From Darkness to Light

"His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled."
—Psalm 97:4

THE LANGUAGE OF THE Bible is often punctuated with highly descriptive and meaningful symbols. In both the Old and New Testaments we find numerous word pictures and illustrations that have been used to describe future events, some of which are now taking place during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. One of these symbols is light, or enlightenment. In this psalm, the writer looks down the long stream of time and speaks of the kingdom of truth and peace that we believe will soon be established over all the earth. This is promised to take place when the present calling, selection and testing of the members of our Lord's bride class has been fully completed.

FORETOLD EVENTS

The psalmist points forward in prophetic terms by saying, "The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." (Ps. 97:1) The present day sin-sick and dying human

family will surely rejoice under the administration of Christ's future kingdom that will bring life, peace, and happiness to all of the obedient of mankind. "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation [establishment, *Marginal Translation*] of his throne." (vs. 2) Beyond the present scenes of violence, death, and corruption that now fill the earth, our attention is drawn to the just provisions of the kingdom that will be established on the sure foundation of 'righteousness and judgment.'

However, the structure of earth's present rulership which has been established by men and based on selfishness and pride must be destroyed to make way for the promised kingdom, as we read, "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about." (vs. 3) "The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth."—vs. 5

THE PEOPLE ENLIGHTENED

Our featured text emphasizes that light, which is associated with the Truth, will shine forth from one end of the earth to the other. Its enlightening rays will educate and make known to earth's inhabitants the ways of the Lord and his laws. "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled." (vs. 4) Some will 'tremble' and not realize that the time has come for the kingdom of Christ to be set up, take control over the affairs of earth and to erect a new and better world upon the ruins of the old one that will be destroyed. God's plan and purpose is to be accomplished, and the prophecies of the Bible show clearly that the

long-promised kingdom of the Lord will be established and take the place formerly occupied by the selfish and proud institutions of men.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

God has established certain laws in harmony with which he operates and those who come into conflict with these laws reap the penalty of their course in due time. At the close of this age, man is reaping the result of six thousand years of sin, selfishness, and pride. Thus, the Scriptures speak of our day in prophecy and the closing years of this present Gospel Age in various ways of destruction. It is called "the day of vengeance" (Isa. 63:4), "the day of wrath" (Zeph.1:14-18), "a time of trouble" (Dan. 12:1), and in various other symbolic terms.

The Prophet Malachi wrote of this time, "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4:1) The Prophet Joel said, "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 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 2:1,2

Jesus spoke of this time as one of great tribulation and distress among nations. "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

INCREASED LIGHT

The prophetic 'lightnings,' of which the psalmist spoke in our featured scripture text, is a symbol which illustrates the increase of knowledge as a sign of our day in prophecy.

The Prophet Daniel wrote, "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: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."—Dan. 12:1

Many prominent statesmen and historians now recognize that there is a relationship between an increase of information and the present day scene of chaos and unrest. The worldly-wise understand that the enlightening influences of our day are contributing factors that have influenced the common people to demand more freedom. However, they do not see that this increase of knowledge marks our day as a special time, and in fulfillment of scriptural prophecies which were written many long centuries ago. God's due time is drawing near for the long-promised establishment of Christ's kingdom over all the earth.

DEMAND FOR RIGHTS

For centuries, the thought was generally held among earth's elite, and people of power, that knowledge in the hands of the common people was

a dangerous thing. They feared that it could threaten the established rights and privileges of the hereditary ruling classes. Every possible effort was made to keep the people in ignorance especially during the period of the Dark Ages. But the time arrived in the later centuries of this Gospel Age when God advanced his ultimate purpose for his human family, and made it possible for the common man to obtain knowledge and education. These symbolic lightnings began to enlighten the world, and it has had a major effect in connection with the present conditions of unrest and clamor in the nations of earth.

Symbolic lightning thus becomes more meaningful especially in connection with Joel's prophecy which describes this time period as one of 'clouds and thick darkness.' Lightning flashes manifest during this cloudy day are associated with the great principles of truth and justice, and are brought into contrast with the world's present disorder. A flash of lightning may disclose error concerning either the social, political, financial, or ecclesiastical segments of the world's order. Long-held governmental views and practices of the past are questioned, and the masses are incited to press for better conditions to which they feel justly entitled.

Never before have such conditions prevailed in earth's society, and there is ominous and increasing dissatisfaction and unrest. The current of popular opinion throughout the earth is now being directed in a revolutionary and anarchistic direction. The rulers, as well as the ruled, have long since given up hope that the old established order of things can ever be entirely reestablished. The question is now

being asked how can the world prevent being completely engulfed in anarchy and turmoil?

DARKNESS REVEALED

The prophetic lightning flashes are helping to reveal corruption of all kinds in the world, and dishonesty in high places. This is emphasizing a greater need for more radical changes to be made in the world's business and economic structures. The question becomes how to right these wrongs. The result is seen in conflicting ideas, voices, theories, and threats. These all add to the confusion and increase the trembling within earth's social structure, and this serves to weaken the powers of the symbolic heavens and earth. Our present chaotic world is trembling even as the psalmist's prophetic words proclaim in our featured text.—Ps. 97:4

GLAD TIDINGS

During these closing years of the present Gospel Age, the attitude of those consecrated followers of our Lord Jesus who are endeavoring to be faithful amidst the present turmoil and confusion among nations is not to be one of fear and doubt. They are privileged to proclaim the wonderful message concerning our Heavenly Father's plan of reconciliation for his human creation. The Prophet Isaiah addressed this point and wrote, "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! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion."—Isa. 52:7,8

The Lord's people know that our loving God has all things under control and that he has commissioned his Son, our Lord Jesus, to establish his kingdom over the earth, and that its righteous rule will bring blessings of life and peace to the world. Although we are distressed by the present turmoil in the world, we know that the outcome will in due time be glorious. We thus continue to lift up our heads in confidence, and trust as we proclaim our Father's ultimate plan to bless all men.

We believe that not only is the deliverance of the faithful members of our Lord's bride in the first resurrection near, but that the deliverance of the whole earth from the bondage of sin and death also draws near. Through the enlightenment of prophetic scriptures pointing down the stream of time to our day, the Lord's people are given a blessed knowledge of the Divine plan. This enables them to see both the necessity for God's present method of Divine discipline upon the world, and also the peaceable fruits of righteousness which they may attain in the process.

We have full confidence in God's ability to bring order out of confusion. We understand the reason for the judgments of this day, and that our God speaks from heaven and from his high place of authority and control. We give thanks that the time is near when he will bring to an end the unrestrained human selfishness and pride that marks today's world, and establish his kingdom of peace and harmony in its place.

DISCERNING THE TIMES

Lightning flashes that are portrayed in the prophecies of God's Word are symbolic of knowledge

along all lines as it affects the general course of human history and behavior. Spiritual Truth as it applies to God's will for his own special people is revealed through the Scriptures, and is being disseminated by the consecrated followers of the Master.

To understand the prophetic meaning of the times in which we are now living is to be regarded as a special favor from the Heavenly Father. Our attitude should be one of much gratitude toward him for the Truth that he has granted us the privilege of understanding. Our gratitude should be manifest by an increasing zeal, and the desire to help bring that Truth to the knowledge of others in a very dark world. Our eyes of understanding should discern clearly the day of the Lord that we now see in progress. Faith in his Word guides our eyes of understanding through the word of Truth, and enables us to see the glorious outcome which will be the kingdom of our dear Lord Jesus.

MEANINGFUL SYMBOLS

The day of the Lord's wrath has stages of gradual development. Its general character is that of a struggle between the forces of light and darkness, of liberty against oppression and of truth against error. It is widespread in its application, and universal in its ramifications. No one symbol could fully describe it. The Prophet Zephaniah described this process as the "fire" of God's jealousy. "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." (Zeph. 3:8) However, the prophet then reveals God's wonderful plan for enlightening his human family with knowledge and understanding. "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."—vs. 9

Another of God's prophets used the word "whirlwind" to describe this time. He wrote, "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." (Nah. 1:3) Then, in other symbolic language, the prophet wrote, "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."—vss. 6,7

From still another perspective, the prophetic Day of the Lord is referred to by Isaiah as a great storm. "Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand." (Isa. 28:2) When describing the destruction of the ecclesiastical segment of earth's society, the prophet said, "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment." (Isa. 34:4,5) Isaiah spoke of the day of God's vengeance again, and

said, "I have trodden the winepress alone: and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come."—Isa. 63:3,4

Jeremiah used the "sword" as an illustration to describe God's wrath against the proud and selfish institutions devised by men. "Lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth." (Jer. 25:29,30) The whole earth will be affected by the events taking place during the time of God's vengeance. "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."—vs. 31

PROUD HEARTS ARE HUMBLED

The human family is generally unaware of the true significance of the events that are now taking place and that are associated with the day of God's wrath against earth's proud and selfish institutions. The destruction is being permitted so that

men's arrogant hearts may be humbled and thus prepared for the righteous kingdom which is to assume control over earth's affairs. They are blinded to God's ultimate plan and purpose and do not understand that in his wisdom he will permit the present trouble to spread and involve the entire world.

The revelator used many powerful symbols to describe these great events that are to accompany the day of God's wrath and vengeance over the nations. "There were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."—Rev. 16:18-21

WIND, EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE

The experiences of Elijah may illustrate in some respects the various stages that would mark the great Time of Trouble and Day of the Lord in the closing scenes of the Gospel Age. The symbolic terms that were outlined to him indicate three stages of trouble—the winds of war and strife, a shaking and resulting upheaval of the nations, and the consuming fire of anarchy.

Elijah was concerned that he alone was left as a prophet of God. "He said, I have been very jealous

for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (I Kings 19:10) Elijah was informed that he was not alone. "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."—vs. 18

God then gave Elijah important instructions, "He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."—I Kings 19:11,12

A STILL SMALL VOICE

The 'still small voice' that Elijah heard may relate to the psalmist's words, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10) "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." (Ps. 107:29) The Prophet Isaiah also looked forward to that time, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:9

Various symbols are used to describe certain features associated with the momentous events in the

Day of the Lord. The Heavenly Father takes full responsibility for the overthrow of this present evil world, and he accomplishes this great work through the prophetic increase of knowledge, and the flash-ing of his lightnings. The trembling earth is a com-prehensive symbol associated with wind, earth-quake, fire and in various other ways, but it will continue to tremble until its final collapse. The kingdom of Christ will then be established in its place.

WE ARE NOT IN DARKNESS

The Apostle Paul spoke of our time and related it to birth pangs which come upon a woman when she is about to give birth to her child. This suggests that the great Time of Trouble and Day of the Lord would not come all at once, but in spasms with pe-riods of easement inbetween. "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 es-cape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."—I Thess. 5:1-6 ■