

Your Land Shall Not Yield Its Produce

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Forerunner, "Prophecy Watch," December 1995

About forty years before Israel entered the Promised Land, God foretold what would happen when the people turned from His commandments and way of life. Seven hundred years later, this prophecy, found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, began to come to pass when in 721-718 BC, Israel was overrun by the Assyrians and her people taken captive to the cities of the Medes (II Kings 17:5-6). The prophecy predicted that Israel would remain under this punishment for seven prophetic times or 2520 years (Leviticus 26:18). This period lapsed in AD 1800-1803, and true to the prophecy, Great Britain and the United States began their rise to prominence on the world scene during those years.

In the ensuing years, the peoples of Joseph enjoyed the tremendous benefits of the blessings of Abraham. The British and American navies ruled the seas, and their armed forces made war and kept the peace worldwide. Between them, Ephraim and Manasseh produced more industrially and agriculturally than the rest of the world combined. In short, they were the envy of the world.

Throughout this period, these nations were also fairly sound morally. Although scandal, immorality and injustice plagued them from time to time, the majority of the people possessed sound values and solid character. However, when these nations, America especially, became more involved in international power and politics during World War I, outside influences—mostly negative—began to erode their national characters.

One look at America and Britain today, though, shows how rapid and disastrous our falls have been. Our nations are ruled by men and women of deceit and chicanery. Business leaders fight and cheat for every penny at anyone else's expense. Sports and entertainment stars—often the most immoral and wicked among them—are idols to millions. Perversions of every stripe are paraded before us on television as normal and legitimate. Maybe worst of all, religion based on the eternal principles found in the Bible has been rendered impotent by a tolerant, non-judgmental, indiscriminate public.

The blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26 still apply. Britain and America have forsaken the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they have attributed their prosperity to their own ingenuity, strength and wisdom. Our peoples have grown fat, lazy and self-indulgent. The Americans and British have taken up the practices of the nations around them, and these things God hates. He promises to allow the curses of such activities to descend upon our nations as well-deserved punishment.

A Curse Upon Agriculture

One of the first of these curses deals with agriculture, the basic industry of any stable nation. God promises:

But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, . . . you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. . . . And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit. (Leviticus 26:14, 16, 20)

America, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa began with economies based primarily on agriculture. Once the agricultural foundation was stable, other industries and commerce could flourish and grow. But even when a nation is considered an industrial, commercial or technological giant, if it cannot feed its citizens, it will quickly lose its power and status. Thus, a blow to a nation's breadbasket is often crippling and sometimes fatal.

The American Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Agriculture report that 63.7 percent of American workers in 1850 were involved in agriculture. By 1992, however, that work force had shrunk to only 2.5 percent. Since 1940, the number of farms has dropped from 6 million to 2 million, while the average size of a farm has increased from 174 to 473 acres. These statistics indicate that American farms have evolved from family-run businesses to corporate-run industries.

America still produces tremendous amounts of livestock, poultry, grain, fruit, vegetables, nuts, eggs and textiles. We lead the world in wheat and corn exports and are second in rice exports, as of 1992. If weather, insects and soil conditions cooperate, this nation can still feed the world.

But what if they do not? What happens if the U.S. suffers a few years of drought or, conversely, inundation? What occurs if farmers have to combat locusts, weevils or other pests in successive years? Where will we be if our reserves spoil, burn or simply run out? Could there be famine in America?

For the moment, American agriculture is stable, but signs of future problems are increasing:

- » Wheat yields fell 10-15 bushels an acre in Oklahoma this past summer due to a mild winter, a dry spring and an unfortunate wet season just before the harvest that caused root rot and other diseases (U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 23, 1995). This problem also hit Kansas, the Dakotas and other grain-producing states.
- » A severe drought hit the northeast in 1995, causing agricultural officials to estimate crop yields down 30 to 50 percent. Wight County, Virginia, lost 80 percent of its peanut crop, and the vegetable crop in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and New Jersey were also hit hard.
- » Wheat stockpiles are shrinking. "Anything below 500 million bushels [of wheat] in storage means the supply is tight," said Martin Foreman, a grain specialist affiliated with the Illinois Farm Bureau (*The Journal of Commerce*, June 27, 1995). This year's stockpile, the lowest in 22 years, is only 443 million bushels (U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 21, 1995). This compares to almost 2 billion bushels in 1986.
- » The corn supply is also expected to drop to 748 million bushels, about half of this year's level. In 1987, U.S. reserves of corn hit nearly 5 billion bushels (*The Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 1995).
- » Gray leaf spot, a fungal disease, hit cornfields in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri this summer, causing the U.S. Department of Agriculture to forecast a 20 percent reduction in corn production in 1995 (August 18, 1995).
- » American fruit crops were generally down in 1994-95. Apples were down 1 percent; grapes, 3 percent; pears, 8 percent; peaches, 1 percent; cherries, 35 percent; strawberries, 7 percent; and citrus, 11 percent (U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 23, 1995).
- » World grain reserves are also being reduced. In Europe stockpiles have fallen from 17.16 to 6.28 million tons in just one year. In South America and Africa, grain output has fallen over the last 10 years and the Russian grain harvest is thought to be the lowest

in 25 years. In fact, the 1995 world harvest forecast fell below the 1.8 billion tons required to meet consumption levels (*The New Federalist*, August 21, 1995).

These random reports do not portend immediate disaster, but together they show how fragile our food supply is. One devastating year of crop failure, floods, droughts, disease or insect infestation could wipe out supplies and cause serious food shortages. If this were to happen over large parts of the globe, worldwide famine would follow.

Scarcity During Prosperity

The Third Seal is described in Revelation 6:5-6:

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat [a day's ration] for a denarius [a day's wage], and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

This is a picture of scarcity of grain during a time when olive oil and wine are abundant. The grain must be measured very carefully, and it is sold at about twelve times its normal price. At the same time, growers are commanded not to reduce the production of oil and wine, items which most would consider to be luxuries. It seems that the common folk would spend all their living on grain to fend off starvation and have nothing left over for the finer things, while the rich would continue to live comfortably and make money on the inflated grain prices. The Third Seal describes scarcity in the midst of prosperity; the rich get richer as the poor get poorer.

Such a situation is not hard to imagine in our fast-paced, greedy world. Amos shows the rich "[selling] the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals" (Amos 2:6). Many businessmen have no qualms about taking advantage of a situation, as long as they are guaranteed to make a profit. We should not be surprised when food prices escalate sharply after a mediocre harvest.

God is not capricious; He does nothing without a purpose. He says that He sends these droughts, floods, diseases, insects and famines to warn us and cause us to return to Him (Amos 4:6-9). Our God wants us to receive blessings, not curses, but sometimes He must get our attention and point us in the right direction when we go astray.

But Israel is stubborn and rebellious (Jeremiah 5:23). The people fail to see that their sins have caused these curses to fall upon them (verses 24-25). In fact, Israel *loves* to dwell in sin (verses 26-31)! Thus, God must punish them to make them obedient to His laws—laws that will make them prosperous and happy.

Hunger is a method that hits home quickly, and God will try to use this curse effectively:

Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the short measure that is an abomination? Shall I count pure those with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore I will also make you sick by striking you, by making you desolate because of your sins. You shall eat, but not be satisfied; hunger shall be in your midst. . . . You shall sow, but not reap; you shall

tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; and make sweet wine, but not drink wine. (Micah 6:10-15)

Do Not Worry

These scenarios are not ones we look forward to, but because we live in this evil world among the descendants of Joseph, we should expect them. Some survivalist and conservative writers, who see the handwriting on the wall, are recommending that their subscribers stockpile a year's supply of food for each member of their families. The ant stores food for the lean times of winter (Proverbs 6:6-8). Such an action, of course, is each person's personal decision.

But we have a God in heaven who promises to provide for us (Psalm 37:19; 146:7). Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, 32-33:

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

So take the advice of our Elder Brother: Do not worry about the coming scarcity. Keep working toward growing and overcoming and putting on God's image, and you will eat even during famine!