Dangerous Times:

And Our Reeling Earth

"The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again."
—Isaiah 24:20

IN THE TWENTY-FOURTH chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, he provides us with graphic symbols that describe our present chaotic and violent world. He foresees our time, during the closing years of this Gospel Age, as one in which the world is reeling and staggering like a drunken man toward its inevitable destruction. Isaiah's prophecy deals with the overthrow of Satan's present evil world order, and we are told of the ultimate consequences. The prophet says, "Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down [perverteth the face thereof, *Marginal Translation*], and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof."—Isa. 24:1

The prophet also describes the earth as being "utterly emptied," and in mourning. (vs. 3) It is seen to fade away (vs. 4), and is being "defiled under" its "inhabitants." (vs. 5) He portrays the earth and

its inhabitants as being "desolate" and "burned" up. (vs. 6) Isaiah foretells the time when "The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly." (vs. 19) Furthermore, he says it is also a time when the LORD will "punish the host of the high ones," and "the kings" that are on high.—vs. 21

The word earth that is found in these verses represents the symbolic earth, a term used to denote the present world order. Isaiah has used the words "earth" and "world" interchangeably (vs. 4), and each of these terms is used in a pictorial sense. The word 'earth' refers to our planet earth [#8398, *Strong's Bible Concordance*], and the word 'world' means our inhabited earth [#776, *SBC*]. The various expressions which are employed by them describe how the symbolic earth, and what it represents, is eventually dissolved. The Scriptures elsewhere tell us that "the earth abideth for ever." (Eccles. 1:4) The use of these symbols conveys the thought that Satan's world will be completely destroyed in the closing years of this Gospel Age. It must be destroyed before God's new world order can be established under the administration of Christ. That new world order is described by the Apostle Peter. He said, "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II Pet. 3:13

A TIME OF TROUBLE

There can be little doubt that we, who are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, are witnessing the foretold death throes of the present world order described by the Prophet

Isaiah. Worldwide chaos marks our time, and the violent changes now occurring have caused men and women of all nations to long for a new and better world. We can appreciate the good intentions and efforts of the world's leaders and statesmen to do all in their power to assure that the present society will be one of peace and security for all. We do not speak disparagingly of human efforts when we say, based on the Scriptures, that there can be no ideal world order with lasting peace and security until the kingdom of Christ is ultimately established here on earth.

INCREASING TERRORISM

One of the greatest obstacles to achieving world peace and security is the rising tide of terrorist activities throughout the world. Recently a United States Government report was released that confirms the growing level of violence and its threat of worldwide terrorism. The report appeared in a *Los Angeles Times* article (April 29, 2006) under the caption, "U.S. Reports a Surge in Global Terrorism." The writer Josh Meyer says in part, "The State Department's annual report on global terrorism concludes that the number of reported terrorist incidents and deaths has increased exponentially in the three years since the United States invaded Iraq, largely because of Iraq itself. The report also said that although the United States had made some gains in fighting terrorism, Al Qaeda and its affiliate groups remained a grave threat to U.S. national security at home and abroad—both in Iraq and elsewhere.

"Of potentially greater concern, the government said, is mounting evidence that small, autonomous

cells and individuals are becoming more active. Such 'micro-actors' are engaging in more suicide bombings, and increasingly sophisticated technologies to communicate, organize, and plot their attacks, including the Internet, satellite communications and international commerce, according to the 292-page report."

NUCLEAR THREATS

In recent years, there has been a high level of interest among smaller nations and terrorist groups around the globe to obtain weapons of mass destruction. These lethal means to conduct modern warfare include chemical, biological, and nuclear weaponry.

Nuclear technology has become the ultimate aim of these groups, and among them is one of Pakistan's top nuclear scientists A. Q. Khan. He is of the greatest concern to western nations, and the United States in particular, because of his activities in connection with nuclear projects. He is responsible in recent years for having smuggled top nuclear secrets from Europe to help Pakistan build a nuclear bomb, to compete with his native country's archenemy India, who also has an arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Since that time, Khan has proceeded to peddle this nuclear technology, whether with or without his country's help, to Iran, North Korea, Libya, and perhaps other places. The extreme danger with Khan's actions has thus hastened the possibility that terrorist groups that are not linked to nation-states will soon have access to these nuclear weapons.

At the present time, and without the use of weapons of mass destruction—and in particular nuclear weapons—terrorist groups have the capability to

prepare roadside bombs from readily available fragments, explosive devices and other materials. These destructive materials, once they are assembled together, can be used to blow up a truck or an armored vehicle killing all those inside.

This nightmare scenario, however, is that soon these same terrorists groups may be able to smuggle nuclear materials into a European or American city and detonate a portable device capable of murder on a much larger scale. Nuclear technology is now accelerating, and the size of the bombs more compact and more easily concealed.

In the meantime, Khan is a hero in his country for having produced an 'Islamic bomb' to rival those, not only in India, but also in Israel. Although Pakistan leader and military strongman Pervez Musharraf made Khan publicly apologize for his actions once they had been discovered, Khan faces no further criminal charges. He continues to live a quiet life of retirement in one of Islamabad's suburbs and cannot be questioned by the CIA, or any other outsiders, concerning his involvement in what has become one of the most dangerous terrorist activities in our time.

NORTH KOREA

One of the hot spots in the world of nuclear technology is the small Asian country North Korea. They have a determined nuclear program and negotiations with leading world powers have failed to curb their intentions of producing nuclear weapons. It is believed by many that they already have on hand a small arsenal of nuclear weapons. To make matters even more serious, the North Koreans have

recently tested their latest missile systems, including their new long-range missiles which they claim will reach targets thousands of miles away, including the west coast of America.

The Bush administration has considered making a preemptive strike against the North Korean nuclear facilities to eliminate the growing threat. A news column submitted by the *Associated Press* from Seoul a few months ago appeared in the *Daily News* under the caption, "North Korea Warns U.S. on Preemptive Strike," suggesting the defiant attitude of the country's current regime. We quote in part, "North Korea suggested that it had the ability to launch a preemptive attack on the United States. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said the North had built atomic weapons to counter the U.S. nuclear threat. 'Preemptive strike is not the monopoly of the United States,' the unnamed spokesman said in a report in the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Last week, the communist country warned that it had the right to launch a preemptive strike, saying it would strengthen its war footing before South Korea-U.S. military exercises scheduled for this weekend. Pyongyang's spokesman said it would be a wise step for the United States to cooperate on nuclear issues with North Korea in the same way it did with India. It is rare for North Korea to mention its nuclear capabilities in such an explicit manner. The communist state usually refers to its 'nuclear deterrent force.'"

LONG-RANGE MISSILES

Writing for the *Los Angeles Times* (July 5,2006), staff writers Bruce Wallace and Barbara Demick

reported the serious escalation in North Korea's nuclear technology and weapons program. Their article appeared under the title, "In Defiance, North Korea Fires Missiles." In part, the report from Seoul said, "Defying broad international pressure, North Korea test-fired at least six missiles into the Sea of Japan today, including a long-range Taepodong 2 that has been the focus of tension because of its purported ability to reach U.S. territory.

"The barrage of missiles, which started about the same time as the space shuttle Discovery's Independence Day launch from Cape Canaveral, Fla., was 'provocative behavior' from a country that had been warned against breaking its six-year-old moratorium on long-range missile tests. 'The United States strongly condemns these missile launches and North Korea's unwillingness to heed calls of restraint from the international community,' the White House said in a statement. It said the tests demonstrate North Korea's intent to intimidate other states by developing missiles of increasingly longer ranges."

IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

During the past several years, by persuasion or coercion, the Bush administration has been unable to convince Iran to discontinue its nuclear program. In the meantime, the nuclear threat continues to increase, and the prospects of reaching a peaceful solution continue to decrease. The United States is thus faced with the prospect of developing a new strategy to end Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Many believe President Bush's approach to dealing with Iran's nuclear program has allowed Tehran

to outwit the United States government in the game of brinkmanship, serving to gain much needed time for them to make tremendous progress in their technology and quest for nuclear weapons. According to these, the Bush administration has been preoccupied with the war in Iraq that is going badly, and has refused to conduct direct negotiations with the Iran government. Iran continues to defy not only the United States, but also America's partners in Britain, France, and Germany, representing the European Union, who have also made little progress in their negotiations with Tehran.

Even more disturbing is Iran's dismissal of the United Nations Security Council resolution to end its uranium enrichment program. Tehran's governing clergy is counting on Russia and China, with their substantial oil and gas interests in Iran, to prevent any meaningful economic sanctions from being imposed upon it by any future resolutions.

Others believe that the Bush administration has fallen prey to Iran's ploys and, as a result, Washington should perhaps offer Iran the option of conducting direct negotiations, not only with the United States, but also with its partners in Europe. Therefore, a negotiated settlement could be met that satisfies the interests of both the United States and Iran, while also supporting those of Russia and China.

HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

The United States was the first nation to use the atomic bomb during warfare. They were used twice during the closing days of World War II in its war with Japan. The first atomic bomb, called "Little Boy," was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6,1945,

destroying approximately 90% of the city. It is estimated that the number of those initially killed by the bomb, together with its extensive and associated aftereffects—which were calculated at the end of 1945—was approximately 145,000, mostly civilians. The second bomb, called "Fat Boy," was dropped on Nagasaki three days later with an estimated death toll of 74,000. It is difficult to calculate the exact casualties because of continuing radiation effects many years later.

UNIMAGINABLE DESTRUCTION

The role of the bombings in Japan's surrender, which occurred a few days later, as well as the effects and justification of the use of atomic bombs, has been the subject of much debate ever since. This military action began the nuclear age, and the realization of the immense and previously unimaginable power of the atom that had been demonstrated.

In the years following the end of the war, several governments began to obtain nuclear secrets and the new technology started an 'arms race.' The international community began to focus increasing attention on how to contain the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation.

NONPROLIFIRATION TREATY

Efforts were made to draw up an international treaty that dealt with the threat of spreading nuclear technology, and the Nonproliferation Treaty was ultimately agreed upon. The treaty also sought to promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and to achieve disarmament. Opened for signature in 1968, the treaty entered into force March 5,1970, and was signed in Washington, London, and Moscow.

Five nations were permitted to have nuclear weapons, the only ones possessing such weapons at the time the treaty was opened for signature. The five were the United States, Soviet Union (rights and obligations have been assumed by Russia), Great Britain, France, and China. These same members of the 'Nuclear Club' are also the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Initially 59 other countries also signed the treaty, which has since grown to 187. As a testament to the significance of the treaty, more countries have ratified it than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreements.

MEMBER STATE OBLIGATIONS

These five member states agreed to not transfer nuclear technology or weapons to any other country. Nonmember states also agreed to not develop this technology for weapons. However, India, Pakistan, and Israel have since developed nuclear weapons, but have declined to sign the treaty. North Korea ratified and was a party to the treaty from December 12,1985 until April 10, 2003, when they withdrew. Iran is a signatory to the treaty but has ignored the demand to stop its uranium enrichment program, which is believed to be a cover for the development of nuclear weapons.

As an added safeguard to the treaty, it was further agreed to set up the International Atomic Energy Agency to verify compliance with the treaty through inspections to be conducted by the newly established agency.

THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE

The dim prospects for achieving peace in the world are increasingly gloomy, and there appears to be no

ready solution at hand. However, out of all the violence and chaos that is being experienced by the present generation there is soon to emerge an era of genuine and lasting peace. This is the promise of God's Word, but it will not come to pass because man will have finally triumphed over his pride and selfishness. God will establish Divine control over the nations and its people under the administration of Christ's kingdom of Truth and righteousness.

We are given the assurance in the final verse of Isaiah's prophecy that this time of blessing for the world will come to pass in due time. He writes, "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously." (Isa. 24:23) In this scripture, Isaiah makes reference to Jerusalem which was the capital city of Judea, and also to Mount Zion which was a place of prominence on which the government of Israel was centered. The promise of God to reign in Zion points to his ultimate control over the affairs of his human family.

MOUNT ZION

In the prophet's reference to Mount Zion, he says elsewhere, "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out

of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."—Isa. 2:2,3

We read further, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." (Ps. 2:6) The psalmist then explains that God's king, who is Christ Jesus, will dash the nations to pieces "like a potter's vessel." (vs. 9) The Prophet Obadiah also writes, "Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." (Obad. 17) And again he says, "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."—vs. 21

Jesus and his entire church are shown to be together on mount Zion—a term that is used in the Scriptures to denote the exalted status of Christ and his church. "I looked, and, behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and as the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb."—Rev. 14:1-4, *New American Standard Bible*

A NEW WORLD ORDER

When we study God's plan for the future, we are inspired with hope and courage, but a hope that is based upon human plans and accomplishments is indefinite and weak. It becomes apparent that Isaiah's prophecy of a reeling, staggering world is being fulfilled before our very eyes. (chap. 24) This is encouraging to those whose hopes are centered, not on preserving the old world order, nor in a new world order that is established by man. The only hope is in the plan of God and the establishment of his kingdom. Let us continue to pray for that kingdom, knowing that when our prayers are answered there will be security, peace, and joy for all, and that all will then "call upon the name of the LORD to serve him with one consent," because they will have come under the influence of God's message of Truth, and peace, and love.—Zeph. 3:9 ■

"A long chain of promises in the Old Testament, and continuing in the New Testament, reveal that Jesus would establish a worldwide government in the earth, and that it would be through the agencies of this government that God's promised blessings of life would be extended to the people. One of the promises of Jesus' birth declares of this great One that 'of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.'—Isa. 9:6,7

"The wonderful manner in which world conditions today are fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible gives us every reason to believe that we are standing at the threshold of the long-promised Messianic kingdom."—excerpt, God Has a Plan