

The Restless Sea

*“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.”
—Luke 21:25*

THE WORD “SEA” IS USED

in several ways in the Scriptures. The earliest use of this word is in the account of creation: “God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.”—Gen. 1:9,10

The literal seas or oceans spoken of in the account of creation cover 70% of the earth’s surface. They play a vital role in the fine balance of nature and climate that exists in man’s earthly home. However, for the purposes of our consideration, we will confine our thoughts primarily to the seas and other bodies of water referenced or described in the Bible. As we will note, some of these references are to literal seas, while others are symbolic in nature.

BORDERS SET BY SEAS

The Mediterranean Sea, as it is known today, is referred to by various names in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 11:24, it is called “the uttermost sea.”

These words, spoken to the nation of Israel, were descriptive of the fact that this vast body of water was the “uttermost” western boundary of the land God had given them. It is also called the “great sea,” “hinder sea,” “sea of the Philistines,” and “sea of Joppa.” The Apostle Paul often traveled on this sea.—see Acts 27

Other seas and great water courses, such as lakes and rivers, are used in the Scriptures to set borders. When the land of promise was divided among the tribes of Israel, and a portion given to Judah, seas were used as both the eastern and western borders. We read in Joshua 15:5, “The east border was the salt sea, even unto the end of Jordan. And their border in the north quarter was from the bay of the [salt] sea at the uttermost part of Jordan.” The description continues in verse 12: “The west border was to the great sea, and the coast thereof.”

The “salt sea” mentioned in these verses is the ancient name for the Dead Sea, which is also known as the Sea of Arabah [sea of the plain]. In Genesis 14, we find the account concerning Abram’s deliverance of Lot, who had been taken captive from his home in Sodom. “All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea. . . . And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.” (vss. 3,12) Abram gathered together an army, went out to battle, and rescued Lot. He then returned all of his goods to him, having triumphed over the combined armies of several kings.—vss. 14-17

This event, in which he demonstrated great faith, was significant in the life of Abram. Immediately

following it, the covenant that God had given him earlier, recorded in Genesis 12:1-4, was confirmed. In Genesis 15:1, we read, “After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Continuing in verse 18, “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” Here again we see that God used bodies of water—in this case rivers—as borders, to mark the extent of the land promised in his covenant with Abram.

LOGOS EXISTED BEFORE THE SEAS

In Proverbs 8:24,25, we have mentioned the pre-human existence of our Lord Jesus. “When there were no depths, I was brought forth; . . . Before the mountains were settled.” Indeed, God’s only begotten Son had seen the Father’s mighty works, marked his wonderful wisdom, and even shared in the creative work himself. He experienced his Father’s love, and had his wonderful plan of the ages revealed to him step by step. Thus, he joyfully cooperated in the work of this plan with his Father, being intimately acquainted with him, and provided knowledge of all of his purposes and arrangements. Speaking of his creative work, we read, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”—John 1:3

We also read in Hebrews 1:1-3: “God . . . Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of

his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” As heir of all things, Jesus will be the representative of his Father for all eternity.

RAGING WAVES

We know that in the natural realm the seas have waves, which at times rage severely, producing lots of foam. In the Scriptures, this thought is used symbolically to represent the restless, and sometimes, raging and foaming seas of fallen humanity during this “present evil world.” Mankind in this condition is spoken of as “Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.” (Jude 13) The world of fallen man, like the sea, is never calm, but constantly in motion, resulting in waves and foam of trouble to a greater or lesser extent continuously. In the seas there are tidal ebbs and flows resulting from the pull of the moon; there are currents, and upwellings of water from the cooler depths. This constant motion brings nutrients closer to the surface, and also dislodges material from the sea bottom. Such things remind us of the words of Jesus, prophetic of our day: “There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.”—Luke 12:2

At times, the sea seems out of control, as observed during storms, hurricanes, and tsunamis [tidal waves] that have caused massive destruction, leaving costly damage and loss in their wakes. Often the infrastructure of the areas affected is destroyed. Even when the sea has calmed and the waves have

subsided, the destructive effects are long-lasting. Milder effects, such as erosion carrying away the sand, also remain as long-term evidence that the raging waves had been there. Symbolically speaking, the troubled sea of the present social order is likewise causing great destruction among the institutions of mankind, as we see Satan's kingdom being gradually destroyed.

World events and conditions during this present Time of Trouble have demonstrated this to us. Consider the "Arab Spring," the term referring to the wave of uprisings, demonstrations, riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began in late 2010 and continue even now. The difficulties that arose in Egypt in 2011, for example, began with mere text messages being sent out via cell phones, yet grew to a great wave of social unrest and rebellion, bringing down the leader of the country, only to have the new leader brought down in July of this year. In England, a single event involving police action in 2011 was fanned by violent winds of troubled youths to out-of-control open defiance and acts of violence. Similarly, looking at the financial markets in recent years, there have been massive changes—declines followed by record gains—linked to a great recession, followed by what is termed a gradual recovery. Indeed, the institutions of this world are being tossed to and fro by the raging sea.

SYMBOLIC SEA OF TROUBLE

Although the sea is a symbol of the masses of people in this present evil world who are in a restless and unstable condition, we are assured that when all are brought under the righteous rule of God's

kingdom through the Christ, this sea will cease to be. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” (Rev. 21:1) Then, there will be no more restless masses, no more uprisings, no more wild waves of trouble. Complete law and order, righteous and just, along with loving obedience to God by mankind, will be established, to prevail on the earth forever. The “earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

Before these blessings can come about, the present Time of Trouble must have its work completed, and so we continue to see daily the seas and waves roaring, as noted in our theme text, propelled by discontent, hatred, selfishness, and sin. In the next verse, we read concerning this trouble, “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 21:26 The kingdoms of this present order will go down, overwhelmed by the symbolic “restless sea.” The great religious systems of this world also, characterized as “Babylon” in the Scriptures, will go down to destruction “like a great millstone, . . . cast . . . into the sea,” never to rise again.—Rev. 18:21

JESUS CALMS THE SEA

We recall the account of Jesus miraculously walking on water toward the ship where his disciples were during a severe storm. As he walked toward the ship, the Lord asked Peter to come to him on the water. In faith, Peter did so, but when the wind came up, he was afraid and began to sink into the

water. Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught Peter, speaking these words to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31) When Jesus entered the ship with Peter, "the wind ceased."—vs. 32

The lesson for us in this account is that we, too, will have storms and trials come upon us, as Christ's disciples. These will require great faith to endure, and in some cases, the delivering intervention of the Master. Such has been true from Pentecost until today. The Lord has permitted various storms of life to come to his footstep followers, but he is never far away. At the right moment, he appears to comfort us so that our fear will subside, and seeing the needed development in us, he also calms the storm.

As we grow in our faith and trust in God and his Son, our Redeemer, we then should not fear. The psalmist tells us, "GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear." (Psa. 46:1,2) We also are provided with the familiar but powerful words of the 23rd Psalm: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

We all have much in common with the world of mankind. “There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:10,23) In addition, we are all prone to the same illnesses and other problems that are in the world today. In many ways, the journey of present life has been through a valley of tears and sorrows. However, if we put our trust in the Heavenly Father and are willing to be led by him, our cup of experience will not just be filled with the sorrows of life that affect all on this earth. It will also be filled with the spiritual joys and sweet blessings of a life guided by his loving hand and wise providences.

Eighty years ago, during a time of great national turmoil, in his first inaugural address, President Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Just as forcefully, the Scriptures tell us we are not to fear, “though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (Psa. 46:2) Yes, the storms rage and the waves roar about us, but the bride of Christ will be guided, completed, and glorified “beyond the veil,” because they have put their faith and trust in the Heavenly Father.—Rev. 2:10

GOD’S MIGHTY POWER

God used the sea to demonstrate his mighty power when delivering the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. In the account, found in Exodus 14:8-31, the Israelites had reached the Red Sea and appeared to be trapped, with Pharaoh’s hosts approaching. Just as all hope seemed to be lost,

Moses said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." (vs. 13) The account continues: "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." (vs. 21) After the children of Israel had passed through safely, God once again had Moses stretch forth his hand over the sea. It returned and covered the Egyptians, and "there remained not so much as one of them."—vs. 28

This was a most important event in God's dealings with the Israelites, and is referred to numerous other times in the Scriptures. In Nehemiah 9:10,11, we read, "[Thou] shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, . . . And thou didst divide the sea before them, . . . and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters." It is mentioned again by the prophet Isaiah, as well as the psalmist, "Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea." "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness."—Isa. 50:2; Ps. 106:7-9

These evidences of God's mighty power serve as examples to his people that "with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27) Through his plan of redemption God will bring blessings to all of the

people of earth. How beautiful are these words: “Art thou not it [he] which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”—Isa. 51:10,11

A PICTURE OF THINGS TO COME

Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea was an appropriate picture of the coming resurrection of mankind from the dead in Christ’s Millennial kingdom. When the Israelites were in the midst of the sea, they were also in the bottom of it, and therefore would have been dead under any normal circumstances. However, by the mighty power of God the waters were separated and they passed through on dry ground and were delivered to safety.

A further part of this picture lies in the fact that the host of the Egyptians was destroyed. This was also done by the power of God when he caused the waters to return as they pursued the Israelites. Just as all the willing and obedient of mankind will be delivered through the kingdom processes, all enemies of God will be destroyed—those that continue to pursue the destruction of his Word, his plan, and his people. These will include Satan and his host, as well as any of mankind who willingly cooperate with them after being given an understanding of God’s plan and glorious character. Also, in advance of the final destruction of God’s enemies at the end of the kingdom, the evil systems—

political, social, economic, and religious—of Satan's present dominion are being overthrown in the great Time of Trouble, which will culminate in Armageddon.

Throughout his evil dominion over the earth, the Adversary has brought storms and whirlwinds of temptation, opposition, and persecution against both God's faithful followers as well as mankind in general. God has permitted this so that all of humanity will learn to appreciate his great love in sending his Son, our great Savior Christ Jesus, to be man's Redeemer. Indeed, through the giving of his life as a ransom, he has brought about the means whereby the present storms will soon cease, making way for the sunshine and calm to follow. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

We read in Psalm 65:5-7, "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power: Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." This psalm of encouragement to the children of Israel points forward to all those who will ultimately become God's people. This will include all of mankind, who, in Christ's kingdom, will be brought back from death to live eternally, if obedient, on the restored, perfect earth—a true promised land, "flowing with milk and honey."—Exod. 3:8

These words from the psalmist also apply to spiritual Israel, those who in this present Gospel

Age have made a covenant of sacrifice and have complete faith and trust in their Heavenly Father and his Son, Christ Jesus. These are shown in the Scriptures as those who “overcome” the storms of this present evil world, even while living in the midst of them. (John 16:33; Rev. 3:21) Those striving to be of this “little flock” must have their feet firmly placed upon the solid rock of Jesus, and the solid ground of his character likeness, in order to be able to withstand the present storms and troubled seas.

NO MORE SEA

As previously quoted, Revelation 21:1 promises a time when there shall be “no more sea.” The sea which John speaks of as being “no more” is, as already pointed out, a symbolic one, representing the restless people of earth, unstable as a result of the present evil order under Satan’s dominion. In Christ’s kingdom, there will be no more need of this symbolic sea, for the present order and kingdoms of earth will have been overwhelmed by it. The “sea” will have accomplished its purpose in God’s arrangement. Thus, we see that the physical earth and seas will not be destroyed. We are assured of this by the Scriptural statement: “The earth abideth for ever.”—Eccles. 1:4

In the subsequent verses of Revelation 21, we are given a picture of the spiritual ruling powers of the new heaven and new earth. These powers will be vested in Christ and his glorified bride. They will rule over the earth, and supervise the restoration and reconstruction of man and society based on righteousness, justice, and love. All of the present

evil institutions of earth will be gone. The Christ, head and body, will also be the Mediator between God and man during this restoration period. Once fully restored and tested, righteous man will stand before God, perfect and complete, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden before he sinned. Mankind, however, will then have the invaluable benefit of his prior experience with sin and its resulting storms and raging consequences. Never again will he have a desire to return to such conditions.

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them [forever], and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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 [including the restless sea] are passed away.”—
Rev. 21:2-4

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