

God Speaks to the Nations

***“Be still, and know
that I am God. I
will be exalted
among the nations,
I will be exalted
in the earth.”
—Psalm 46:10,
English Standard
Version***

THE BEGINNING OF 2019

finds the hearts of mankind filled with anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, and in many cases, anger and frustration. This is because another year has passed without any of the major problems of the world being solved. The “distress of nations, with perplexity, ... Men’s hearts failing them for fear,” prophesied by Jesus is just as troubling now, if not more so, than it was a year ago.—Luke 21:25,26

Although we need not look very far to identify the myriad problems rampant in today’s world, a recent Gallup poll, published in November 2018, is worthy of note. In this survey, which dealt with issues affecting the United States, the question was asked, “What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?” The percentages of the top ten answers by respondents to this question were as follows:

Dissatisfaction with government/ Poor leadership	27%
Economic problems	13%
Immigration/Illegal aliens	13%
Unifying the country	6%
Race relations/Racism	6%
Healthcare	6%
Lack of respect for each other	5%
Ethics/moral/religious/family decline	3%
Environment/Pollution	3%
The media	3%

The remaining 15% of responses were scattered over more than 25 other categories not included above. What seems to stand out in the survey is that, far and away, people identified their dissatisfaction with government and their leaders as the country's largest problem more than any other issue. By contrast, a relatively small percentage of respondents, only 3%, identified the decline of ethics, morality, religion and family as of similarly high concern.

MAN'S EXTREMITY REACHED

Surveys such as the foregoing are interesting to review and analyze. However, little seems to change as to the resolution of mankind's many problems, whether in this country or in other parts of the world. It is sufficient if we realize that both from the standpoint of reality and the fulfillment of Bible prophecies, man is quickly reaching his extremity. Thankfully, however, this means also that the time has come in human experience when divine authority and power will soon manifest itself in the affairs of men. It is this that God,

through the psalmist, refers to in our text, saying, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

This is the hope of those who put their trust in God! As these look ahead into the year 2019, it is with confidence that nothing will happen to interfere with the ultimate and glorious outcome of the divine purpose. To know this, and to be assured of it, is a great source of encouragement and strength, and a safeguard against becoming entangled in the countless controversies which make up the confusion of this chaotic world.

To the sincere student of the Bible, there can be little doubt that the prophecies of the Bible are in process of fulfillment which describe the ending of Satan’s world and the time when the kingdom of Christ will be established for the blessing of the people. Happy are those who are able to discern the meaning of the many signs of this momentous era in which we are living. However, to enjoy this knowledge does not mean that we can look ahead into 2019 and foresee in detail just what will happen. We do not know what will happen in the economy, nor do we know what will take place with regard to the immigration issue, healthcare, race relations, or the myriad of other problems plaguing just this country alone. What we do know is, that regardless of what happens, God’s kingdom plans will neither be thwarted nor delayed.

In the opening verse of the psalm from which our text is taken David writes, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” God has always helped his people in their every trouble, and this text has been a great comfort to all those who have put their trust in him. However, it comes

to us at the present time with even greater meaning, for the verses which follow indicate that the psalmist's use of the term "trouble" is an evident reference to what Daniel described as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

Jesus quoted Daniel's prophecy, and indicated that its fulfillment would be at the end of the present Christian age, during the time of his return and second presence. (Matt. 24:3,21,22, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) It is descriptive of the very time in which we are living, when, as Jesus foretold, the hearts of the people would be filled with fear. (Luke 21:26) As the world enters the year 2019, there is nothing in sight to allay their fears, and nothing to give assurance that the problems which emanate from so many quarters will be resolved.

However, for those who put their trust in the Lord, it is different. These find shelter behind the fortress of God's promises and do not fear, "though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." (Ps. 46:2) The "earth" as used here is a symbol of the present humanly constituted social order which the Apostle Paul describes as "this present evil world." (Gal. 1:4) It is the removal of this "earth," with all the calamitous events associated therewith, that is causing the hearts of the people to be filled with fear. However, we will not fear because, as David states, "God is our refuge and strength."

After speaking of the "mountains," symbolic of earthly kingdoms, being "carried into the midst of the sea," the psalmist then adds, "The waters thereof roar and be troubled, ... the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." (Ps. 46:3) Jesus

used the roaring of the sea and waves to illustrate the restless, discontented attitude of the people in this time of world-wide distress. (Luke 21:25) The prophet Isaiah also refers to it, saying, "Woe to the multitude 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 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 before the whirlwind."—Isa. 17:12,13

It would be difficult to imagine a more vivid picture than this of the chaotic state of the nations today. The nations, and mankind in general, are simmering with unrest and anger. Indeed, all the great "mountain" kingdoms, governments and institutions of society are being lashed by the raging seas of human passion. Some of them have already toppled over into the "sea," and the remaining ones are gradually weakening from the strain placed upon them by the demanding "waves" of the downtrodden masses.

Viewed from the standpoint of human wisdom, this chaotic world situation is a frightening one. We should not fear, however, because we know that in it a divine purpose is being worked out. It is that purpose which is described by the Prophet Haggai when he wrote that God would "shake all nations," and that then "the desire of all nations shall come."—Hag. 2:7

"THE EARTH MELTS"

Although close at hand, the time has not yet come for God to speak peace to the nations. Further

“shaking” is needed in order for the people to be convinced that they cannot, by their own wisdom and power, establish peace and security in the earth. For this reason, the Lord’s voice is now being heard in another way. “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.” (Ps. 46:6, *ESV*) The “voice” of the Lord is a symbol of his authority and power. Just as the Prophet Haggai indicates that it is the Lord who would “shake all nations,” so David is telling us the same thing. He describes the breaking down of the present social order as the melting of the earth. Thus, whether we think of it as being “removed,” or “shaken,” or as “melting,” the idea is that earth’s present tumultuous world order is coming to an end.

This should not alarm the people of God. Taking heed to the Master’s assertion that he had chosen his disciples “out of the world,” they endeavor to follow the instructions of the Apostle John not to love it. (John 15:19; I John 2:15) The systems of this “present evil world” are not worthy of a Christian’s love, for they are characterized by sin, selfishness, greed, oppression and war. Footstep followers of Christ rejoice in their knowledge that such a world is coming to an end, and that in its place will be established a new, righteous world, the kingdom of Christ.—Isa. 65:17; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-3

It is true that the Lord’s people at the present time are living in the midst of the trouble which is causing the removal of the symbolic earth. They are subject to the difficulties confronting the people incidental to the shaking processes all around them. They do not fear, however, for as David declares, “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is

our refuge.” (Ps. 46:7) While God is abundantly able to give physical protection to his people when it is his will to do so, our greatest source of comfort and strength is in the understanding he gives us of the meaning of world distress—that it is working out for the people that great purpose of peace and blessing which he has promised throughout his Word.

To the people of God the invitation is extended, “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.” (vss. 8,9) Great and widespread are the “desolations” which already have been “made in the earth.” David asserts that these are the works of the Lord. It would be difficult to harmonize this with the fact that God is merciful, kind and loving, were it not for the further explanation of the divine purpose in what is being done. It is by means of these “desolations,” the psalmist explains, that the Lord “maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth.”

We should not have difficulty understanding this, since we know that one of the chief characteristics of this present world has been war. The final arbiter of most of its disputes has been war. It is clear, we believe, that the only way to make wars cease is to put an end to the system that has legalized and oftentimes glorified war. When those who are enlightened by the Word of God accept the invitation to “behold the works of the LORD,” and they see the “desolations” he has made in the earth, they also discern its necessity and the glorious outcome. Because of this, they do not fear. They know that

the infinite wisdom and almighty power which control the universe are working out a glorious purpose which, when fully consummated, will reveal God's mercy and love for all mankind.—Ps. 103:8-11; John 3:16,17; I John 4:9,10

WAIT UPON THE LORD

Throughout all the centuries those who have loved righteousness have often been perplexed as to why the Lord continued to permit injustice and wickedness to flourish in the earth. The proud, the arrogant, and the vile have often been the ones who have prospered, while the meek and the pure have suffered. (Ps. 94:1-7; Mal. 3:14,15) In every generation, man's inhumanity to man has made countless thousands mourn.

It is in answer to this quandary of his people that the prophet records these words: "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 by the fire of my jealousy." (Zeph. 3:8) This indicates that at no time has God been unmindful of conditions in the earth which have been so contrary to his will. In his own due time and way he has purposed to rid the earth of all the corrupt institutions of man which have been largely responsible for the world's problems, past and present.

In Isaiah 42:13, we are given a partial explanation of the manner in which the Lord would bring about the destruction of Satan's world. The prophet says, "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.” The “cry” and “roar” here mentioned would seem to have the same significance as the “voice” of the Lord previously noted in Psalm 46:6, which the psalmist declares would cause earth’s institutions to “melt.” These words all denote the exercise of divine authority and power by whatever means God might use to accomplish his purposes.

GOD’S METHODS

One of the methods God is using to bring about an end to this present evil world is that of allowing man to wage warfare against his fellow man to such an extent that “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.” (Matt. 24:22) In a description of the final phase of this great time of trouble, we read that the Lord will “call for a sword,” and that “every man’s sword shall be against his brother.” (Ezek. 38:21) The thought contained in these various expressions seems to be that God, in his own way, brings about the destruction of man’s world by causing its selfish factions, whether they be entire nations, societal groups, or merely individuals, to rise up with the intent of destroying one another.

What an effective method this will ultimately prove to be in making wars and killing to cease in all the earth. For this to be accomplished more is needed than simply the destruction of the weapons of war and killing. Implements of war have been destroyed many times, only to be rebuilt with more deadly and widespread capabilities. In reality, it is the whole concept of war and the taking of a fellow human being’s life which must be destroyed in the

minds of the people. The glory must be taken from it, and the people must come to loathe the very thought of it.

Moses, in his prayer recorded by the psalmist, spoke concerning God that “thou turnest man to destruction.” (Ps. 90:3) Through this, the people are learning a lesson which will lead to an eternity of joy through their wholehearted obedience to God and to his righteous laws. This lesson, summarized by Paul, is “that sin ... might become exceeding sinful.” (Rom. 7:13) The great “time of trouble” which God is now permitting in the earth is one of the final lessons man is having the opportunity to learn concerning the terrible effects of sin.

Only through a knowledge of God’s plan is it possible to reconcile the thought of God’s love with what is occurring in the earth today. In his prayer, after saying that God turns man to destruction, Moses added, “And [God] sayest, Return, ye children of men.” (Ps. 90:3) This returning will be in the resurrection, when all of the condemned race will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to profit from their previous experience with sin and evil. “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: ... all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth.” (John 5:25,28,29) Man will come forth, Jesus continues, to a “resurrection of judgment.” (vs. 29, *ESV*) Paul later speaks of this as a time during which God “will judge the world in righteousness.” (Acts 17:31) All of this will be for the purpose of fulfilling the words, “Return, ye children of men.”

SPEAKING PEACE TO THE NATIONS

At the present time the voice of the Lord speaks of turmoil and confusion among the nations. How different it will be, though, when he speaks to the raging waves of human passions, saying, as our text declares, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Just as God has the necessary agencies through which his voice of authority will accomplish the destruction of Satan's world, so when he speaks peace to the nations it will be with an authority that they cannot ignore, nor will they desire to do so.

"I will be exalted in the earth," God declares. He has permitted his authority to be flouted by man, through the evil influences of Satan, from the time that Adam transgressed his law. Throughout all the centuries since that time the human race has been in more or less rebellion against God's principles of righteousness, but he does not intend this situation to continue forever. The words of our Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth," indicate that it is God's purpose to re-establish his will in the hearts and lives of men. (Matt. 6:10) Indeed, it is to make way for this kingdom of peace and righteousness that the present world is now being brought to an end.

It will require the entire thousand years of Christ's earthly kingdom to establish divine authority in every respect. (Rev. 20:6) Paul wrote that Christ "must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:25,26) Among the first enemies to be destroyed are the selfish and unrighteous institutions of Satan's world. This is

the process that we presently see taking shape in the earth. The subduing and destruction of all unrighteousness will continue until death itself, man's greatest enemy, is destroyed.

It will be then that God's name will be fully exalted in the earth. Paul explains that the task of putting down insubordination to divine rule is to be accomplished by Christ, through his kingdom authority. He indicates that when this is fully accomplished Christ himself will become subject to his Father, "that God may be all in all." (vs. 28) Only then will the prayer, "Thy will be done in earth," be fully answered. His ultimate victory against sin and its awful results is assured by the promises of the Bible, and soon, through the Messianic kingdom, divine authority and power will be manifested in terms of life-giving blessings.

Returning to the words of God through the Prophet Zephaniah, after assuring us of his intention to "devour" the evil institutions in earth today, he adds, "Then I will give to the peoples purified lips, That all of them may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him shoulder to shoulder." (Zeph. 3:9, *New American Standard Bible*) Thus again is indicated the full extent to which the Lord's name, authority and goodness will be exalted in the earth.

As we enter the New Year, it is with increasing evidence that the time when God will speak peace to the nations is near. May this assurance fill our hearts with comfort and keep out the fear which is everywhere so prevalent. Entering 2019, armed with the strength of this assurance, may it be with a greater determination than ever before to "seek ... first the kingdom of God."—Matt. 6:33 ■