

The Reeling World of Today

***“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 24:20

THE WORLD OF TODAY

was aptly foretold in the Bible by the prophetic expression that it would “reel to and fro like a drunkard.” Man now lives in an environment that is hugely different from that of a mere generation ago, and completely unlike any preceding period of his existence.

Without doubt, one of the largest contributing factors to this is the ability of people—individuals and groups alike—to instantly communicate with each other and have access to every conceivable type of information. For most, this ability is literally “in the palm of our hand.”

Consider these current statistics from the GSMA, a trade association which monitors world-wide mobile communication usage. The GSMA states that the number of mobile communication devices in the world now exceeds 7.5 billion. This is nearly 3%

greater than the total world population, estimated presently at 7.3 billion. It also calculates that the number of mobile devices in use is increasing by more than ten per second, thus multiplying at a rate five times faster than the earth's population. When the number of mobile phones first exceeded the world's population, approximately one year ago, a prominent executive in the financial industry noted: "No other technology has impacted us like the mobile phone. It's the fastest growing manmade phenomenon ever—from zero to 7.2 billion in three decades."

One might think that such an explosion of communication in a period of just one generation, and the related ability to obtain seemingly unlimited information and knowledge, should result in greater progress toward resolution of the world's many problems. Yet, it is clear that these circumstances have had an opposite effect. God, through the Prophet Daniel, foretold this, saying that at the "time of the end . . . knowledge shall be increased." However, rather than this yielding solutions to man's troubles, it would be accompanied by "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1,4

The "smallness" of our world today dictates that solutions to problems be global in nature, because nations and people in every corner of the earth are impacted by events and troubles in all other parts of the planet. Some statesmen and historians go so far as to claim that now our difficulties are so complex that the only real solution is a one-world government. However, the existing fragmentation of the political, economic, religious, and social aspects

of our world, and generally selfish motivations, have rendered this solution virtually impossible.

Our world is being pulled in so many directions that it lacks stability and a firm objective. Most feel that the future is very uncertain, and thus they “reel to and fro” with fear, not knowing where man is heading. We believe that the Scriptures are very clear in their predictions of conditions in the earth today. However, it is a reasonable question to ask: If God has known of present conditions ages in advance, does he also have solutions?

EARTH DESTROYED—NOT LITERALLY

Our opening text is a graphic description of a world order tottering and stumbling toward inevitable destruction. In this same chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy, almost all of which is similarly prophetic, we are told that the earth is made “empty, and . . . waste,” and turned “upside down.” The prophet also declares that the earth “mourneth and fadeth away.” The same earth, according to this prophecy, is seen to be “utterly broken down,” “dissolved,” and “removed like a cottage.”—Isa. 24:1,4,19,20

The “earth” here mentioned is clearly not this literal planet upon which we live. The literal earth cannot mourn, nor has it sinned and become deserving of punishment for transgressions. This term is used to denote what we call the “world,” or world order. In the fourth verse of this chapter, the words “earth” and “world” are used interchangeably. The term earth here is symbolic, as are all the various expressions which are employed to describe how the symbolic earth is destroyed. The use of so many descriptive pictures by the prophet conveys

the unmistakable thought that the world being described is to be completely torn down.

The world spoken of by Isaiah is the same as referred to in the New Testament by Paul with the words, “this present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) Its ruler is Satan, who the apostle said is “the god of this world,” and who Jesus spoke of as “the prince of this world.” (II Cor. 4:4; John 16:11) Satan’s evil world must indeed be destroyed before God’s new world can be established. That new world, or “new earth,” is described by the Apostle Peter as one “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—II Pet. 3:13

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Both the Old and New Testaments give us numerous pictures and prophetic insight concerning events now taking place in the world. These prophecies identify the present period of human experience as “the day of the LORD” and “the day of God.” (Isa. 13:6; Joel 2:1,11; II Pet. 3:10,12) It is the “time of the end” of the present Gospel Age. Man’s rulership, based upon selfishness and guided largely by Satan’s deceptive influence, is crumbling to its fall.—Dan. 12:4,9

Not knowing that the time has come for divine intervention in the affairs of men, human wisdom still clings to the hope of erecting a new and better world upon the ruins of the old one. Temporarily, and to a very limited degree, this may be accomplished on occasion. However, the prophecies of the Bible show clearly that before the events of this “day of the LORD” are completed, God’s long-promised kingdom will have taken the place formerly occupied by the fallen institutions of men.

This present period is also called the “day of vengeance of our God,” and the “day of his wrath.” (Isa. 61:2; 63:1-4; Ps. 110:5) Yet, we are not to get the idea of divine hatred toward man. God has established certain laws in harmony with which he operates, and those who come into conflict with these will reap the penalty of their course. Thus, today mankind is reaping the result of unrepented selfishness and sin, but not personal malice from their Creator.

What Isaiah described as the “day of vengeance,” and Daniel spoke of as “a time of trouble,” others of God’s prophets have similarly expressed. The Prophet Malachi says concerning the same period, “Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble.” (Mal. 4:1) Joel, foretelling the same time of distress upon the world, speaks of it as a “day of clouds and of thick darkness.” (Joel 2:2) Jesus, God’s “great prophet,” refers to this time as one of “great tribulation,” so ruinous in its character that if it were not cut short, “no flesh” would survive its ravages.—Matt. 24:21,22

SYMBOLIC “LIGHTNING”

The psalmist describes prophetic “lightnings” associated with our day, stating that God’s “lightnings enlightened the world; the earth saw, and trembled.” (Ps. 97:4) Here is a symbolism illustrating what the Prophet Daniel described, as previously quoted, concerning the time when “knowledge shall be increased.” Many today recognize the relationship between the availability of information—including ease of communication—and present world

disarray and turmoil. While they recognize that it is the “enlightening” influences of our day that have brought this about, they do not see that this has come in fulfillment of Bible prophecies, and because God’s time has come to make ready for the establishment of his kingdom.

For centuries the belief was held that knowledge in the hands of the common people, and the ability to communicate it on a large scale, was unsafe. For centuries, indeed, this was dangerous for the hereditary ruling classes. Every possible effort was made to keep the people, for the most part, in ignorance. That was especially true during the period styled the Dark Ages. However, the time came when God wanted the people to obtain knowledge. His symbolic “lightnings” began to enlighten the world, and the initial effect of this is the trouble and “trembling” we see happening in the earth today.

The lightning symbolism is especially meaningful in connection with the prophecy of Joel, which describes this same period as one of “clouds and thick darkness.” How apt indeed is the picture. The flashes of lightning in the midst of the gloom and perplexity of this cloudy day are God’s great principles of truth and justice. Lightnings from his obscured throne disclose here one error, and there another, concerning the social, political, religious, and economic views and practices of the past. These flashes of light incite the people to press for better things to which they feel they are justly entitled. Never before have these conditions prevailed on such a worldwide scale.

How clearly the prophetic lightning flashes from God’s throne are helping to reveal corruption in

the world, dishonesty in high places, emphasizing more and more the need for radical changes to be made in the world. How to correct these wrongs, however, the world is not able to see. The result is that man hears conflicting ideas, voices, theories, and threats, continuously. This all simply adds to the confusion and increases the reeling “to and fro” of the earth, and the weakening of man’s ability to keep the world under control. Today, indeed, the earth is trembling as much from the noise of conflicting words, as it has in the past from the explosive sounds of global war.

LORD’S PEOPLE TO BE “WATCHMEN”

In the midst of all this trouble and tumult, what should be the attitude of the Lord’s truly consecrated people? Are they, too, in fear and doubt and confusion? Such is not the case if they are living up to their privileges as watchmen in Zion. (Isa. 52:8) While it is true that the Lord’s people suffer from the same distresses as do the rest of mankind, yet knowing the outcome, they “lift up [their] heads,” knowing that their deliverance “draweth nigh.” (Luke 21:28) In confidence they know that not only is their deliverance in the first resurrection near, but that the deliverance of the earth from the thralldom of sin and death is also close at hand.

Through the Scriptures, the Lord’s consecrated people are given a knowledge of God’s plan, along with its times and seasons. This understanding enables them to see the necessity for God’s present method of dealing with the world, and also the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” which shall soon result. (Heb. 12:11) In the midst of the storm and

babble of this great “day of the LORD,” they hear the all-wise voice of God, and their hearts rejoice. They have full confidence in his ability to bring order out of confusion and chaos. They realize that in the judgments of this day, it is God who speaks from heaven—the place of highest authority and control. They give thanks that his due time has come for engaging in the work of setting aside the order of things which sin and selfishness have produced, that his own long-promised kingdom may be established in its place.

The lightning flashes portrayed in the prophecies are symbolic of knowledge along all lines as it affects the course of human behavior. Spiritual truth, as it applies to God’s will for his own people, is also revealed through the Scriptures, and disseminated by the consecrated followers of the Master. To understand the prophetic meaning of the times in which we are living is, therefore, to be regarded as a special blessing from the Lord. Hence our attitude should be one of great gratitude toward God for the beautiful truth he has granted us the privilege of seeing, and with which we have the blessed privilege of being identified. Our gratitude should be manifested by an increasing zeal in helping to bring that truth to the knowledge of others.

As we align the events of our day with the Bible’s prophetic testimony, we believe that the “day of the LORD” is clearly in progress. It is a “day” that has its stages of gradual development. Its general character is that of a struggle of light against darkness, of liberty against oppression, and of truth against error. It is so widespread in its application, and so universal in all its ramifications, that no one

symbolism could fully describe it. Most importantly to the Lord's people, however, is the understanding, by faith in God's Word, that enables us to see the glorious outcome—Messiah's kingdom! Let us also heed the warning of the Apostle Peter, and not be of those he spoke as "scoffers" among the Lord's people—saying that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."—II Pet. 3:3,4

OTHER PROPHETIC PICTURES

In addition to the prophecies already mentioned concerning the present "time of trouble" and the "day of the LORD," the Scriptures further describe it as the time when "the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my [God's] jealousy." (Zeph. 3:8) Another of the Lord's prophets informs us that God's mode of action during this period is "in the whirlwind and in the storm." (Nah. 1:3) It is also prophetically depicted as a "flood of mighty waters" and a climactic "great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth." (Isa. 28:2; Rev. 16:18) It is clear from such diverse descriptions that none of these are to be taken literally. Rather, they are prophetic pictures and symbols which portray the various features of the world's present trouble and God's response.

Through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord indicated that, to a greater or lesser extent, militarism and its accompanying proliferation of weapons of every kind form a prominent part of this great day of trouble. "I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts." (Jer. 25:29) A similar thought is suggested in

Isaiah 34:3, where the kingdoms of the earth are symbolically spoken of as “mountains” that “shall be melted with . . . blood.”

Still another symbolism of the prophecies, is that of treading the “winepress.” Prophesying of Christ during the early part of his Second Presence, the prophet said, “I have trodden the winepress alone; . . . and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments.” (Isa. 63:1-6) We believe that this work began in earnest as a result of the events surrounding 1914 and the beginning of World War I. This symbolic treading of the “great winepress of the wrath of God” has grown in severity year by year during the century since and still continues today.—Rev. 14:19

GREAT IMAGE TO BE SMITTEN

An additional scriptural prediction describing the overthrow of constituted authority, particularly that of the hereditary ruling houses which governed most of Europe prior to World War I, is contained in a prophecy recorded in chapter 2 of Daniel. This prophecy is with regard to the accomplishment of the divine purpose as illustrated by the smiting of the human-like image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. (vss. 31-45) This image, according to the prophecy, was to be smitten by a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands,” the mountain representing God’s supreme rulership over the earth.

The former powerful church-state ruling houses of Europe, which for centuries claimed for themselves “the divine right of kings,” were largely destroyed as the result of World War I. The historical events

of that time offer evidence, we believe, of the beginning of the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy—that the “image” of Gentile authority was “smitten” and began to crumble. Indeed, the remaining fragments thereof are even now being further “broken to pieces together” and ground to powder preparatory to being blown away as “the chaff of the summer threshingfloors.” (Dan. 2:34,35,44) In harmony with this suggested interpretation, we see Europe today no longer ruled by the great “image” of Gentile power, but mostly by fragmented governments which have arisen out of the masses of the people.

The Apostle Paul also speaks of the symbolic blows of destruction being dealt Satan's empire in preparation for the establishment of God's kingdom. He likens the trouble to birth pangs—“travail upon a woman with child.” (I Thess. 5:1-3) In Daniel's prophecy, there is the suggestion that there were to be three of these major “pangs,” or spasms, of trouble. They are shown as, first, the smiting of the image; second, its pieces being ground to powder; and third, the wind blowing away the “chaff,” or dust. The events of the past century would seem to suggest that we are in the second of these major spasms—perhaps nearing the third.

GOD IN FULL CONTROL

Noting one more prophecy of this present day of trouble, we quote: “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness. . . . A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a

flame burneth. . . . The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.”—Joel 2:1-3,10

As we have seen, many symbolisms are used by the prophets of old to describe one or more of the events transpiring in the momentous “day of the LORD.” However, behind all of this is the fact that God takes responsibility for the overthrow of this “present evil world.” In his Word, the Lord explains to us that he accomplishes this end through the prophetic increase of knowledge—the flashing of his lightnings—and their effects on all aspects of society.

The reeling to and fro of the earth as a result of God’s lightnings is a very comprehensive depiction. The earth may reel and tremble as in a storm, in the wind, from fire, earthquake, floods, or in other ways, but it continues to be “shaken” until it finally falls. Then the kingdom of Messiah, “which cannot be moved,” will be established in its place.—Heb. 12:26-28

A NEW AND BETTER WORLD

World distress incidental to the transitional changes now occurring has caused men and women of all nations to long for a new and better world. We can also well understand the desire of those sincere leaders of the world to do all in their power to bring about a new order, full of freedom and happiness. We are not speaking disparagingly of such sincere human efforts when we say that there can be no ideal world order until the kingdom of Christ is established.

There is nothing which should engender such hope and courage in the hearts of humanity today more than to know that out of all the chaos and trouble experienced at the present time, there is soon to emerge an era of genuine and lasting peace and joy. This is just what we can and should expect, not because man will finally triumph over his selfishness, but because God has intervened in the affairs of men, and will soon establish divine control over the nations through the kingdom of his Son, Christ Jesus. In the last verse of the chapter from which our opening text is taken, we are given assurance that “the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.”—Isa. 24:23

MOUNT ZION—CENTERPIECE OF GOD’S KINGDOM

Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea, and the hill of Zion in Jerusalem was where the government of Israel centered. The promise of God to “reign in mount Zion” would, therefore, denote his control in human affairs. This symbolism of the divine kingdom is mentioned many times in the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments. In the second Psalm, God declares, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” (vs. 6) The psalmist then explains that God’s king, who is Christ Jesus, will “dash” the nations of this present evil order “in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”—vs. 9

In the book of Revelation, Jesus and his entire church are shown to be together on mount Zion. (Rev. 14:1) The prophecy of Obadiah gives us the same portrait of the kingdom, declaring that “saviours shall come up on mount Zion; . . . and the

kingdom shall be the LORD'S." (Obad. 21) It seems clear from these references that the term Zion is used in the Scriptures to denote the exalted status of Christ and his church as they will reign together to uplift and bless the sin-sick and dying world.

Micah 4:2 declares that "the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." This is another of God's promises in which Zion is spoken of symbolically to represent the Christ—head and body. There is good reason to believe, also, that the term Jerusalem is used here to describe the earthly, or visible, operations of the new kingdom. Indeed, the laws of that kingdom will emanate from heavenly Zion—Christ and his church. There will be no need for earthly legislators, because there will be no occasion to change or amend the laws—nor will new laws be needed to resolve unforeseen problems.

However, these laws "of Zion" will need to be made known, and the people will need instruction in their proper application. This will be done through the earthly representatives of the kingdom—spoken by Micah as "the word of the LORD" going forth "from Jerusalem." Those who will represent the Christ—heavenly Zion—in the earthly, or "Jerusalem," phase of the kingdom have already been selected by God and prepared by him for this high position of trust as teachers of mankind under Christ. In Luke 13:28,29, they are identified by Jesus as being Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets. In Psalm 45:16, they are referred to as the "fathers" of Israel, and the promise is given that they shall be made "princes in all the earth." Paul also identified this group as Israel's "elders" who "obtained a good report through faith."—Heb. 11:1,2,39

THE ONLY PLAN THAT WILL SUCCEED

If we were to view this scriptural portrait of God's new world from the human standpoint, it would probably seem quite impractical, and we would have good reason to ask, Will it work? We must remember, however, that this is not a humanly devised utopian arrangement. If it were only that, we would have grounds to doubt any hope of its success. Thanks be to God, though, that it is his new arrangement for a sin-sick and dying world. The Creator of the universe, the great First Cause of all life, has planned it, and certainly he would not make promises to the human race which he is not able to fulfill.

How reassuring are the Heavenly Father's words: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: . . . yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."—Isa. 46:9-11 ■