

A New Year—2016

“It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”
—Isaiah 2:2,3

HOLDING FAST OUR CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

Despite the pleas and efforts of many world leaders, and the sincere desire of a majority of earth’s inhabitants, the goal of worldwide peace which so many claim to be seeking was not reached in 2015. Two thousand years ago Jesus came to earth to be “The Prince of Peace,” but it is evident that the due time in the plan of God for him to establish peace on earth has not yet come. Through various misunderstandings of the plan of God, many professed followers of Jesus have supposed that they were commissioned to establish peace in his name. All such efforts have failed, however, and as we begin 2016, the major problems which exist in the

world—financial, political, social, environmental, and religious—continue with no resolutions in sight.

Notwithstanding present conditions in the world, we enter the new year holding fast our confidence and rejoicing in expectation that God's plan for peace on earth and good will toward men will not fail. If we wish to be assured of such a glorious future for mankind it is essential that we take into consideration the testimony of the Scriptures concerning that plan. The full truth concerning any feature of God's purpose is never stated in a single passage of scripture, but in Isaiah's testimony concerning "the mountain" of the Lord we have a fairly complete outline of the manner in which God will establish peace, and bring about "the desire of all nations."—Hag. 2:7

Isaiah identifies the time for the fulfillment of his prophecy as being "in the last days." This does not mean in the last days of the earth, nor does it mean in the last days of man's existence on the earth. The Bible tells us that the "earth abideth forever," and it was formed to be inhabited by man. (Eccles. 1:4; Gen. 1:26-28; Isa. 45:18) Prophetically speaking, "the last days" are those days of the closing period of the reign of sin and death, immediately after which, by divine intervention, God's long-promised kingdom will be established. We believe that we are now living in the foretold "last days," and that peace will be established in the earth, not by human efforts, but by the authority and power vested in Christ by the Heavenly Father.

Note what Isaiah said would take place in "the last days." "The mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established," or prepared. The word "mountain"

is symbolic in this verse and is used by the Lord to illustrate his kingdom. In Daniel 2:35,44, God's symbolic "mountain" is said to be established in "the days of these kings," those depicted in the human-like image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. From this prophecy, we know that when God speaks of his "mountain," the reference is to his kingdom.

MOUNT ZION

The symbolic use of a mountain to denote a kingdom, or government, would be familiar to the people of the ancient nation of Israel. God ruled over them through his chosen representatives, whose seat of government was at Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Similarly, in Isaiah's prophecy he identifies "the mountain of the LORD," referring to it as "Zion." In a reference to Jesus as the exalted new King of earth, God declares, "Yet have I set [anointed] my king upon my holy hill of Zion."—Ps. 2:6

Isaiah refers to God's mountain as "the mountain of the LORD'S house." The "house" is God's ruling house, or family. This language is familiar, for during centuries past the Roman world was governed by ruling families called "houses." In these families the right to rule was passed on from generation to generation. This was also true in the typical ruling house of David until it was overthrown by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar.

Chief in God's antitypical ruling house is his beloved Son, Christ Jesus. He is the one destined to rule "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." (Ps. 72:8) This one who is called, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS,"

died in order to redeem his subjects—mankind—from death. (Rev. 19:16) Thus, when his kingdom is operative he will rule over living subjects, not dying ones. Similarly, a dead king could not rule, so God raised Jesus from the dead, and gave him “all power . . . in heaven and in earth.”—Matt. 28:18

WITH THE LAMB

The Bible also reveals that Jesus will have associate rulers in his kingdom. These are his faithful footstep followers of the present Gospel Age. Concerning these the Apostle Paul wrote, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” (II Tim. 2:11,12) Again, in Romans 8:16,17, we read, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Jesus said of this same group of his faithful followers, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John tells us that he saw a “Lamb” stand on “mount Sion,” and that there were “with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” It is explained that these followed the Lamb, and were the “firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” (Rev. 14:1,4) The “Lamb” here referred to is the glorified Jesus, and those who have his Father’s name written in their foreheads are identified as also being in the family of God. They also are part of God’s ruling house

which, in the last days, is established, or prepared, in the “top of the mountains” to constitute a new world government.

The same group is again referred to in Revelation 20:4,6, where we are told that they are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,” and that “they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” They come forth in “the first resurrection,” and, as “priests of God and of Christ, . . . shall reign with him a thousand years.” It is thus clearly indicated that the ruling “house” of the Lord which is established in “the last days” is Christ and his faithful followers. These are described by Jesus as “children of the kingdom,” who “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:38,43

ALL NATIONS TO BE BLESSED

Isaiah informs us that when this “mountain of the LORD’S house” is established in the top of the mountains, indicating its control over all the kingdoms of this world, “all nations shall flow unto it.” While the prophetic testimony of the Scriptures indicates that the events of these “last days” are in preparation for the setting up of the “mountain of the LORD’S house,” the work of its establishment is not yet fulfilled. Certainly “all nations” are not now flowing into that kingdom.

The kingdom of Christ today is far from the thoughts of the nations of earth—professed Christian and non-Christian alike. They still imagine that they can solve their own problems, and in at least some cases, we may say that they are probably doing the best they can. No present efforts,

however, will be able to stem the tide of distorted thinking and general human selfishness which now holds this fear-filled world in its grip.

Mankind will not recognize and admit their inability to establish peace until the final spasms of this present “great tribulation” come to pass. Only then will they realize that by divine power “those days” have been “shortened.” (Matt. 24:21,22) At that time they will say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

While the Scriptures indicate that Israel will be the geographic center of the Lord’s earthly kingdom, the reference in this prophecy to “Zion” and “Jerusalem” is symbolic. Zion, as we have seen, is symbolic of Christ and the faithful members of his true church—those who will live and reign with him. These receive the “first resurrection,” are exalted to the divine nature, and, we believe, will be invisible to men. However, they will function through perfect human representatives.

Jesus tells us who these perfect human agents will be—“Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets.” He said that in the kingdom on earth the people would “come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south,” and “sit down” with them, indicating the relationship of teachers and students. (Luke 13:28,29) In Hebrews, chapter 11, the names of many of these “worthy” ones are mentioned, and we are informed that they proved their faithfulness, and will “obtain

a better resurrection.” Paul also informs us that they will be “made perfect.” That is, having by faith already passed their trial, they will be awakened from death perfect.—Heb. 11:35,39,40

In Psalm 45:16, these are referred to as the former “fathers” of Israel, and the explanation is given that instead of maintaining this particular position, they will become the “children” of the Christ, and be made “princes in all the earth.” These intermediaries, while not the rulers of the kingdom in the proper sense of the word, will so fully represent Christ among men that they will be recognized as the kingdom’s earthly leaders by mankind. Hence, we might speak of these and their role as being the earthly ruling phase of the kingdom, symbolically referred to as “Jerusalem” by Isaiah.

It is evident that these perfect earthly leaders of the kingdom will be on terms of intimate communion, fellowship, and cooperation with its spiritual rulers, the Christ, just as Adam, in perfection prior to his transgression, could commune with the heavenly powers. The spiritual and earthly leaders of the kingdom will be related to each other as father and children, and as collaborative branches of the same heavenly government. The heavenly phase will be the law-giving department, and the earthly will be the teaching and law-administering branch. Thus we have the promise that “out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

Then will be the time when the Lord’s judgments will be abroad in the earth as depicted by Psalm 98:7-9, which reads, “Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell

therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.” What a refreshing experience that will be for the sin-sick, distressed, and fear-filled world of mankind!

Concerning the qualities of the great judge—the Christ—during the thousand-year kingdom judgment day, Isaiah wrote, “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:2-5

A FEW WILL NOT OBEY

It is apparent from the foregoing scripture that not all the people will obey the laws which go forth from Messiah’s kingdom. The great judge, and his associates, will be able to discern this, and will be capable of rendering just retribution and punishment. There will doubtless be some willful sinners, and it is these who are referred to as the “wicked” who are slain by “the breath of his lips,” meaning the pronouncements which will then go forth from “Zion” and “Jerusalem.”

The Apostle Peter refers to these in Acts, chapter 3. In the context, Peter tells about “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” This period, he explains, occurs during the Second Advent or “presence” of Christ Jesus, whom he speaks of in this sermon as “that prophet.” He states that “it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”—vss. 20-23

What rich blessings, however, will accrue to those who obey the laws of the new kingdom! These are the ones who will then say, “He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” When they do learn God’s ways, and walk in the paths of peace he outlines for them, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:3,4

In a similar prophecy by Micah, he adds that then “they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.” (Mic. 4:4) At long last, the world will then have freedom from fear, distress, and want. All will have economic security, and together will dwell in safety and in peace forever.

FROM SICKNESS AND DEATH

In Isaiah 25:6-9, we have another prophecy of Christ’s kingdom in which it is referred to as a “mountain.” In these wonderful verses we are assured that the Lord will make unto all people “a feast of fat things,” and that he will “destroy [*margin*, swallow

up] . . . the face of the covering cast over all people.” This is a reference to the people’s general lack of knowledge concerning God due to the fact that Satan has covered their mental discernment and kept them in darkness. However, then it will be different. The “earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

The prophet assures us also that God will “swallow up death in victory,” and “wipe away tears from off all faces.” (chap. 25:8) These words present truly a glorious prospect! They assure us that Christ will reign until “all enemies” are put down, and “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (I Cor. 15:25,26) Then “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:4

As we enter upon the year 2016, a sense of danger, distress, perplexity, and fear holds the world in its clutches. The purpose of the events of these “last days,” which will soon reach a culmination, is to transform the hearts of the whole world of mankind, and make them ready for the wonderful blessings of the kingdom. Thus, let us view these things from God’s eternal perspective, and see the silver lining to the present clouds of trouble. The Apostle Peter told us where to focus our mental vision, saying, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” (II Pet. 3:13,14) So minded, we can “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”—Heb. 3:6 ■