, and now that the foretold revealing of the tares is in progress, there is a great lamenting. As a result, millions are losing faith in what they had supposed was the true Gospel of Christ and its purpose.

However, it is not the elements of the true kingdom that are now crumbling under the impact of

forces let loose by the increasing light of our day. The true kingdom is not yet recognized by the world. In that kingdom, the parable promises, “the righteous shall shine forth as the sun,” and will enlighten and bless the world with universal peace and everlasting life. One of the Old Testament promises of this Messianic kingdom pictures Christ as the “Sun of righteousness,” which shall “arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) The followers of the Master, the wheat, are promised a share with him in that glorious kingdom. In that role, they too, according to the parable, shall “shine forth as the sun.”

It is evident, then, that Jesus himself did not expect that the wonderful promises of a worldwide kingdom of peace and happiness to be established through him as the Messiah would be fulfilled until after his Second Advent, and that one of his first works upon his return would be that of overthrowing the counterfeit arrangements set up by men. To realize this helps materially in understanding the significance of what is now occurring in the world. It means, not a failure of Christ’s ultimate purpose, but a setting aside of failed systems and their related false teachings. Thus, the way can be cleared for the people to learn about the true God of love, and the blessings of life and happiness he has provided for all through the redemptive work of Christ.

“FALLING AWAY” FORETOLD

The Apostle Paul also foretold the development and eventual destruction of a false system which claimed Christ as its leader. In II Thessalonians 2,

he explains that there would come a great “falling away” from the faith, and that a “man of sin”—a system in reality opposed to Christ—would grow up in the earth. He also declares that this system would eventually be rendered powerless and finally destroyed (according to the Greek text) by the “bright shining of his presence.” (II Thess. 2:3,8) That is, the enlightening influences set to work in the earth as a result of the Second Presence of Christ would bring about this foretold destruction.

Jesus, after his resurrection, gave the wonderful vision of Revelation to the Apostle John. It is not until the end of the vision that we see the nations being healed and restored by the waters of the river of life. (Rev. 22:1-5) Prior to this, however, John sees in vision the nations and religious systems of the world gathered unto the great battle of Armageddon, the culmination of the great Time of Trouble previously spoken of, and the time in which all these systems will come to an end.

In other words, the Revelation vision portrays, not the ever-increasing and widening influence of the true Messianic kingdom purpose beginning at Pentecost, but the flourishing for a time of the forces of wickedness, deception, and falsehood, under the direction of Satan. It does reveal, however, a faithful few who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” It reveals these faithful ones as at last being exalted to kingdom power and authority with Jesus, and that his kingdom will truly lead mankind to the “water of life.”—Rev. 14:4; 22:17

DIVINE POWER TO BE EXERCISED

In foretelling the birth of Jesus, the prophet declared that the “government shall be upon his shoulder.” This is another way of saying that he will assume full responsibility for its success. He can do this, for after his resurrection he declared that “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18) This means that he will not depend upon the arm of fallen man or human governments to enforce his decrees, as did those who established the imitation kingdom arrangements. Jesus now possesses “all power,” and will use it to guarantee the success and efficacy of his kingdom.

Is this not what we should expect of Jesus? We believe in the miracles he wrought during the period of his First Advent. Should it be hard to believe that now that he is raised from the dead he is able to accomplish even greater things? True, many long centuries have passed since Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and calmed the storms, but this does not mean that divine power will never again be exercised on behalf of mankind. Indeed, it will be so, and that, we believe, in the near future.

Think what that will mean for distressed humanity! No longer will the world be ruled by power politics, or by “balances” of power, for divine power will sweep aside all of the selfish arrangements of man. The kingdom agencies put in place by Jesus himself, by the authority given to him by God, will cause righteousness and peace to spring forth in all the earth. Yes, he will truly be “The Prince of Peace” and “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” As “The everlasting Father,” or life-giver, Jesus will restore mankind to

life, so that not only will they have peace, but they will have health and life also. Soon the whole world will have the opportunity of receiving these blessings, brought to pass by the salvation provided through this wonderful Savior.

The fact that so many have misunderstood the real purpose of Jesus' life and the Gospel message he declared will in no way interfere with the successful carrying out of that purpose. The message of the Gospel of Christ will yet be recognized as a glorious success when, through the kingdom agencies, "the knowledge of the glory of the LORD" fills the whole earth "as the waters cover the sea."—Hab. 2:14; Isa. 11:9

The real work of God, through Christ, during this age has been a success. That work has been, not the converting of the world and the establishing of Christ's kingdom, but the gathering out from among all nations a people to be associated with Jesus in the kingdom when it is established. (Rev. 5:10; Acts 15:13-15) This work of selecting "a people for his name" has gone on unnoticed by the world. It has been supervised by divine wisdom, and its final completion, near at hand, is guaranteed by divine power.

When it is complete, and the righteous "little flock" are all selected and gathered, and united with Christ in glory, then the promised blessings to the world will no longer be held back. The kingdom will be here indeed. All mankind will know for the first time the real significance of the divine program that was initiated twenty centuries ago, when the shepherds heard that glad announcement, "Fear not, . . . For unto you is born this day in the city of

David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Then the world will know also that the “zeal of the LORD of hosts” has completed all the glorious things foretold to be accomplished through the Savior who was born in Judea, crucified on a hill called Golgotha, and raised to divine power at the right hand of God Almighty. These will then truly be recognized as “world-shaking events” for mankind to rejoice in eternally! ■

*“The people walking in darkness have seen
a great light; . . .
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and
the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.”
—Isaiah 9:2,6,7, New International Version*