

The Voice of God— Past, Present and Future

“Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth. ... God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.”

—Job 37:2,5, New American Standard Bible

sent and even hatred.

We are witnesses each day to the resulting cacophony of these and many other voices which enter our ears and fill our minds. The resulting message to most is that of chaos, perplexity and often anger, as they attempt to make sense of the countless voices which continually inundate their

THE EARTH TODAY IS filled with the sounds of innumerable voices. There are voices of the leaders of nations, religions and businesses. There are voices of the rich, the poor, and the general masses of society. There are voices of the old, the young, the physically infirmed, and the mentally distraught. There are voices of political persuasions, of lifestyle preferences, of dis-

lives. Contributing to this state of confusion is the fact that these countless voices are, for the most part, in utter conflict and opposition to each other, though they all claim to speak truthfully.

To compound these matters, it seems today that few feel the need to be accountable for the words and messages emanating from their voices. Thus, mankind is left with the futile task of attempting to sort through all of these sounds and determine which are true and which are untrue. This confusion of noise so unique to our day is aptly described by the Prophet Isaiah: “The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle.” (Isa. 13:4) Most assuredly, therefore, the “tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations” accurately presents a foreboding portrait of the world in which we now live.

VOICE OF GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Lost to most, in the din of all the sounds just described, is the one voice which should be heard and given earnest attention to above all others—the voice of God. The voice of our Creator is singular, truthful, harmonious, and never-changing. His voice is spoken through the Bible, the Word of God. In our opening text, we are told to “listen closely” to him, and though God “thunders with His voice,” he speaks “wondrously, Doing great things.” As further stated in our text, the “great things” God is doing are not comprehended by most of mankind. Yet it is for their ultimate eternal benefit that such great things are being done by the power inherent in the voice of God.

As the world becomes increasingly involved in the daily life and death struggles of what men have called civilization, the exact order and nature of events yet to come is difficult to determine. However, the Scriptures are clear concerning the ultimate outcome, which is the establishment of God's kingdom, under the righteous rule of Christ. The Scriptures also make it clear that God is speaking to the various elements of present society through the distresses in which they are all involved. Most do not yet hear his "voice," but those who are taking heed to the "sure word of prophecy" do hear it and rejoice. (II Pet. 1:19) They understand that the time is soon coming when the Lord, in his own way, will cause the conflicting voices of humanity to cease their strife and acknowledge his voice: "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."—Ps. 46:10, *Revised Version*

It would seem that the present struggle of society's conflicting voices is mostly for the purpose of being in a position to gain advantage over, dominate and ultimately render powerless opposing sounds. What none of these opposing factions know as yet, however, is that by their own actions, they are accomplishing God's purpose—that of bringing to an end earth's present sinful order. Under God's arrangement, Christ will be the sole ruler of the world of tomorrow, during which the earth will not be under the domination of any of the kingdoms or "voices" of this world. The present "melting," or leveling processes so plainly visible within the nations are said, prophetically, to be due to the fact that God is speaking to the nations: "He uttered his voice, the earth melted."—Ps. 46:6

NOT YET HEARD

While many nations have, down through the centuries, claimed to be guided and blessed of the Lord, the Scriptures show that this has not actually been the case. These nations have frequently claimed that God's voice was expressed through their military might, but in this they have been wrong. It is difficult for the world's leaders, as well as mankind in general, to reconcile this claim of the past with what is now happening. The result is that many question whether there truly is a God who is paying attention to what is transpiring in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that God's voice is not yet heard above the noise of earth's conflicting cries.

The truth is that God has not, in the past, been speaking to the nations, but has permitted them to go on in their selfish way until various features of his plan had transpired. Bible prophecy indicates that this long period of God's relative silence in the affairs of mankind ended at the time of the First World War in 1914. For many centuries prior to that, the Lord declared that he would hold his peace and would not speak to the nations. As noted by the Prophet Isaiah, God also explains how, when the time should come for him to break his long silence, his voice could be identified. He says that he would "cry," and "roar," and that he would go forth as a "man of war," and "stir up jealousy" among the nations. Finally, the Lord explains, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not."—Isa. 42:13-16

This last expression is most meaningful. The poor, blinded world must first be spoken to in very drastic ways before their attention can be gained to listen

to the voice which later will lead them in ways of peace and happiness. Thus, the Lord first speaks to the nations in the only language they can understand. It is the language with which they have spoken to each other throughout the centuries, that of conflict, war and destruction. A further hint of the Lord's method of speaking to rebellious people is found in the words of another of God's prophets: "In the fire of my wrath have I spoken, ... saith the Lord GOD ... And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood."—Ezek. 38:19-22

Note also the expression of Isaiah 42:14, "Now will I cry like a travailing woman." In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul similarly explains that the "sudden destruction" which comes upon the world in the "day of the Lord" is "as travail upon a woman with child." (I Thess. 5:2,3) Travail on a woman with child comes in spasms. Thus we might say that the Lord has been speaking to the nations in all the spasms of destructive trouble that have come upon them during the past century. As yet, however, they do not heed, although occasionally we hear an expression indicating that some are beginning to realize the significance of what is transpiring.

The first step in mankind's ability to hear the voice of the Lord in earth's present troubled state is the necessity of being awakened to a sense of the selfishness and pride which has long-ruled man's thoughts, words and actions. When the people of all nations begin to think along this line, and when, through the further melting processes they see their idols of silver and gold and their false gods of torment and war destroyed, they will be ready to hear the Lord speak to them. Then, his voice will

resonate with the softer and more joyful tones of the Messianic kingdom's arrangements.

Until then, however, God is still speaking to the nations "in his wrath," and still vexing them "in his sore displeasure." (Ps. 2:5,6) How sorely vexed they are today. The "distress of nations, with perplexity," is great and is increasing. (Luke 21:25) How glad we should be that, through the sure word of prophecy, we know that God has set his king upon his "holy hill of Zion." Soon his rulership over the nations will become manifest to all, and as a result they will learn and practice war no more.—Mic. 4:3

GOD'S VOICE TO ISRAEL

God spoke to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, also called Horeb, with respect to the institution of the Law Covenant. (Deut. 5:22-28) In verse 22, it is stated that the words of the Lord were heard "out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness." That is, these constituted God's method of dramatically calling attention to his voice with regard to this vitally important event.

When God spoke to Israel out of the fire, the message was of a twofold nature. First, it contained the divine law for the people. Secondly, it revealed the glory and character of God. The latter is found in the statement, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments." (Deut. 5:9,10) This is an important point to keep in mind, for it is not just through the trouble alone that God desires to be heard. He also wants to gain the

attention of the nations through the revealing of his glory, in order that they might listen intently to his voice as he speaks to them out of the trouble.

It is true, certainly, that there is a message for the people in the trouble itself. It is telling them of the futility of human selfishness, and reveals the awful consequences of a program of hate and war. Getting mankind's attention, and speaking to them through the trouble, prepares the way for hearing the Lord's voice outlining his law, the law of the New Covenant. In all of these aspects of hearing the Lord's voice, the length, breadth, height and depth of his glorious character is revealed to all people. This relationship of the trouble to the voice of the Lord that speaks through the trouble, is aptly shown in Zephaniah's prophecy. First, we are told that God destroys the symbolic earth with the fire of his jealousy, emphasizing that he will not forever permit selfishness and injustice to dominate in world affairs. Then he turns to the people a "pure language," that they may learn to "call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."—Zeph. 3:8,9

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE FUTURE

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul refers to the experiences of Israel in connection with the giving of the Law Covenant. He indicates that they point forward to a great shaking time just preceding the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and the inauguration of the New Covenant. (Heb. 12:18,22-28) Verse 24 of this passage provides an important truth, namely, that Christ will be mankind's mediator under the New Covenant arrangement. Just as Moses was Israel's mediator when the Law Covenant

was instituted, so in the fulfillment of that picture the Scriptures show that Christ will mediate the New Covenant “between God and men.” (I Tim. 2:5) This is one reason why the dramatic time just preceding Messiah’s kingdom is described in the Bible as the “day of the Lord.” (I Thess. 5:2; II Pet. 3:10) It is the day when Christ is invisibly present, preparing the people by speaking to them out of the symbolic fire of the “time of trouble,” that they might be ready to accept the divine law of the New Covenant.—Dan. 12:1

The Apostle Paul indicates that symbolic Mount Zion was pictured by Mount Sinai. (Heb. 12:18,22) Several prophetic utterances thus fall into place. From Joel 3:16, we quote: “The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake.” In Haggai 2:6, another of God’s prophets tells us of this shaking of the heavens and earth. Finally, in Hebrews 12:26,27, the apostle quotes Haggai and applies it to the events associated with the establishment of the New Covenant. It should be noted that in all of these prophecies, the shaking occurs as a result of the Lord’s “voice.”

The shaking prophesied by Haggai is followed by the “desire of all nations” being realized, showing that the shaking is related to the establishment of God’s kingdom. (Hag. 2:7) This, in turn, was illustrated at Sinai by the people’s desire for the blessings of life which they hoped to gain by keeping that Law. It is also said that at Sinai the people saw the glory of the Lord, and that he spoke to them “face to face.” (Deut. 5:4,24) Following the present shaking, the glory of God will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and the tabernacle of God

will be with men. He will dwell with them and he shall be their God, and they shall be his people.—Hab. 2:14; Rev. 21:3

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN PROPHECY

Let us note further Scriptural testimony concerning the events associated with the day of the Lord. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: 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 gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness.” (Joel 2:1,2) Here we have the symbolic “trumpet” of the divine message and voice, “thick darkness,” and “clouds,” all of which were realities at Sinai, and pictorial of events associated with the day of the Lord, just preceding the inauguration of the New Covenant. We believe the events of the past century give strong evidence that we are now witnessing these symbolic conditions.

Another prophecy of the day of the Lord that is strikingly similar in its language to those already examined is that which is found in these words: “The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as

dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land."—Zeph. 1:14-18

In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter employs some of these same symbolisms in his graphic description of the day of the Lord. In his second epistle, Peter connects these events with the second coming [Greek: *parousia*, or presence] of Jesus, and the ushering in of the "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:1-13) Thus again, does the inspired record indicate the time application of the wonderfully harmonious prophecies of the day of the Lord.

JESUS' SECOND PRESENCE

The present time of trouble, with its symbolic darkness, clouds, and fires of destruction, is not a sign of the nearness of Jesus' second coming, but rather of his actual presence. This is shown by the prophecy of Isaiah 63:1-6, where we are told that the day of the Lord's vengeance is precipitated by one that "cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, ... travelling in the greatness of his strength." In the prophecy the question is raised as to who this is, and the reply is, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

In this prophecy, the one "mighty to save" is pictured as, first of all, treading the winepress of God's wrath. In the New Testament, he who "treadeth the winepress" is identified as Christ Jesus during the time of his second presence. (Rev. 19:11-16) In

this same chapter are also depicted the final scenes of the great time of trouble which make way for the establishment of Messiah's thousand-year kingdom of blessing.

BLESSED RESULTS

Another prophecy relating to the day of the Lord, and one which reveals its outcome in the blessing of the people, is that found in Psalm 97:1-7. "The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods."

When the present "heavens," the religious powers of today, are shaken out of their place, and the "new heavens" under Messiah's rule become operative, how wonderfully this will "declare his righteousness," and how clearly all the people will "see his glory." Then it will be recognized that the collapse of the present systems, which now seems to be such a calamity, was but the overthrow of "graven images" and false gods. Then, too, it will be seen that the present shaking of earth's society, portrayed as "hills melted like wax," was occasioned by God uttering his voice, that all would hear and recognize his rightful sovereignty over man's affairs.

Let us, then, watch the progress of world events with the view of identifying the voices of our God, and that of his Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. If we do this sincerely, and with the aid of the inspired prophecies, it will be true for us as promised to Israel of old, that we will know his name. Especially in this day of the Lord will we rejoice in the fulfillment of the divine promise which states, "Therefore, they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I." (Isa. 52:6) Having this promise fulfilled in us, we will recognize that, in turn, we have the privilege of proclaiming these glad tidings to others. As indicated in the next verse, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"—vs. 7

Though the blessings of God's kingdom have not yet begun, we see that even now his Son, earth's rightful king, is overruling in the affairs of this world, to bring this present order to an end. Soon, the kingdoms of this world will be leveled and humbled, and the Heavenly Father's loving and reassuring voice will be heard by the people, saying, "Be still, and know that I am God: ... I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10) When the coming righteous kingdom is established, and its work fully accomplished, all shall know God "from the least even unto the greatest." Until then, while the voice of the Lord is recognizable in the world's affairs only in the fire, clouds, and thick darkness of present trouble, it is our blessed privilege to join in the proclamation of the "good tidings" that soon God's new world of peace, happiness, health, and everlasting life will be established in the earth. ■