Deadly Floods in Serbia and Bosnia

Verica Dering, Good Samaritan Leader, Cameron Park, CA

“Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. When he was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children, were swept away, one trouble succeeding another as in a moment. It is God that shields His creatures, and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer. But the Christian world have shown contempt for the law of Jehovah; and the Lord will do just what he has declared that He would, He will withdraw His blessings from the earth, and remove His protecting care from those who are rebelling against His law, and teaching and forcing others to do the same. Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some, in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others, and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them.

“While appearing to the children of men as a great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great conflagrations, in fierce tornadoes and terrific hail-storms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous. Destruction will be upon both man and beast. ‘The earth mourneth and fadeth away,’ ‘the haughty people … do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the

As images keep streaming out of this disaster-ravaged region, you can’t help but shed tears, especially when that’s your homeland and they are your people. I was born in Serbia, and spent the first thirteen years of my life in the land once called Yugoslavia—the land of the South Slavs. It was there that the foundation of so much of who I am today was laid.

The region’s worst flooding in recorded history—three months of rainfall deluged Serbia and parts of Bosnia in three days—coupled with the fact that Serbia is one of Europe’s poorest countries, spells a gloomy conclusion to one of the worst “natural” disasters so far this year.

Businesses, roads, and railways, as well as more than 100,000 homes and 230 schools, were washed out by the flooding. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated, including entire towns in some instances. Around a million people are without drinking water in Bosnia alone. As if the catastrophic flooding weren’t enough, the region is also dealing with a host of other consequences from the flooding, including exposed land mines, a potential shutdown of one of the biggest power plants in Serbia, and landslides. Even if some areas have escaped the worst of the flooding, others have been taken out by some of the 3,100 landslides—2,100 in Bosnia and an additional 1,000 in Serbia—triggered by the tremendous amount of water that has destabilized and shifted the earth.

Serbia has been the hardest hit in the region. At least 30,000 people have been evacuated, but many more are believed to have fled the impacted area.

Serbia’s Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić announced that May 21, 22, and 23 were to be days of national mourning for the victims of the most severe flooding ever recorded in the region. He did not sound optimistic. He said, “In the scale of the material damage, we have been hit 10 times more than all the other countries in the region, and I hope this will not show in the number of victims.”

And the worst of the flooding may not be over yet. Although the weather in the region has improved dramatically since Thursday, May 15, weather.com meteorologist Jon Erdman said that flooding downstream, especially in the Serbian capital of Belgrade, will peak over the next two days.

“Flood events can persist for days, even weeks, after heavy rain occurs, as water from swollen tributaries empties into main stem rivers, producing a broad flood crest,” Erdman said.

Indeed, even as floodwaters receded in some locations, others downstream along the Sava River had already been swept away by the
swollen expanse of river. As the flooding continues, authorities in the region fear that the death toll will continue to grow.

Prime Minister Vučić called this a “total catastrophe of Biblical proportions” and, according to one of my relatives, ordered that all nightclubs and bars along the Danube River in Belgrade be shut down during this extraordinary time!

I have written to dear friends and members of our faith family telling them about our concern and prayers, sending our love, and expressing our sadness at the loss of everything of this earth by so many poor people, including many who have lost their loved ones. I also asked if there were anyone of our church family who needed special help because of this disaster. It is hard to find fitting words in these situations. We can find comfort and strength only in the Lord and in His promises. All the signs are telling us that we are nearing the end of the history of this sinful world and this poor planet. Let us turn our eyes to eternal realities and the deliverance that awaits those who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

The Stoiljkov family to whom I wrote are thankful for our solicitude. They were spared the full brunt of this catastrophe, as their house sits on a higher elevation, so that they are not homeless, like the thousands of others whose homes were destroyed. Still, the rain came down heavily for days and it was a very terrifying experience. Sister Lidia wrote that there is a realization of man’s helplessness in the face of such elements and that only God can effect change in these situations. She was quick to quiet our fears and reassure us that no one has lost his or her life, but there are several very needy cases. In particular, there is an elderly couple, Emil and Erzika Ceslar, who are in poor health and have no income other than what their little piece of land provides. They had a garden and kept bees and sold the honey. Now the horrific rains and flooding have destroyed their only source of income. There is also a brother, old and unwell, from Bosnia, who called for help, but they could spare only a little—a mere symbolic gesture of encouragement rather than real help. The Stoiljkovs would be very grateful for any help that we, their brothers and sisters, can afford, for their hearts break when our people call and beg for assistance and they are not in a position to help them.

“It is too much for the human mind to grasp, that God, having gathered together all the riches of the universe, and laid open all the resources of His power, should place them in the hand of His Son, saying, All these I give to you for man. These are my gifts to him. Confer them upon him that he may know that there is no love like Mine, and that his eternal happiness consists in giving Me his love in return. As the sinner contemplates this love, it broadens and deepens into infinitude, passing beyond his comprehension” – The Youth’s Instructor, November 9, 1899 (emphasis added).

I would personally like to thank everyone who has felt and experienced the grace of God and who, responding to the unfathomable riches of God’s love, has sought to love God in return and share His blessings with others! May you be blessed beyond measure!
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**2014 Calendar**

- July 21: Centennial Commemoration Registration Deadline
- July 24-27: Family Camp, Yosemite National Park, CA
- July 30-August 3: Centennial Commemoration, Cedartown, GA
- August 4-14: International Youth Conference, Holland
- August 11-13: Western Field Delegates’ Meetings, Mountain Center, CA
- August 11-17: Reformation Tour, Germany
- August 13-17: Western Field Conference, Mountain Center, CA

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