

The Day of the Lord

“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. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

—II Peter 3:10,13

prophecies being unerringly fulfilled. We rejoice in this as we realize the truth of God’s Word and see our race moving ever closer to the blessings of

[PREFACE: Fifty years ago, in the October 1962 issue of The Dawn, this “Highlights of Dawn” article appeared. When first published, it could hardly be imagined that the trouble foretold would yet be unfolding fifty years later. For most theories of man, this would have necessitated a revision of thought. However, the years that have intervened, rather than making this message irrelevant, have enhanced the strength of the prophecies cited. The events since those specified in this article have only underscored the progress of God’s divine plan, as we see the

Christ's kingdom and the restitution of all things promised in the Scriptures. We are assured concerning this vision, "It shall speak, and not lie: though it [seem to] tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. (Hab. 2:3) Thus, with the desire that our mutual faith be strengthened and reassured from the words which appeared on these pages half a century ago, we republish this article.]

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, when man first transgressed the divine law, God withdrew himself from human affairs and, except on certain occasions, has permitted the reign of sin and death to continue without interference. One of these exceptions was the sending of the flood to destroy the race in the days of Noah. On other occasions, he has inflicted special punishments upon nations because of gross sins, especially when the conduct of these nations had a bearing on the lives of his own people.

However, by and large we could say that God's policy toward his sinful human creatures throughout the centuries has been one of "hands off," allowing people and nations to work out their own destinies as best they could. It has been a downhill road for humanity—the "broad road" that leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13, *Weymouth*) This attitude of the Creator does not imply lack of interest in his human creatures, for the Bible assures us that despite the sinful course of humanity, God still loves the people, and has made provision through the redemptive work of Christ to deliver all the willing and obedient from sin, sickness, and death.

God has a "due time" for the accomplishment of

all his purposes, and the work of deliverance is scheduled to be accomplished during the time of Christ's Second Presence. It is this general period that is referred to in the Scriptures as "the day of the Lord," for it is during this time that God, through the agencies of Christ's kingdom, will deal with the people to give them an opportunity for reformation and restoration.

DARK IN THE BEGINNING

We are not to think of this "day of the Lord" as being one that, in its early stages, is all bright, and without trouble of any kind. We read, "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light." (Zech. 14:6,7) The prophet Joel also wrote concerning this time, that it would be "A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations."—Joel 2:2

The early portion of "the day of the Lord" is also referred to in the prophecies as the day of God's "wrath." (Ps. 110:5; Ezek. 7:19; Rev. 6:17) During this time, and in contrast to the past, there occurs a divine overruling in the affairs of men to bring about the destruction of all humanly constituted authority based upon selfishness and sin. The Scriptures reveal that the accomplishment of this will entail much trouble throughout the earth. The prophecies depicting this period are graphic in

their descriptions of the distress which comes upon mankind in this “day.” Here are some of them:

“Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.”—Isa. 34:1-3

“The LORD is the true God [God of truth, *Marginal Translation*], he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.”—Jer. 10:10

“A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.”—Jer. 25:31-33

“Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace

and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”—I Thess. 5:1-3

“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

“At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.”—Dan. 12:1

“Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, 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

“The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once.”—Isa. 42:13,14

“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

“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.”—Ps. 46:8-10

A LOVING PURPOSE

While the foregoing prophecies depict a period of universal upheaval and trouble such as never before was experienced on the earth, the last two remind us that the divine object in this “wrath” against sin and selfishness is the establishment of the divine will throughout the earth, and that this will mean the end of war, and the filling of the earth with a true knowledge of the living God. He will turn to the people a “pure language,” with the result that all will call upon him to serve him with one consent. He will make wars to cease, and his name will be exalted in the earth. For this we give thanks!

It is never possible to arrive at a proper understanding of any prophecy of the Bible except as we compare it with the entire prophetic testimony. Some, failing to do this, have used the prophecies which speak of fire in connection with the day of God’s vengeance, and thus have reached the erroneous conclusion that literal fire will be rained down from the sky and destroy the earth. We know from many prophecies that this is not true. For example, after mentioning the “desolations” which

the Lord will bring upon the earth, we find the Psalmist David explaining that after this Jehovah's name will be exalted in the earth. This indicates that the earth remains.—Ps. 46:10

We know that this is true, for there are many assurances in the Bible that the literal earth will not be destroyed—that it was created, not in vain, but formed to be inhabited. (Eccles. 1:4; Isa. 45:18) It is a symbolic earth, or a social order, that is destroyed in the dark beginning period of “the day of the Lord.” This symbolic earth is said to be “removed,” to be “melted,” and to be “devoured” by the “fire” of God's jealousy, or “zeal,” as the Hebrew translation reads.—Ps. 46:2,6; Zeph. 3:8

Jesus described the trouble to come upon the people as distress of nations with perplexity, and then likened this to the roaring of the sea and the waves. In his description, Jesus may have had in mind the prophecy of Isaiah 17:12,13, which reads, “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 [many, *MT*] 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 [thistledown, *MT*] before the whirlwind.”

From this, we see that when the prophecies speak of the roaring of the sea and the waves, the symbolic reference is to the clamoring of the people. Instead of literal waters roaring, it actually is the nations which “rage.” (Ps. 2:1-5; 46:6) The

Psalmist David spoke of the mountains being carried into the midst of the sea, but in the same prophecy he interprets this as the removal of kingdoms—symbolized by the reference to mountains.—Ps. 46:2,6

In examining the above prophecies, and many others in the Bible which refer to the same general period, it will be noted that various symbols are used to illustrate the distress which was to come upon the people of earth during the day of God's wrath. There are many aspects to the prophetic "time of trouble," or "tribulation," which comes upon the earth in the early days of the Lord's Second Presence, and it would be illogical to single out any one of these and say it would be literal, such as fire, or a whirlwind, or the tumbling of literal mountains into the ocean. This is all pictorial language, and the use of fire in the prophecies is no exception.

THE DAYS OF NOAH

One aspect of the prophetic time of trouble, as shown in our theme text, is that it comes upon the world "as a thief in the night." Jesus illustrated this by referring to the "days of Noah," the time when the ark was being prepared as a means of saving Noah and his family. He said that the people then went on with their ordinary and regular pursuits of life and knew not of the coming flood until it was upon them. It would be the same, he said, in "the days of the Son of man."—Luke 17:26,27

The Apostle Peter likewise speaks of the days of Noah and of the flood as an illustration of the trouble that brings the present social order to an end. He wrote, "The heavens were of old, and the earth

standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world [Greek, *kosmos*, meaning order] that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." (II Pet. 3:5,6) Then Peter explains that the "heavens and the earth, which are now" are "reserved unto fire," and that the earth "and the works that are therein shall be burned up."—vss. 7,10

Some have erroneously taken this to mean that since the world before the flood perished in literal water, so the present world, or earth, will be destroyed by literal fire. However, we should remember that Peter is merely using the circumstances in connection with the destruction of the pre-flood world as an illustration of the ending of the present evil world. An illustration is never precisely the same as the thing illustrated. In the tabernacle services, a bull-oak was used to illustrate Jesus in the flesh, but Jesus was not like a bullock.

We are not implying that there will not be a great deal of "fire" during this time, as the nations rage against one another and bring about the destruction of their world. However, the point of Peter's prophecy is that a "world"—an order of things—is destroyed in this raging of the nations, and fire is merely one of the symbols used to illustrate the various aspects of the great "time of trouble" involved.

PATTERN OF EVENTS

Our interest in these prophecies is based on the fact that we now see them in process of fulfillment. This becomes evident when we examine the general pattern of events which they forecast. One of the things foretold is that there would be a general

gathering of the nations of the earth in cooperative efforts for war and peace. We have seen this in process of fulfillment over many decades, and it continues. The first major gathering of the nations was in connection with World War I, which began in 1914. In that struggle, the vast majority of all the nations of earth were assembled on one side or the other in what was then claimed to be a war to end wars.

Following the armistice of 1918 came the League of Nations, which, it was hoped, would safeguard the peace of the world. It failed, however, and there came another alignment of the nations in the second global war in a generation—World War II. With the close of that war came the setting up of the United Nations. While in the past small groups of nations formed treaties of mutual security, there have never been such worldwide gatherings of the nations as have taken place in our time.

The Lord said that HE would gather the nations. (Zeph. 3:8) One of the means used to accomplish this has been the increase of knowledge in this “time of the end.” (Dan. 12:4) Rapid means of travel and communication have made it impossible for single nations to exist in absolute isolation from others. Additionally, selfishness prevents them from coexisting in peace. All of this results in chaos of one kind or another almost everywhere. Heads of state and other government officials travel back and forth from nation to nation, and from one council table to another, but no lasting solutions are found to their problems.

IN SPASMS

The prophecies also point out that the great time

of trouble would come upon the world in spasms, like travail upon a woman with child. (I Thess. 5:1-3) This also we have seen, particularly in the two world wars, and other world conflicts since. The first spasm of destruction resulted in the overthrow of the powerful church-state monarchies of Europe. There is a handful of minor kings left, but they are weak and have very little, if any, influence in the molding of world affairs.

Meanwhile, other forms of government have risen—some of them dictatorships, some, so-called democracies, and some of other forms. Some of the dictatorships were destroyed in World War II—those also being replaced by other forms of government. However, all efforts to re-establish and govern the present social order upon the basis of selfishness will ultimately fail. In reality, what we see taking place is the chaotic disintegration of Satan's world, with each spasm of destruction leaving its foundations weaker and its superstructure more vulnerable to the next attack.

The prophecies also point out that the “time of trouble” would be as an evil which would spread from nation to nation. (Jer. 25:31-33) This was true with respect to both world wars. They did not engulf the whole world at once, but began as struggles between individual nations. They then spread until all the major nations became involved. Thus the fulfillment of the prophecy relating to the “slain of the LORD” in these spasms of trouble has been worldwide.

The fact that those who lose their lives in these spasms of destructive trouble are referred to as the “slain of the LORD” does not mean that God is

directly responsible for their death. However, this is the day of God's wrath upon the nations, and he takes the responsibility, both for the gathering of the nations and the casualties resulting from their struggles. It is by this means that they are destroyed as nations, and the way prepared for the kingdom of Christ.

As we have seen, Jesus foretold that this time of trouble would eventually become so destructive that unless it was brought to a close all human life would be destroyed. (Matt. 24:21,22) This possibility has also now become a reality. We are thankful, however, for Jesus' assurance that this total destruction of the human race will not be permitted, that there will be divine intervention in time to prevent this otherwise inevitable and ultimate result of human selfishness.

FAITH STRENGTHENED

When we note the wonderful manner in which the prophetic pattern of events is being woven in the fast-moving events of our time, it should give us a strong faith that we are indeed already living in the days of the presence of the Son of Man, and that his kingdom will soon be established for the blessing of all the families of the earth. It is a time of fearful foreboding for the world, but for us it is a time of rejoicing.

It is not that we are unmindful of the sufferings of the world around us, but we know that Satan's world must be destroyed before the people can receive the blessings of Messiah's kingdom. Our rejoicing is not in what is happening throughout the earth today, but in the promises of God to

establish a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness—that is, a righteous social order under the jurisdiction of Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thus, we continue to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) The complete answer to this prayer will not come suddenly. Not until the close of the coming thousand-year reign of Christ will it be fully answered. Not until then will all insubordination to the divine will be put down, and all the enemies of God and righteousness destroyed. By then even man’s great enemy Death will have been destroyed.

The expression, “Thy kingdom come,” and “Thy will be done,” are not synonymous in meaning. The kingdom is the means by which God’s will is to be re-established throughout the earth. To begin with, the authority and power of God’s kingdom will be in the hands of Christ, but ultimately all authority and power contrary to the will of the Creator will be put down, and death itself destroyed. Paul explained, “When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”—I Cor. 15:28

We know that there will be no failure of this work, no holding back of the divine purpose. In our impatience, we may think that the time is long delayed for the restitution project to be put into operation. However, from God’s standpoint this is not so. Let us, then, learn patiently to wait on the Lord, meanwhile zealously laying down our lives bearing witness to the “gospel of the kingdom” in any and every way which may be open to us. What a privilege it is to be