

by Imam Zafrullah Domun

As I said last week I will try to show as from this Friday sermon how the words of the Prophecies of the Promised Messiah (as) about the great disaster that would engulf the world were fulfilled almost to the letter during the First world war. I will do my best not to bombard you with figures and names of places and speak generally about how that war was a turning point in human history and was exactly what the Promised Messiah (as) spoke about. Out of sympathy for his fellow human beings, he informed them that Allah would send a catastrophe that would engulf them all because of their sins and because they failed to recognize him. He appealed to people to change their evil ways or else they would pay severely for their sins. Some may disagree with this statement but we will leave it for the time being.

As I said last week, it seems that the Promised Messiah (as) was overwhelmed by the information that he received from Allah about this catastrophe to the extent that he asked Allah not to let him witness it. Eventually Allah taught him to pray as follows “*Rabbe akhkhir waqta haza*” which may be translated as “O my Lord delay its happening”. Eventually he understood from Allah that it would happen within 16 years. But in fact, only 9 years after he received the revelations and six years after his death, this great event happened in 1914 and lasted until 1918 while its consequences are still being felt after 100 years. Those who are interested should watch the new documentaries on the World War One on YouTube and consult as well as much as they can the innumerable books, magazines and documents available on the net. Our aim is only to show that with this event, Allah proved once more the truthfulness of the words of His Messiah.

So, the first thing that we note is the suddenness of this great event. We should bear in mind that the Promised Messiah himself was not aware of what type of event Allah was speaking about except that it was described as “*zalzala*” meaning “great shaking.”

In fact, the events of the First World War would shake the whole world. In a popular book about the war we can read:

“The shot that triggered the War of 1914-1918 was fired by a 19-year-old student in the little Balkan town of Sarajevo, capital of the Austro-

Hungarian province of Bosnia on June 28, 1914. Before its echoes died away, Europe was drenched in the most terrible bloodbath the world had ever known ; the war became known as “the First World War” because it was the first total war in history which involved whole nations including civilians; it spread to 28 countries on six continents; battles ranges on land from Africa to China and on seas from Jutland in the North sea to the Falkland islands in the South Atlantic Ocean; most of the European continent lay in ruins; the map of the world was changed and the war that was fought “to end all wars ” had set the stage for the second world war 20 years later.”

So that was indeed the Sign the Promised Messiah (as) evoked and it did come to pass. It affected towns, villages and meadows. Historians speak of the destructions of millions of houses and soldiers compared the shelled places where the battles took place with a lunar landscape. On the net, we have many articles about this. For example, we can read:

“Hostilities disrupted ecologies on battlefields everywhere, but nowhere was the concentration of forces so great as on the Western Front. Trenches ran from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier and the ensuing stalemate ensured ecological upheaval. Millions of soldiers and billions of shells transformed fields and forests within the relatively narrow war zone into a wasteland. Military strategy dictated devastation.”

When they retreated, the Germans practiced a scorched earth policy so that the enemy could find nothing but a desert land. Another extract is as follows:

“But large projectiles did the most damage. In the heat of battle, artillery units fired several hundred rounds an hour. Although their range rarely extended beyond twenty kilometers, the guns obliterated nearly everything within reach. Chemical weapons added to ecological turmoil. Chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gases asphyxiated animals and humans alike. The deformed landscape trapped the deadly vapors in shell holes and the seams of trenches. Burnt earth, rotting corpses, and craters like cauldrons with a horrid brew of mud, gore, and the green-yellow mists of stale gas struck the troops as the very image of hell.”

There is one famous French writer Henri Barbusse (1873-1935) and a German novelist Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) who fought on the Western Front and witnessed the destruction first-hand. In his dispatches, Barbusse

identified battlegrounds as “fields of sterility” where “frightful loads of dead and wounded men alter the shape of the plains” and “everything appears turned over...full of rottenness and smelling of disaster.” “Where there are no dead,” he observed, “the earth itself is corpselike.” Jünger repeatedly used the adjectives “dark,” “ravaged,” “dreary,” “savage,” “eerie,” “barren,” “devastated,” and “hideously scarred,” to describe his surroundings. Other soldiers believed that the landscape had “lost its nature” and had turned into something artificial.

In another line the Promised Messiah said:

“People will be seized in a wave of Divine wrath so suddenly that a naked one will have no time to secure his loin cloth.” I have read of reports of people running from their beds naked when they started hearing the shells of the German army approaching and eventually they were killed.

In another stanza we read “Suddenly an earthquake will severely shake them all—be they humans, trees, rocks, or oceans.”

Anyone who is familiar with the history know that the consequences of the war were terrible for people, trees rocks and even oceans. We may have more to say about the battle that took place in the oceans but suffice it to say right now that they were the theatres of great battles. We also read “According to the French Forestry service, “*350,000 hectares of forest had been destroyed during the war, an amount that would have supplied the tree harvest for the next sixty years.*” In a letter to his wife, Major Rowland Charles Fielding recorded the vivid and horrific scene of the aftermath of a battle on the Western Front:

“Not a brick or stone is to be seen, except where it has been churned up by a bursting shell. Not a tree stands. Not a square foot of surface has escaped mutilation. There is nothing but the mud and the gaping shell-holes; a chaotic wilderness of shell-holes, rim overlapping rim; and, in the bottom of many, the bodies of the dead.” (RoR August 2015)

In another line of the poem we read “in the twinkling of an eye the earth will be turned upside down and streams of blood will flow like channel tides.” As a result of the war, four heads of state lost their crown and some their empire as well. They were the emperors of Austria Hungary, Germany, Turkey and Russia. On Wikipedia we can read:

“The aftermath of World War I saw drastic political, cultural, economic, and social change across Eurasia (Europe and Asia), Africa, and even in areas outside those that were directly involved. Four empires collapsed due to the war, old countries were abolished, new ones were formed, boundaries were redrawn, international organizations were established, and many new and old ideologies took a firm hold in people's minds.”

As far as the sea becoming red with blood is concerned, we read:

“One such example where the latter detail was met with remarkably literal fulfilment was during the Gallipoli expedition in April 1915, when the Allies carried out a disastrous attempt to seize control of the Dardanelle straits from the Ottoman Empire. The campaign entailed a major amphibious invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula on 25 April 1915, involving mainly British, Anzac (Australian and New Zealand) and French troops.

Due to fierce Ottoman resistance and their clear strategic advantage of holding the higher ground, the Allies suffered staggering casualties. Many troops did not reach shore and were shot whilst at sea. One Allied pilot, Commander Charles Samson, who was performing aerial reconnaissance, later gave an eyewitness account of what he saw from his plane. He stated that the sea was “*absolutely red with blood to 50 yards out.*” This was also confirmed by an Ottoman Turkish officer, Major Mahmut of the fifth army, who vividly described the scene: “*The fire changed the colour of the sea with the blood from the bodies of the enemy – a sea whose colour had remained the same for years.*” (RoR August 2015)

We should also note that the American historian, Professor Robert Citino said “*World War I was the largest and bloodiest conflict that the world had ever seen.*” Yet at no one at the time, including those militarily and politically informed, could predict the brutal fate that lay ahead for soldiers who believed the common misconception that the war would be over “*before the leaves fall.*” This was largely based on the false assumption that most wars of the previous decades were relatively short and decisive and that the destructive potential of novel technologies of warfare and the sustainability of the global economy, all made the chance of a prolonged conflict impossible. However, according to the most recent scholarly calculations, during the four dreadful years of the war in which more than 65 million men were mobilized, an estimated 10 million died. A further 20 million were severely wounded. Although difficult to ascertain with any precision, civilian fatalities have been estimated to be

approximately 7 million, rendering the total casualty figure in the region of 37 million. (RoR August 2015)

All these figures give us an idea about the scale of this disaster.

In another line of the poem we read “*“Men shall lose their senses and birds their consciousness and nightingales and pigeons will forget their songs.”*”

The fact that so many people were engaged in killing one another can only be the result of the loss of senses of many people, but because of the shell explosion, many became deaf and some were shell shocked and disturbed. Furthermore, it has been reported in literature that the Belgian Waterslager canary population was close to extinction during World War I. Systematic breeding was re-established only after the conflict.

In another line we read “That hour will bear heavily upon every traveler and those on a journey will lose their way in agony”

So, we read from an extract from Review of Religion August 2015 as follows:

“The heart-rending diary entries and personal accounts of travelers, who found themselves stranded in enemy countries, vividly portray the difficulties they had to face. For example, describing the plight of Russian tourists, Dr Ekaterina Rogatchevskaia, Lead East European Curator (Russian Studies) at the British Library writes:

“In summer 1914 many foreigners, Russians included, holidayed in spa towns in Germany and Austria, for example in Carlsbad (now Kavlovy Vary in the Czech Republic), and were detained there after war broke out. The diaries of these detainees truly reflect the mood of people who had to spend several months in an enemy country in a hostile environment and under constant surveillance by the Austrian police. Many of them had no money, as they had not planned to overstay their holiday and those who had the means could not get cash as their accounts had been frozen. Although this type of detention was not real imprisonment, foreigners were not allowed to move about freely, and it eventually became difficult for them to rent accommodation not only because they could not pay, but also because of the growing xenophobia. In some places, the police prohibited the local population from renting out rooms to citizens of the enemy states, and in some cases, people would get rid of foreign tenants before police warnings.

The majority of people who could not find any suitable occupation felt lost and demoralized.”

There are at some more lines from this poem to comment upon. I will do so *incha Allah* in the coming sermons. We should all try to increase our knowledge of this war and reflect upon how it was a sign for the truthfulness of the Promised Messiah (as). May Allah grant us such an opportunity and may this endeavor grant us increase in faith, *incha Allah*. Ameen.