

# The Passing Time

*“My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.”*

—*Psalm 31:15*

## **AS WE HAVE COME TO THE**

end of another violent and turbulent year in the history of this sin-sick and dying world, let us endeavor more fervently to put our trust in our loving and eternal Heavenly Father as we enter the new year. We must keep in mind that he has promised his people that he would guide, strengthen and protect them from those who would persecute and do them harm.

## **DAVID'S TESTIMONY**

In the wonderful words of the Psalmist David, he reveals his very high sense of trust by putting his ‘times,’ or his life, in the hands of the most high God. He thus begins the psalm by saying, “In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.” (Ps. 31:1) These sentiments should characterize all of the Lord’s people who are living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. He continues, “Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy

name's sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth." (vss. 2-5) We are inspired to greater trust and faithfulness as we realize, as did the psalmist, that our times are also truly in the hands of our beloved Lord.

## **A GLANCE BACK**

Reflecting on some of the news events of the past year, we may perhaps look back with fading memories, but recall that the new year opened while the elaborate funeral proceedings for the 38th president of the United States were in progress of completion. Gerald R. Ford had been the longest living ex-president, having died at the age of 93 at his home in Rancho Mirage, California on December 26, 2006. After services in California and then lying in state at the nation's capital, interment took place at Grace Episcopal Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan on January 3, 2007.

## **THE UNELECTED PRESIDENT**

Ford had become America's 38th president as a result of some of the most extraordinary events in the entire two-hundred-year history of the country. As a former Republican Congressman from Grand Rapids, Michigan, he was sworn in as President on August 9, 1974. This immediately followed the resignation of President Richard Nixon as a result of the Watergate scandal. Ford thus became the only governing official to ever occupy the White House who had never been elected to office as either president or vice president. He had been brought to the

height of power to accomplish the difficult process of healing that the citizens of the United States sought at that time to heal the wounds surrounding Nixon's impeachment and resignation.

At the time of Ford's death, President George Bush praised him as a man of integrity and great rectitude, and that most Americans were grateful for his service to the country. He said, "For a nation that needed healing and for an office that needed a calm and steady hand, Ford came along when we needed him the most." Vice President Cheney said that he had served under Ford as chief of staff in the White House. "He embodied the best values of a great generation—decency, integrity and devotion to duty."

Ford served as President for 2 ½ years, and during the early days of office his approval rating reached 71%. However, after he later granted President Nixon full pardon for all federal crimes that he had committed while in the White House, Ford's political approval rating plummeted to 36%. His political career was doomed, but he said the pardon was necessary to finally bring the Watergate scandal to a close.

## **EXPANDING EUROPEAN UNION**

January 1, 2007 also marked the time when Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union, bringing the total number of participating countries to 27. This move helped to end the geographic divisions that had been left over from the cold war, and it extended the borders of the EU to the Black Sea. It now encompasses an area inhabited by nearly 500 million people. Romania has about 22

million people, while Bulgaria has approximately 7.7 million. There are now 32 official languages in the Union.

In Bucharest, Romania, President Traian Basescu said that attempts to enter the European Union had been going on for 17 years, and added, “We arrived in Europe, welcome to Europe. This is an enormous chance for new generations.” Meanwhile in Sofia, Bulgaria, a newspaper headline read, “We are home.”

Both countries are the EU’s poorest members and the hope is that joining will help raise per capita wealth, which is one-third of the average. This is the second wave of enlargement into formerly Communist Eastern Europe, which will give political and economic stability in a region surrounded by unstable neighbors.

## **VICE PRESIDENT TARGETED**

Americans were shocked to learn in an ABC News report submitted by Jonathan Karl (February 27, 2007) that Vice President Dick Cheney had been the target of an assassination attempt. Under the title “Cheney Targeted in Assassination Attempt” Karl wrote, “A suicide bomber struck at the main entrance to Bagram air base in Afghanistan today, as Vice President Dick Cheney was visiting.

“Immediately after the attack, a red alert traveled throughout the base—a red alert that we heard saying that the base was under direct attack. At least nine people were killed, officials tell ABC News. Associated Press reporters at the scene said they had seen the bodies of at least 12 people.

“A Taliban spokesperson has claimed responsibility, saying the intended target was in fact Cheney. The bomber never got near Cheney. Qari Yousef Ahmadi said, ‘We knew that Dick Cheney would be staying inside the base . . . and that the attacker was trying to reach him.’ Although Cheney was apparently never in danger at any time on a trip that had been marked by intense secrecy and high security, but this is clearly an unwelcome surprise.”

### **IRAQ SITUATION GRIM**

America’s war in Iraq during the year 2007 continued to worsen. The death toll of civilian casualties in the country rose dramatically, and the numbers of United States military personnel killed was becoming increasingly more unacceptable by the citizens of this country. It was hoped that a change in policy might have positive results. Therefore, President Bush moved Lt. General David Petraeus into position as top commander of all United States troops in Iraq, thereby replacing former General George Casey Jr. Also, Admiral William Fallon would succeed General John Abizaid as head of Central Command.

In addition to these changes, it was then decided that a temporary surge in the number of American troops serving in Iraq would be required to help bring an end to the deadly violence and carnage. The level was therefore increased by several thousand. Most of the increase would be achieved by extending the deployments of those troops already in Iraq, and also by accelerating the deployments for those troops scheduled to be posted there.

The Bush administration and military officials believed that without adequate security, particularly in Baghdad, any progress in Iraq would be difficult if not impossible. Once the level of violence was brought under control, the U.S. military could then concentrate on accelerating the training of Iraqi security forces, and thereby turn more territory over to them for control. The new plans also included an increase in the amount of money needed for reconstruction projects.

Some United States generals and many analysts warned that a short-term surge in military forces would not have any long-term effect on the level of violence in Iraq. They feared that it would only result in an increase in American casualties. It was also realized that these changes would increase the political opposition within the government.

## **MAJOR TERROR PLOT FOILED**

Three Islamic militants were arrested by German police that were suspected of planning a large-scale terrorist attack against several targets, including the American Air Base at Ramstein and the Frankfurt international airport which is one of the busiest in Europe. It was learned that the plot was in its advanced stages, and would have been extremely deadly if carried out.

The German federal prosecutor said, at a news conference, that a six-month investigation involving 300 people from the police network had uncovered the major plot. Police officers had raided 41 houses and apartments across the country seizing computers and other equipment.

The suspects had amassed 1,500 pounds of hydrogen peroxide in a hidden location, and were in the process of moving the explosive material when they were arrested. This was the main chemical used to manufacture the explosives that were used in the suicide bombings that took place in London in July, 2005. Officials said that they also had military-grade detonators which connected them to Al Qaeda. Two of the men were converts to Islam who had trained in terrorist camps in Pakistan. The third man fled and in a scuffle with a police officer was able to get his pistol away from him. He shot the officer in the hand before being subdued.

These arrests came only one day after Danish police arrested eight people who were suspected terrorists in a plot there. German officials said there was no evidence of a direct link between the plots although there are many similarities, including a suspected link to Al Qaeda.

## **THE WARS WORST ATTACK**

News reports from Iraq during the midsummer months spoke of a string of suicide bombers who were targeting an ancient religious group known as the Yazidis, a small Kurdish-speaking sect in the northwestern part of the country. At least 400 people were killed, and many more injured. Some estimates of death were as high as 500. A ministry spokesman said that 2 tons of explosives were used in the blasts, which crumbled buildings, trapping entire families beneath the bricks and rubble. It was acknowledged that this was the most devastating attack of the entire Iraq war.

As emergency crews and dazed residents were sifting through the debris, reports came in that described another attack that had occurred at a Baghdad market district during the morning rush hour in which several more innocent victims had lost their lives or were injured.

All of this took place as the American military was claiming that the recent troop surge was a huge success, particularly against Al Qaeda terrorists. It was clear, however, that Al Qaeda still has the capability of carrying out major attacks. United States commander, General David Petraeus, had said only a day or two earlier that he was preparing recommendations to reduce the level of troops in Iraq, but cautioned against a quick or significant reduction that could jeopardize America's achievements in the war. The attack on the Yazidis dealt a serious blow to the Bush administration's hopes of presenting a positive picture in a progress report on Iraq by Petraeus to be given later in the year.

## **WILD WEATHER**

There is increasing evidence that the earth's climate is changing, and that it tends to be more violent and unpredictable. During the past year, a heat wave killed over fifty people in the Midwest and Southern parts of the country, with sustained temperatures rising well above 100 degrees in some places. California had its second largest wildfire ever.

Torrential storms flooded areas of Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, and South Dakota. Texas and Kansas residents were preparing for a new wave of storms, while still cleaning up from previous flooding—along with Oklahoma,

which is also being flooded again. Also, a massive rainstorm in New York City closed the subway system for a time.

All of this disruption is not confined to the United States. It was also estimated that over 2,000 people were killed, and millions more were displaced in India and Bangladesh during severe storms and flooding. There were runaway forest fires covering a large portion of Greece, while the hottest-ever temperatures were recorded in Japan. In addition, there has been unprecedented melting of Arctic ice caps.

## **CHANGING ATTITUDES**

A few years ago most Americans felt indifferent toward the subject of global warming. The media gave equal time to those who denied any possible effects, and respected scientists who had studied the problems involved. Neither had the United States signed the Kyoto Accord, which was the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held at Kyoto, Japan in December, 1997. The convention, too, had agreed to allow carbon emissions at the current enormously high levels. Those who realized the danger said that this agreement would only ensure continuous and increasingly destructive world weather patterns. They pointed out that in many areas farmers already could no longer rely on old established rain patterns to grow their crops. Furthermore, compliance with these agreements would guarantee throughout the world bigger floods, worse droughts, more destructive hurricanes and tornadoes, and even, in some areas, increased blizzards.

Opinions suddenly changed in the aftermath of the Katrina hurricane that devastated New Orleans. With the ever-growing succession of severe local storms, people are now considering the possible connection between these storms and the worldwide change in weather patterns. Each new natural disaster reinforces this sense.

## **ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION**

During the past year, illegal immigration continued to be a threat to the identity and security of the nation, and the American people want the government to do something about it. In June, 2007, President Bush's guest worker amnesty plan was turned down, and the issue of tax-paid services to illegal immigrants was again brought to attention.

Most Americans realize that new laws are not needed to stop the endless flow of illegals into the country, but to enforce the existing laws, and to repeal some laws that grant taxpayer-financed services to these people. The guest worker amnesty plan is essentially an attempt to have open borders. This would allow programs such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) plans to be carried out. Both of these plans allow for open borders and an economic integration of North America. Open borders are thus required to make these programs operational.

President Bush and those in his administration that were promoting open border legislation suffered a setback, and were surprised at the force and determination of those who rejected it. Those who are promoting these schemes continue to use

their positions of power to seek new ways to work around the opposition and to pass the legislation anyway, either as a whole or incrementally. However, communities across the country are now taking matters into their own hands in an attempt to stop the unpopular interests of the Federal government. It is no longer a 'border issue' but a 'national issue,' and it is affecting small towns and cities all over America.

## **THE ECONOMY**

During the past year, Americans became more aware of a financial crisis that was developing, especially in the housing market. It was associated with sub-prime mortgage loans which had been issued on many homeowners properties, along with a sharp rise in foreclosures. This problem began a year earlier in the United States, but in 2007 it spread to other areas of the world. Sub-prime lending refers to the practice of making home loans to people who do not generally qualify for them, based on their income, or through previous poor credit performance. It therefore becomes a risky contract for both those who are purchasing the homes and for those who are lending the money.

When interest rates began to rise, the monthly payments on home loans also increased because many of them were written with adjustable rates. This resulted in a decline in property values when many homeowners were unable to meet their financial commitments and forced into foreclosure. Lending institutions were also left without means to recoup their losses. The sharp rise in foreclosures after the housing bubble burst caused several

sub-prime mortgage lenders to shut down or file for bankruptcy. This has affected the value of stock prices in some sectors of the economy.

In late summer, customers across Great Britain queued up in long lines to withdraw their savings from Northern Rock, one of the largest mortgage lending institutions in the country. Concern spread that a sustained panic could damage the national economy should the confidence of investors and depositors be undermined, and there was fear that the apprehension might affect other financial institutions. Questions have been raised concerning the impact that United States sub-prime mortgage lenders may have had on British financial institutions.

## **OUR SALVATION IS NEAR**

Having looked briefly at some of the events that took place during the past year, and noting just how desperate the conditions are in the world, we realize that we are truly living in the closing years of this present Gospel Age. Our attention becomes focused on the glorious spiritual calling and promised inheritance of our consecrated walk in the Lord, and we willingly leave all troublous matters in the powerful hands of our loving Heavenly Father.

We thus turn to the serious words which were written by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the brethren at Rome. He admonished, "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Rom. 13:11,12)

‘Our salvation’ and wonderful inheritance is truly ‘nearer than when we [first] believed.’ Let us trust that all things will work in us according to God’s ultimate purpose.

In accordance with the apostle’s words, we now consider the prophetic words of our Lord Jesus as recorded in Luke’s gospel. Looking forward to the present time at the end of this Gospel Age, he says, “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. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”—Luke 21:25-27

The symbolic signs of which Jesus spoke indicate the great events that would be associated with this special time. The ‘sun’ thus represents the glorious light of gospel truth. The ‘moon,’ as a reflection of the sun pictures the law of God, and the ‘stars’ point to the inspired apostles as the teachers of truth. It was to be a time of great ‘distress’ among the nations, while statesmen, world rulers and religious leaders would be full of fear as they looked at the deteriorating conditions in the world. Our Lord Jesus, however, will soon establish his kingdom of righteousness over all the earth as promised.

## **THE CHURCH’S DELIVERANCE**

Luke then writes, “When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.” (vs. 28,

*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) The wonderful hope and nearness of the church's salvation is inspiring to all who put their trust in God.

As we enter another new year, we are witnesses of a level of violence and instability in the world that continually increases. No one knows what lies ahead, or how to prepare for it. However, the consecrated child of God is being guided and led by the powerful hand of our loving and eternal Heavenly Father, who knows our every weakness and every need. Let us put our lives in his hands and trust him to help us in our heartfelt desire to know and serve him in the days ahead.

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