The Corruption of Riches

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days."
—James 5:1-3

IN THIS TEXT THE APOSTLE looks down the stream of time to our day, and foresees the consternation and woe that had been prophesied to accompany the closing events of the last days. It is a time of great trouble, and it occurs at the end of the present Gospel Age. (Dan.12:1; Matt. 24:21,22) God's judgments are directed especially toward those in financial power, and to those who have selfishly misused their wealth. They have 'heaped treasure together for the last days,' and earthly treasures can no longer save them from the judgments that would come upon them. His words ring true to those who are living during the present time, and are witnessing the great

upheaval that is taking place throughout the world today.

James stresses that judgment will be particularly brought to bear upon the financial institutions, and those who have accumulated great wealth. They have previously controlled the economy of nations, and they will be affected most during this tumultuous time. He describes it as a time when gold and silver, as well as many other kinds of earthly riches, will no longer have any lasting, or significant, value.

Many students of the Bible believe that we are now living in these prophetic last days, and are able to observe firsthand the deteriorating conditions that are being manifest all about us. We wait on the Lord's direction concerning these important matters, and continue to watch the foretold prophetic signs of the times that are destined to come upon all the earth.

THE LAST DAYS FORETOLD

Old Testament prophets have written about the great time of trouble that would come upon all nations at the end of the age. These prophets of God were moved by the Holy Spirit, and wrote of these great events many centuries ago. (II Pet. 1:21) They described it as a time when God would vindicate his vengeance upon all earthly institutions which have been founded on pride and selfishness. This foretold trouble has come about suddenly, and violently, upon the nations during these closing years of the present Gospel Age. These events have been described in symbolic language, and foretell the great time of trouble that

will bring this age to a close. The nations and its institutions will be gathered together, and none will escape the final judgments.

THE PROPHET ISAIAH

Concerning this time, the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "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. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames." (Isa. 13:4-8) Although Isaiah wrote these words many centuries ago, we recognize the prophetic signs that speak of the events of our day.

A TIME OF TRAVAIL

This day is the time when God's vengeance is being poured upon the nations, and is described as travail that comes upon a woman who is about to deliver her child. The Apostle Paul says, "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 escape. 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. 5:2-6

The Lord's people who are living in these last days, according to prophecy, are intently watching the events of our day unfold. They do not remain in darkness as do others in the world. The spasms of trouble, that are recognized by many to have begun with World War I, have increased in intensity since that time, as foretold. It has come upon the world suddenly, and man has been unable to change the course of events. The deliverance and birth of the new order of society will, under the authority of Christ's kingdom, bring about the long-promised blessings to all mankind.

A TIME OF JUDGMENT

The judgments that have been directed especially toward the rich, and the miseries that are associated with these judgments, have been prophesied to come upon them in these last days of the present world order. This order has been established on selfishness and pride. There are many long-standing and unresolved issues that require God's severe judgments upon all wrongdoing and unrighteousness. Man's selfishness, and desire to gain wealth at the expense of his less fortunate neighbor, is not a new event. These selfish traits can be traced throughout the history of mankind, but there is particular emphasis on this judgment that must be brought to bear against the financial segment of society in the last days of the present age. In our theme text, James foretold that great distress

would come upon this class of wealthy who have heaped treasures together for the last days. Corruption, fraud, scandal, and greed may be found in many high places where profits may be increased, and treasures heaped together for the impending time of trouble.

OUTSOURCING U.S. JOBS

In recent years it has been noted that a corporate revolution is gaining momentum within the financial and business sectors of the country. Businesses originating in the United States are searching for ways to gain greater profits, and new methods are being sought. The solution is to relocate higher paying jobs and to send them to offshore sites where there is an abundance of eager and cheaper labor. The goal is to make more money by sending these jobs to countries which have a lower income base. What was once secure and long-term career positions for many American workers has now turned out to be a loss of those jobs. This practice has created turmoil among the increasing number of employees affected, and it is beginning to have a profound impact within the financial and corporate sectors of the United States economy. Outsourcing is becoming a crisis among the American workers who are being left behind.

The concept of outsourcing U.S. jobs began a few years ago with U.S. firms laying off software programmers and call center workers, and in turn hiring cheaper employees overseas. This practice has now grown to encompass nearly every kind of work that is normally done by computer operators. This includes a broad scope of business activities including

copy editing, financial analysis, tax preparation, and other types of work. Voice mail has also reduced the need for receptionists, while word processors have transformed the traditional role of secretaries. Outsourcing is beginning to have a major influence on reshaping the typical business office by eliminating many older jobs, and redefining others.

To the employees of these various kinds of businesses that are being affected, outsourcing means the sudden and permanent threat of losing one's ability to make a living, while at the same time knowing that someone else in some far-off place is doing the same job for a fraction of the income they had been receiving. This has helped contribute to the poor economic climate that is facing the United States at the present time.

U.S. COMPANIES WITH NEW ADDRESSES IN INDIA

In an article published by the *Los Angeles Times* a few months ago (August 29, 2004), David Streitfeld wrote about the disruption that is now taking place within the United States corporate world. His column was entitled "Office of Tomorrow Has an Address in India," with a sub-heading: "U.S. companies that discreetly embrace outsourcing find workers—accountants, typists, editors—who are eager and talented."

His report focuses on a particular corporation called "Office Tiger" which is located in Madras, India. In his opening remarks he makes very clear the seriousness of the present trend to outsource American jobs to offshore locations. "Task by task, function by function, the American office is being hollowed out and reconstituted in places like this, a

makeshift facility on the sixth floor of a shopping arcade. Office Tiger, one of the most prominent and aggressive of a new breed of outsourcing companies, has hired 2,000 Indians, most of them young and all of them relentlessly gung-ho. They work as typists, researchers, librarians, claims processors, proofreaders, accountants, and graphic designers."

CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES

The American corporate world has also been rocked by scandal among some of its chief executive officers in recent years. This has occurred within many top companies in the country, and reveals corruption and fraud that has occurred in important positions in the business and banking industries, as well as others. A major scandal has become front-page news recently that corroborates the miseries and woe that James foretold would inevitably come upon those who occupy high positions in these last days. An article appeared in a recent issue of *Time* magazine (December 13, 2004), that reports the growing seriousness of the oil-for-food scandal that involved the Saddam Hussein regime of Iraq. The article is entitled "The Fight of His Life. " The subcaption for the article is, "Kofi Annan built a reputation as the world's most trusted diplomat, but the oil-for-food scandal has riled U.S. critics. Is his job in jeopardy?"

UNITED NATIONS' SECRETARY-GENERAL EMBROILED IN SCANDAL

Kofi Annan is serving in his second term as secretary-general of the United Nations, which is headquartered in New York City. This is a very highly coveted position as one of the world's most

highly esteemed diplomats. Although he has held this position for several years he now finds himself embroiled in a scandal involving the misuse of large sums of money that were being administered by the United Nations under his jurisdiction. This took place during the years leading up to the present military conflict in Iraq. The controversy has become so very serious that it may force him to resign his position at the United Nations. Johanna Mc Geary, a contributing author of *Time* magazine, describes the developing scene in the above mentioned article:

"The sonorous voice is familiar around the world. No matter what the crisis of the day, Kofi Annan's soft baritone always manages to convey a sense of imperturbable gravitas. Yet his calm must have been sorely tested last week when the U.N. Secretary-General learned more about the latest trouble lapping at his door. Annan had gathered a few top aides at a private site to discuss the scandal over the U.N.'s management of the oil-for-food program during the reign of Iraq's Saddam Hussein."

SCANDAL INVOLVES ANNAN'S SON

The report in *Time* magazine tells what happened next:

"In the middle of the discussion, a staff member's cell phone rang with unsettling news: another story was about to break, this one about suspicious payments to Annan's son Kojo from the Swiss company's Cotecna Inspection S.A. which won an oil-for-food contract in 1998. Annan, a man famously immune to anger, allowed 'a look of surprise and dismay to cross his face,' says someone who was

there, 'and his jaw started clenching and unclenching.' Then he said very quietly, 'Let's get on with the agenda.' Speaking to reporters about the implication of his son in the U.N.'s oil-for-food program, a few days after the revelations about his son started pouring out, he addressed the mess with his characteristic cool: 'Naturally, I was disappointed and surprised. I understand the perception problem for the U.N., the perception of conflict of interest and wrongdoing.'"

A United Nations (CNN) report for November 30, 2004, concerning the Secretary-General's son, stated, "Kojo Annan received money for consulting work done in Africa for Geneva, Switzerland-based Cotecna Inspection, which was hired to verify whether food, medicine, and other goods entering Iraq were on the approval list under the $64 billion oil-for-food program. The United Nations previously said the payments stopped after Kojo Annan left the firm in 1997. Earlier this year, it revised that statement, saying the younger Annan received money through the end of 1998 under an agreement not to compete with Cotecna in West Africa. Cotecna had said the payments to Annan were halted when the firm won the contract to inspect oil-for-food humanitarian shipments starting in December 1998. But late last week the United Nations said Kojo Annan had received payments as recently as February 2004 under the non-compete agreement."

As difficult as it must have been for Kofi Annan to acknowledge his son's involvement in the growing oil-for-food scandal, which has already threatened his own position in the United Nations, he nevertheless took the opportunity to further speak to

reporters about the long-term crisis that had been festering between his office in New York, and the White House in Washington, D.C. In his statement (*Time* magazine, December 13, 2004), he said: "I understand the perception problem for the United Nations, the perception of conflict of interest and wrongdoing."

THE PERCEPTION PROBLEM

The 'perception problem' to which the Secretary-General referred involves, first of all, a conflict of interest. It is public knowledge that there has been a conflict of interest between the present United States administration and the international body over a period of several years. It is a long-standing conflict that has existed between Annan and the United Nations on one side of the issue, and United States President Bush, together with the Republican administration, on the other.

The second point of reference Annan made to reporters concerned wrongdoing. This was the determination of the United States to go to war against Iraq without receiving United Nations approval beforehand. The result of this perception has been to target the United Nations, and to expose its inefficiency and bias.

This situation became increasingly serious when the Security Council of the United Nations refused to grant the Bush administration the authority to go to war against Iraq. Diplomatic channels from the United States government, which involved Secretary of State Colin Powell, had failed to gain the support of the United Nations. In recent months Annan and Bush exchanged heated comments over

the matter at an important meeting which was held in the United Nations General Assembly. The disagreement was over the United States' aggressive policy and subsequent military invasion of Iraq. These disagreements gained even more momentum when Annan questioned the United States right to conduct a major offensive against the Iraqi people in the battle for Fallujah in late 2004.

CALLS FOR ANNAN'S RESIGNATION

The oil-for-food controversy has involved highly positioned people in various world centers, and has mushroomed into a full scale scandal. It has recently become the subject of five separate congressional investigations. All eyes are being trained on Annan and his office's role in the matter, and his resignation is being openly called for. The *Times* article (December 13, 2004), in connection with calls for Annan's resignation, reports on a public hearing that took place in which this matter was discussed. "Norm Coleman, a Minnesota Republican chairing one of the congressional inquiries, wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* last week that Kofi Annan should resign, because the most extensive fraud in the history of the United Nations occurred on his watch."

Although President Bush, along with members of his Republican cabinet, are powerless to remove the Secretary-General before his second term of office expires in 2006, there has been much in the way of political maneuvering in diplomatic circles both in Washington and New York, as well as other places, to get the most mileage out of the scandal.

This has been followed by the recent resignation of the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, John Danforth.

THE U.N. INTRODUCES OIL-FOR-FOOD

In 1996, the United Nations introduced an oil-for-food program amounting to $64 billion dollars which would allow Saddam Hussein's Iraq regime to sell its own oil resources and use the profits for their own humanitarian purposes. This was to include such items as food, medicines, and many other vital commodities that would, in turn, alleviate the suffering and distress of the Iraqi people who had endured many years of sanctions following the first Gulf War. These sanctions had been imposed largely at the instigation of the previous American government.

The concept was destined to failure from the start, and the program was marked by mismanagement and fraud under the United Nations' management. This occurred during the present Secretary-General's administration. Although the United Nations was in charge of overseeing the huge transactions, from both sides of the table, the Iraqi government under Hussein managed to divert more than $20 billion dollars of this money to prop up his failing regime.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

In the previously quoted *Time* magazine article, written by Johanna McCreary, the seriousness of the situation is revealed from records that have been found in war-torn Iraq. "Records found in Iraq allege that government officials and others, notably in France, Russia, and China; oil companies,

including American giants; and individuals, among them the senior U.N. official appointed to run the program, received preferential deals to buy Iraq oil at below market price. Many have denied it, and there is no hint of personal impropriety by Annan. Much of Saddam's stolen revenues came from oil sales to Jordan, Turkey and Syria, which the United States government, and the United Nations Security Council, knew about. Should members of Congress resign, asks Senator Carl Levin, because they turned a blind eye to illegal sales Saddam made with their full knowledge?"

THE POLITICAL FALLOUT

The oil-for-food program, and the conflict in Iraq has had a profound and unsettling impact on one of the world's most important peace diplomats. An unmistakable shadow has been cast over Annan's career. During his first term of office there was little that stood in the way of his success, and it was a time when there were fewer scandalous and divisive problems. He has been openly challenged and criticized, along with French and Russian officials, for not supporting the United States invasion of Iraq. This has led to an unfortunate weakening and diminished authority within the United Nations organization to keep the peace in the world, which is a fundamental platform of their charter.

A NEW AND PURE LANGUAGE

The signs of the end of the age are all about us today. After God's righteous indignation has been poured out upon the assembled nations and unjust institutions erected by man, he will then turn to

the people with a "pure language" that is based on truth and righteousness. The present social structure will be consumed by the "fire" of his jealousy. (Zeph. 3:8) All injustice and corruption will be done away with, and man will be reconciled to perfection during the future times of restitution under the administration of our exalted Lord, and his faithful bride class. "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) All unrighteousness will be done away with when mankind learns the pure language of Truth. It will fill the hearts and minds of the people. This language will turn the sinner away from the doctrines of men and devils, and the idols of filthy lucre. We look forward to this wonderful promise and the time when Zephaniah's prophecy will bring blessings to all mankind. At that time they will turn their hearts to God with a sincere desire to know and serve him. The 'pure language' will dispel the veil of darkness, ignorance, and superstition that is presently cast over all people.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

In Paul's first letter to Timothy he points out the destructive influences and sorrowful results that are often experienced by those who seek after earthly riches. He advises that "godliness with contentment is great gain," and reminds us that "we brought nothing into this world," and will take nothing with us when we leave. We should learn to be satisfied with those things that we have received by God's grace. (I Tim. 6:6-8) "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many

foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced them-selves through with many sorrows." (vss. 9,10) The apostle has been directing our attention to the cor-ruption of riches, and the awful results that may come upon those who continue to strive for it.

THE TEMPTATION OF RICHES

Earthly riches may be evaluated from many standpoints, and does not always refer to actual monetary wealth. The good things of this life may center around some particular talent or ability that one may possess. These treasures may include such things as the honor of men, or political and business influences. Others may struggle to obtain social standing, or a higher education that may become an idol or treasure of the heart. All such tempta-tions must be put away by those who seek to know our Lord and to serve him.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."—Matt. 19:23,24 ■