

Winter 2016 Newsletter

Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia

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Hope

*“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.”
Haggai 2: 6,7*

The news is chilling! Paris is stunned by terrorist attacks that kill at least 130 people and wound hundreds more! In San Bernardino, California, 14 are dead and more than a dozen wounded, in the 355th mass shooting in the United States in the year 2015. The Paris bombers and the San Bernardino killers were clearly on a mission, being well prepared for their attack, heavily armed and equipped with explosive materials.

The so-called Arab Spring continues to fester in the Middle East. In Egypt dissatisfaction with the rule of the Moslem Brotherhood is causing unrest. Syria is bordering on anarchy. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS, has spread terror throughout the Middle East. With an army of up to 30,000 fighters, ISIS holds the cities of Mosul and Ramadi in Iraq, as well as much of Syria. Fear of them is spreading to the countries of Europe. In the aftermath of the bombing and shooting rampage by ISIS in Paris, the

United Kingdom and Germany have joined the U.S. led campaign against ISIS.

The tiny nation of Israel is the favorite target of Jihadists and has suffered terrorist bombings for decades, but they have been sharply criticized by the world community for any efforts they have made to protect their people and their cities from further attacks. However, after the September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Trade Towers in New York City, the cry went up to stamp out terrorism. The U.S. did not hesitate to go to war, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq. But after years of war, terrorism is still very much with us and growing in incidence and intensity. Syrian refugees fleeing the savagery of ISIS in their homeland pose a moral dilemma for the nations. Are they all truly people in distress, needing resettlement, or are there terrorists hiding among them, seeking to infiltrate the countries which agree to give them asylum?

The economic systems of the world are on the verge of collapse. The world's debt is beyond amendment. Many countries are either bankrupt or on the brink. This year's Presidential hopefuls believe they have the answer, as did all those who held the office before them. Still the world is in turmoil, and death, terror, upheaval, uncertainty, and war continue as before.



Will mankind ever have peace and security? Centuries ago the angels who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, declared "Tidings of great joy to all people." They sang that there would be "Peace on earth, good will to men" (Luke 2:14). Was that an empty promise? Has God forgotten us?

Since that time there have been centuries of trouble, but the Divine Word shows that the trouble of our day was foreseen and would be unparalleled. The Scriptures not only contain prophecies of the trouble, but also offer substantial hope beyond the fire and terror. God's Word predicted that a great increase of knowledge would come at the end of the age. This would be accompanied by an unprecedented "time of trouble" (Daniel 12:1, 4). During this period, Joel 3:10 tells us, "the weak say I am strong." Just so, today a few—"the weak"—hold the former world leaders at their mercy. The world is today held hostage by religious and political terrorism.

Jesus is recorded (Matthew 24: 21, 22) as telling his disciples that this tribulation would be of such magnitude that if it were not cut short no flesh would be saved. We have reached such a capability in our day. Since the use of the atomic bomb at the end of the Second World War, the subsequent arms race of the Cold War brought the fear of world annihilation. Nine countries today have nuclear capabilities.

While the Superpowers have entered into treaties limiting the production of nuclear arms, other countries such as North Korea, Pakistan, and India have developed atomic weapons and are not part of any non-proliferation treaty. Lately, Iran has been working on developing the materials which will give them the ability to make a bomb. Atomic weapons in Iran's arsenal pose a grave danger to the

Middle East, Israel in particular, and to the whole world. An atomic war could wipe out life on the earth.

The Bible says that earth's troubles will be so terrible that the hearts of the people will be "failing them for fear, and looking after those things which are coming on the earth." (Luke 21:26) Within man's present institutions, political, economic, and social distress is rampant. Even the age-old citadel of religion, the Catholic Church, has been corroded by the exposure of child sex-abuse cases which have been covered up for decades. In the face of the horrible dilemma in which the world now finds itself, is optimism still possible? Repeated failures of leaders to solve the world's problems should teach us that we need Divine intervention.

If the trouble was foreseen, was a solution also provided? Yes! As a loving Father, God is deeply grieved by man's inhumanity to man. Though mankind is hardly deserving of it, "God so loved the world that he gave His only Begotten Son" that the world should be saved by Him (John 3:16). But, Jesus walked the earth two thousand years ago, and since his time, even the churches established in his name have failed to bring peace to the earth. The world has continued to suffer sickness, bigotry, wars, and death. Psalm 76:10 states that the "wrath of man" shall one day praise God. But, when will that be?

Divine wisdom knew that once sin entered the world, it was necessary for man to understand all its ramifications in order to be able to appreciate righteousness. When man has reached the point when he acknowledges his inability to fix his world, God will intervene and establish His own Kingdom which will fulfill the legitimate "desire of all nations," and the earth will be filled with his glory (Haggai 2:7; Matthew 6:10). Then will the long-awaited "Peace on earth, good will toward men" become a reality.

Isaiah 35 tells us what God's kingdom will be like. After telling of the revitalization of the earth, the restoration of sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and vigor to the lame, it ends with the joyful refrain, "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Peace, life, economic security, vigorous health and freedom from fear are the sure promises of God's Word. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

But what would such a Kingdom mean to those who have died? The Bible tells us that the dead will all be raised to enjoy its benefits, because Jesus died "a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6; John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15). All those who died in war or terrorist bombings, or in accidents, or by disease, or simply old age—these "ransomed of the Lord"—will return to be reunited with their loved ones. (1 Corinthians 15:22) There will be life in its fullness, everlasting life, in perfect health for all the willing and obedient. This was secured by Jesus' death on the cross as a Ransom for Adam and his entire race. "And he is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins: and not for ours only, **but also for the sins of the whole world**" (1 John 2:2).

How can we be certain that these promises of the Bible are more than merely platitudes? A look at the Bible's prophetic record should inspire confidence in its testimony. Micah 5:2 foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. He was. Daniel 9:24-27 forecasts the date on which Jesus would begin his ministry, when he would die [the "sacrifice and oblation cease"], and when the first Gentile would be accepted into the church [after one week, 7 years, during which he would "confirm the covenant" with Israel]. From the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah to build the walls of Jerusalem, 69 weeks of days [a day for a year] equals 483 years—454 B.C. + 483yrs = 29 A.D.[the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, see Luke 3:1]

Isaiah 53:1-3 foretold that Jesus would be despised and rejected. The religious leaders of his day actually plotted Jesus' death! Psalm 41:9 says that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend. Judas Iscariot was one of his twelve apostles. Zechariah 9:9 tells of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem riding upon an ass. Psalm 22 is a prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion, and Psalm, 16:10 says he would not be left in death. Jesus was resurrected.

The nation of Israel had God's exclusive favor for 1845 years. God said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). God also told them that if they were unfaithful he would scatter them among the nations (Deuteronomy 4:27). Just before his death, Jesus declared Israel's house [nation] desolate and the Jews were scattered among the Gentiles for nearly 2,000 years. However, God also promised to bring them back to their own land and restore them (Zephaniah 3:16-20; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Jeremiah 31:29-36). Isaiah 40:2 even indicated

when that would be: "...she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins." The word "double" has the meaning of a duplicate half. If Israel had exclusive favor for 1845 years that means their rejection would last 1845 years. From the date of Jesus' death, 33 A.D. + 1845 = 1878. In 1878, the sanctions against the Jews were lifted and they were allowed to buy land in Palestine. Their first settlement was called Petah Tikva, which means "door of hope." Their return had begun.

With such a record of reliability, how can we doubt any promise made by God. The very turmoil of our times assures us that we are upon the threshold of God's Kingdom. When the current time of trouble has run its course to accomplish all of God's will, then His Kingdom will take complete control of earth's affairs and there will be a resurrection of the dead.

Although it is hard to conceive of a world in which men will no longer die, such a time is truly coming. We have the promise of God's Word and, just as the prophecies of trouble have been fulfilled, so the promises of blessing are assured. The summation of this promise is found in Revelation 21:3-5: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."

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