

Threatened Global Food Supply: Shortages Possible

***“Nation shall rise
against nation,
and kingdom
against kingdom:
and there shall be
famines, and
pestilences, and
earthquakes, in
divers places. All
these are the
beginning of
sorrows.”***

—Matthew 24:7,8

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, MAT-

thew records part of Jesus’ answer to his disciples when they had asked him what sign would be given to indicate the time of his Second Presence and the end of the present Gospel Age. In his answer, he pointed out many things to them that would come to pass before his kingdom would finally be estab-

lished. He emphasized that one of the signs of his return would be associated with famine, and an increasing time of trouble that truly marks our distressed and chaotic world today.

END OF THE AGE

The question may be asked if Jesus has returned, is now present and his kingdom near, why then should this blessed promise be associated with the worldwide troubles and distress that we now see among the peoples and nations of earth? On another occasion, Matthew recorded the Master's words that address this very situation, when he said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34) Jesus himself endured much persecution and violence at the hands of fallen men, and he was subject to the corrupt powers that be during his earthly ministry. He was falsely accused as a blasphemer, tried and physically abused during the darkness of night, and nailed to a cross the next morning to pay the price for the sins of mankind.

The prophetic words of our Lord concerning the end of the age have significant meaning as we witness the chaotic events of our day. Jesus proclaimed, "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

Our Lord often spoke in symbolic language during his earthly ministry, and in the above scripture. He spoke of signs in the sun which represent the Gospel Truth that he was preaching, the moon which portrayed the Law of God, and stars that pointed to the inspired teachings of the apostles. The roaring of the sea and the waves illustrates the

troubled masses of humanity that exercise their pent-up frustrations against the present world order that includes the social, political, financial, and ecclesiastical institutions.

HUNGER AND THIRST FOR TRUTH

The Prophet Amos spoke of a spiritual famine for the bread and water of life when he wrote, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.”—Amos 8:11,12

During the long, intervening centuries since our Lord’s First Advent, many of the followers of Jesus have experienced this famine of the bread and water of life. Some were persecuted even unto death, while countless others were denied the common blessings of fellowship and study that we enjoy today. Coinciding with the promised return of our Lord in the latter part of the 19th century, truth concerning the Divine Plan of the Ages has been made available to the Lord’s people on a scale never before realized. During this time, however, there are challenging new philosophies, ideologies, and temptations that have caused some to stumble in their quest for the Truth. The faithful child of God will heed well the words of the revelator. “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”—Rev. 3:10

A TIME OF TROUBLE

Concerning some of the events that would take place at the end of this age, Jesus said, “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) This Time of Trouble identifies the turbulent years that the world has been passing through, especially since the beginning of World War I. The Master had earlier identified this time as the “beginning of sorrows.”—vs. 8

A UNITED NATIONS REPORT

In connection with Jesus’ reference to famine in our featured text, we note that in December, 2007 the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agency reported that there has been an unforeseen and unprecedented shift in the rapidly dwindling world food supply. They also said that prices for food are now soaring to historic levels. These changes are creating a very serious risk, especially in the developing nations of the world. The agency’s report included the food price index which indicates a rise of more than 40% during the past year. This is compared to a 9% increase that was reported during the previous year, which was considered unacceptable. Their figures also show that prices paid for imported food by the poorest countries rose by 25% during that same time.

The United Nations Agency pointed out that reserves of cereals are severely depleted. World wheat stores declined by 11% this past year, which

corresponds to about twelve weeks of total world-wide stocks on hand, a decline from the previous eighteen weeks supply. They say that there are only eight weeks of corn in storage at the present time, which is down from an eleven-week previous supply. Prices for wheat have risen 52%, and oil-seeds are also at record high levels.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Some specialists have suggested that there are several reasons to explain the rapidly dwindling food stores in the world today. Some of these reasons point to climate changes and may include both drought and flood conditions. If a significant change in climate occurs in a particular high production area, or if a disease affects a major crop, then the risks to food production are very high. Another serious problem concerns dramatic worldwide population growth, as there are more mouths to feed, and less land to produce food. In recent months, there has been a tremendous increase in the price of oil supplies, and rising fuel costs for agricultural machinery, as well as transportation and distribution costs for trucking companies that is causing increased concern.

POLLINATION

Another contributing factor in connection with the production of food points to the vanishing honeybee colonies due to Colony-Collapse Disorder (CCD). These little insects are directly responsible for the pollination of one third of all flowering food crops grown in America and in other countries of the world. Scientists are searching to find the cause for the disorder which has devastated beekeeper

colonies throughout the country during the past few years. Without honeybees, the growing of numerous varieties of fruits, nuts, and vegetable products is seriously threatened.

AGRIBUSINESS

During the past several decades in the United States and in other countries, there has been a gradual shift in population from rural areas to urban and suburban locations. With this shift, there has also been realized the death of the family farm where many families were once able to produce a considerable percentage of their own food, either by way of home gardens and fruit trees, or through eggs, milk, and various kinds of meat products.

Some of this former farmland has been purchased and developed by building contractors who have changed the landscape into subdivisions and strip malls that now occupy the land. Also, during this time, large agribusiness concerns have taken over many areas of this vacated farmland and have concentrated their production on growing fewer crops used solely for human consumption. Instead, they are turning their attention to the production of crops used for biofuel and cattle feed.

BIOFUEL PRODUCTION

Ethanol is a homegrown biofuel that is being produced on American farmland to help reduce the dependence on oil that is being imported from foreign sources, mostly from Middle Eastern countries. Corn is grown in large quantities as an important part of the biofuel production, thereby making it less available for human food production.

Corn has always been a mainstay of American agriculture, and is one of the principal ingredients in the production of cereals, baked goods, and corn syrup which is used to make processed foods such as candy and soft drinks. Corn is also a major source of food for cattle, pigs, chickens, and turkeys.

A recent study has been conducted by the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development at Iowa State University. Their report indicates the direct and indirect costs of producing biofuel, or energy crops, on America's farmland. It also shows that ethanol production in the United States could end up consuming half of the nation's cereal grain production, including corn, wheat, and other coarse grains by the year 2012. This situation is expected to drive up food prices as well as to cause shortages.

The growing of animal feed stocks also creates an inefficient ratio when this diversion is compared to the growing of crops for human consumption. These are important factors in relation to America's ability to feed its own citizens, now reported to be over three hundred million people. The study also estimates that the greatly expanding production of ethanol in America's heartland has raised the price of food by approximately \$50 for each person annually.

Alternatives to corn are being considered, such as making biofuel from waste materials such as leftovers from paper mill and logging operations. These wastes are not as economically profitable, however, as corn-based production. The federal government is funding research to make cellulosic

ethanol more commercially viable, but many technical problems still exist.

THE GROWING REALITY

The idea that food supplies in our modern world could be threatened seems an impossible thought, but the reality is that there have been huge increases recently in the cost of wheat, corn, rice, oats, soybeans, and other major agricultural products. This has come about partially because of the accelerating demand for food in the developing nations and their rapidly increasing populations. In addition, biofuel production and poor harvests in some areas of the world are beginning to make even basic food supplies scarce.

Wheat future prices have tripled since 2004, corn prices have nearly tripled since 2005, and soybeans have tripled since 2006. Food crises that occurred in past years were usually associated with crop failures, pest infestations or war. However, once global trade in grain commodities became commonplace, food shortages in one part of the world were quickly brought under control by importing foodstuffs from other countries that had not been affected. The situation at the present time seems to indicate a lack of supply everywhere all at once.

DROUGHT THREAT

From another perspective in connection with the seriousness of maintaining adequate worldwide food supplies we cite a recent news item "Wheat Supplies, Already Tight, May Be Hurt by Global Drought" and submitted (March 7, 2008) by Tony Dreibus in *Bloomberg Market Pulse*. We quote

in part, “Global wheat production, after failing to keep pace with demand the past three years, may be hurt again in 2008 by dry weather in the United States, Canada, and Russia, the three largest exporters of the grain. A moderate drought in the southern Great Plains, where most United States winter wheat is grown, has slowed development of plants starting to emerge from dormancy, the Canadian Wheat Board said today in a report. Russian crops need rain, and moisture in the Canadian Prairies is ‘poor’ for crops that will be planted in May, according to the CWB, Canada’s biggest wheat marketer.

“Wheat futures on the Chicago Board of Trade, the world’s largest agricultural exchange, have more than doubled in the past year and reached records on February 27. Global production has failed to keep pace with demand in seven of the past eight years, eroding inventories to a 30-year low, United States Department of Agriculture data show. Chicago wheat futures have rallied in the past year after the 2007 United States crop was damaged by an April freeze that was followed by excessive rainfall. Prices set records six times this year on the Kansas City Board of Trade and the Minneapolis Grain Exchange.

“World inventories are expected to fall to 109.7 million metric tons by the end of the marketing year on May 31, the lowest since 1978, the USDA said. United States stockpiles may fall to 272 million bushels by the end of May, the lowest in 60 years, the government said. In the United States, the world’s top wheat exporter, the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles and western Kansas remained

dry. That's fueled speculation about low soil-moisture levels for grain that's starting growing after lying dormant since November, the board said. Precipitation is needed very soon for plants in the region. Growers in the southern Plains grow mostly high-protein hard-red winter wheat, used to make staple foods including bread and pasta. Demand for grain has increased in the past year because of concerns that global growers wouldn't produce enough."

DISEASE THREAT

The worldwide nature of threat concerning the supply of foodstuffs is noted in the article "Spread of Wheat Disease Sparks Shortage Fears" (March 10, 2008), and published by *Business Daily*. It was written by Allan Odhiambo, who points out, "The global food prices outlook darkened after the Food and Agricultural Organization revealed that a contagious wheat disease that was previously found in Kenya has spread to key producing markets in the Middle East. The latest FAO survey of the wheat market showed the virulent fungi that spread in the entire East Africa region has attacked crops in the main wheat producing countries of Yemen and Iran.

"Agriculture experts warned that the situation could worsen if the disease spreads east of Iran to Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan—the world's leading producers. Detection of the wheat rust fungus in Iran is worrisome; the fungus was spreading rapidly, and could significantly lower output this year. It is important that the international community

gets this disease under control to reduce the risk to countries that are already hit by high food prices. Nearly 80% of all wheat varieties planted in Asia and Africa are susceptible to the wheat stem rust (*Puccinia graminis*) that spreads when its spores are carried by wind over long distances. In Kenya, the rust disease has been particularly destructive in wheat-growing districts. It has been blamed for the decline in the national wheat production that has triggered a steady rise in the price of wheat and its products such as bread.”

SHORT SUPPLIES

The National Farmers’ Union of Canada put out a press release (October 14, 2007) that included the headline, “Global Food Crisis Emerging.” The release stated, “Based on early predictions by the United States Department of Agriculture on world grain supply, and demand for the 2007-08 crop year, the NFU’s director of research, Darrin Qualman, broadcasts a dire warning that ‘we are in the opening phase of an intensifying food shortage.’ Total grain supplies were the lowest in the 47 periods for which data exists and were quite possibly at their lowest levels in a century. This crop season would mark the seventh year out of the past eight in which global grain production fell short of demand.

“Despite the so-called green revolution, the miracle of fertilizers, irrigation techniques, and disease-resistant grains, the world once again is in danger of not feeding itself. There are all kinds of reasons for this: population growth, climate change, a shift to feeding livestock instead of using grain directly

for food, which is a less efficient way of feeding people, and growing demand for ethanol. There are no easy solutions and there are other potential problems. The collapse of the cod fishery is well known, but many edible fish species are also in danger. Qualman says one-third of ocean fisheries are already in collapse and scientific journals estimate that two-thirds may be in danger by the year 2025.”

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Although conditions in the earth at the present time are deteriorating as prophesied long ago, nevertheless, we continue to put our total confidence and faith in our loving Heavenly Father’s ultimate plan of reconciliation that will be made available for mankind under the soon-to-be-established kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. During our Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry, one of his major teachings related to the wonderful promise of life that would one day be made available for the whole human family in due time.

This marvelous hope was centered in the life that he would soon give for their salvation and ultimate blessing. We read, “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) Jesus subsequently bought the world with his own precious blood that was shed at Calvary’s cross. The ‘bread’ of which he spoke related to the great work of redemption which he accomplished. All who accept the merit of his sacrifice will share in the provisions made possible for all during the time of his future earthly kingdom.

THE DESERT SHALL BLOSSOM

We rejoice in the prospect of the long-promised kingdom that will bring peace and blessings for the poor sin-sick and dying human family. Under the provisions of Christ's kingdom, all unrighteousness will be eliminated and nothing will hurt nor destroy the beauty and harmony that is promised to all of the willing and obedient of the human family.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote centuries ago concerning this most blessed time. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God."—Isa. 35:1,2

EARTH YIELDS HER INCREASE

This wonderful promise from the loving hand of our Heavenly Father will surely come to pass, and we rejoice in the psalmist's prophetic words. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him." (Ps. 67:1-7) There will no longer be

disease, drought, and a number of other negative influences concerning food supplies for all people because the earth will then yield her abundant increase for the whole human creation.

“He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:1,2) These marvelous words are true and faithful, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—vs. 17 ■