

Thy Kingdom Come

***"It came to pass,
that, . . . one of his
disciples said unto
him, Lord, teach us
to pray. . . . And he
said unto them,
When ye pray, say,
Our Father which
art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy
name. Thy
kingdom come. Thy
will be done, as in
heaven, so in
earth."
—Luke 11:1,2***

WE CANNOT OVERESTI-mate the importance of the kingdom and its place in the message of God's plan for the entire world. Not only is it given the prominent position in the model prayer, it occupied much of the preaching of Jesus and his disciples. (Matt. 9:35) Many of the parables of Jesus were given to explain features of the kingdom. It was the central feature of the preaching of Peter, Paul, and others when

they spoke to the people.

In Acts 2:40 (*Revised Standard Version*), we read, "[Peter] testified with many other words and exhorted them saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." Most Christian congregations of today would expect their pastor to say, "Save this crooked generation," failing to realize that due

to the evil results of sin it is past saving in its current state. Like the apostles of old, our concern is not to save this “present evil world” at all. (Gal. 1:4) Rather, our concern is for Christ and for his kingdom, which the Scriptures show is to be an entirely new arrangement, ordered by God, for the purpose of bringing about man’s salvation to its full completion.

Concerning this subject, it is needful that we explore the “what,” “when,” “who,” “where,” and “how” of the kingdom and its operation. To do so properly, and if we have faith in the promise of the model prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” we must first put aside human creeds, traditions, and philosophies. Only by examining the scriptural testimony concerning the kingdom can we explore this subject with the certainty contained in God’s Word.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM AND ITS PURPOSE?

Briefly stated, the kingdom is the arrangement of God that will permit disobedient mankind to return to his favor, to perfection of being, and to everlasting life. The dictionary defines “kingdom” as a state or government having a king or queen as its head. In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we have described a kingdom designed for the benefit of man, and also the events which show how that arrangement was withdrawn. In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we have described the restoration of God’s kingdom and how mankind will be blessed.

The disobedience of our first parents not only meant no more blessings, it meant death—“For as in Adam all die.” (I Cor. 15:22) The Bible promises

that not only will blessings flow to all under the new kingdom arrangement, even the curse of death itself will disappear—"For he [the king] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—vss. 25,26

Although it was the disobedience of Adam and Eve which brought to an end that first kingdom established by God, the progeny of our first parents have been no less disobedient. Paul tells us, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) This clearly refers to all human beings. There are others, too, who the Bible says have been disobedient. "God did not spare angels when they had sinned, but hurling them down to Tartarus ["incarcerated," *Strong's* definition] consigned them to caves of darkness, keeping them in readiness for judgment." (II Pet. 2:4, *Weymouth Translation*) The kingdom is designed specifically to bring all intelligent creation in the universe back into harmony with God.

WHEN WILL "THY KINGDOM COME"?

The kingdom of God will arrive after the present kingdom of Satan is destroyed. There should be no mistaking that the present kingdom is not of God. Consider the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness: "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt

thou serve.” (Matt. 4:8-10) Note that Jesus did not deny Satan’s claim to rulership over the kingdoms of the world. Jesus knew, in fact, that Satan was “the prince of this world.”—John 14:30

The question remains: when will God set up his kingdom? Daniel, in the second chapter of his prophecy, interpreted a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar. In the dream, the king had seen a great image consisting of various metals. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom was represented by the golden head, and that other kingdoms would subsequently rise up. Daniel further said that after the end of these kingdoms, God’s kingdom would be set up. “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” (Dan. 2:44) We have seen all the kingdoms represented by this great image come and go. Their days of glory are over, and their fragmentation to the point of eventual destruction is going on before our vision. God’s kingdom is next to arrive on the scene, and it, Daniel says, will never be destroyed.

In Zephaniah 3:8,9, we read, “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” The gathering of the nations, spoken

here by the prophet, is going on before our eyes. It will not be long until the “fire” of earth’s last great world conflict will destroy all of man’s arrangements and the present kingdom of Satan. It is critical to note here, however, that the earth itself is not to be destroyed. After this final battle is over, the prophet says, the people will begin to taste the benefits of God’s kingdom.

WHO WILL ADMINISTER GOD’S KINGDOM?

It is God’s arrangement that his kingdom will be administered by his son, Christ Jesus, and the glorified church. The work of the kingdom, and specifically the role of a chief administrator, is described by the psalmist, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. . . . All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. . . . Men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.” (Ps. 72:8,11,17) As beautiful as the words of the psalmist are, the “He” is not named. It is no mystery, however, for as we turn to the New Testament, we find these words, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:10,11

The administration of God’s kingdom is not just through Jesus Christ alone, although he is the one specifically named. The Scriptures show that additionally his true church is so closely associated with him that we are given the picture of Jesus Christ as the head of the church, which is his body. This picture is beautifully recorded by Paul at the end of

the fifth chapter of Ephesians, when he writes about the love that should exist between a husband and a wife. “Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. . . . Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. For we are members of his body. . . . This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:23,25,30,32) These verses explain that Christ shares the kingdom administration with his church, as a husband shares with his wife. By being a part of Christ, the church inherits what is his—”If ye be Christ’s [belong to Christ], then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Gal. 3:29

WHERE WILL THE KINGDOM BE?

God’s kingdom will be on earth and in heaven. Sincere students of the Bible many times use the phrase “two phases of the kingdom,” meaning that the kingdom consists of two parts, a heavenly and an earthly. This truth is alluded to by Jesus in the closing words of our theme scripture. Yet, many of our Christian friends believe only in a heavenly kingdom, and they hope that is where they will be when they die.

There are heavenly promises, to be sure, but there are also earthly blessings promised to mankind. The dual aspects of God’s kingdom are well-described in these words of Paul: “This is in harmony with God’s merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it—the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ; yes, things in Heaven and things

on earth, to find their one Head in Him.” (Eph. 1:9,10 WT) Note that Paul specifically mentions creation in both heaven and earth as being purposed by God to be restored under the headship of Christ.

Let us look more closely, however, at the earthly phase of the kingdom. Doing so, we see that the Scriptures contain promises to the world of an earthly nature, which will be fulfilled during the operation of the kingdom. Among these are the prophetic words of the psalmist and of the Prophet Isaiah: “The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.” “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Ps. 37:11,29; Isa. 26:9) Who are “the inhabitants of the world”? Are they only those fortunate enough to be alive when Christ sets up the kingdom? Such cannot be the case, as it would be a travesty of God’s attributes of justice and love. The inhabitants of the earth spoken of by the prophet are, in fact, all who have ever lived. This means that all the dead will need to be resurrected.

If some find it hard to believe that there will be a resurrection of all the dead, they are not alone. Paul questioned the rulers of his day, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you [King Agrippa], that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8) Down through the ages, due to the deception of the Adversary, mankind has generally found it far easier to believe that those who die really go on living elsewhere instead of believing that they are truly dead, to be someday made alive by the power of God. Earlier in the Book of Acts, Paul makes it

clear that he believed in an all-encompassing resurrection, and that this was prophetically spoken of in the Law and by the prophets. “This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:14,15

Indeed, if there is no resurrection of the dead, we have many problems harmonizing such a thought with the Scriptures. A case in point is the statement made by Stephen regarding Abraham: “He [God] gave him [Abraham] none inheritance in it [the land of promise], no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him.” (Acts 7:5) Since we know that God’s promises are sure, we must conclude that Abraham is coming back from the dead—else how will he ever receive the land as a “possession.”

Similar reasoning was employed by Jesus when he showed the Sadducees that there was a resurrection. “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.” (Luke 20:37,38) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were long since dead when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. If, as this passage says, the Lord was still their God in Moses’ day, the conclusion must be that they will someday be made alive through a resurrection from death.

One reason that the concept of a resurrection of the dead is hard for people to understand is that many believe the earth is not big enough to hold everybody. We have often heard the term “population explosion,” and indeed the total population of the earth reached 7 billion for the first time in late 2011. This being the case, how could the earth handle the resurrection of everyone who has ever lived, and how many might that be? The *Population Reference Bureau* (prb.org) says this is one of the most frequently asked questions they receive. In a paper first published in 1995, they explain how difficult it is to estimate such a number. However, they make educated guesses based on many factors, and recently came up with this total: 108 billion births as of 2011.

Today the earth is home to just over 7 billion people. This means that approximately 6.5% of all the people who have ever lived on this planet are alive today. Thus if God were to resurrect all those of mankind who have ever died, we would have over fifteen times more people than currently live on the earth. Can the earth possibly hold that many?

The United States contains over 3.5 million square miles of land. In the New York borough of Manhattan, people have an average of 41 square yards each of living space, assuming they all lived at ground level. At that density, it would require less than half the land area of the United States to hold 108 billion people. While such density is typically not desirable to most, it should be helpful to remember that, in this example, we are talking about putting all these people in less than one half of the land area of the United States. This amounts

to less than 1% of the planet's total land area. Those who have flown extensively know that there are vast areas of the earth which are deserted, not populated by anyone. The Scriptures assure us that God's plan is designed to bless all mankind, and although some may doubt, there will be no mistake in God's kingdom regarding people having enough space to live comfortably.

Having food to feed this many may also sound like an insurmountable problem to bringing everyone back to life. This thought, however, mistakenly assumes that the same God who gave ancient Israel food to eat for forty years in the wilderness will be unable to overrule the feeding of all mankind in the kingdom. "Is the LORD'S hand waxed short?" (Num. 11:23) Certainly the great God of the universe will be well capable of bringing about the conditions and resources necessary to feed all mankind in his kingdom.

HOW WILL THE KINGDOM OPERATE?

The kingdom will operate under the righteous heavenly rulership of Christ and his church. Under that heavenly authority, the earthly phase of the kingdom will operate through specially selected human representatives. All will be done under the principles of righteousness, and the operation of the kingdom will eventually destroy all opposing elements.

Psalm 45 is prophetic in this regard. There we read a description of the king—Christ Jesus—and a woman dressed in fine gold—the church. This psalm also talks about another group: "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou

mayest make princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) The “fathers” from the Jewish point of view were all their ancestors, particularly those who were most righteous. Sometimes we refer to these as “patriarchs” or “Ancient Worthies.” This simply means that they lived in ancient times and were deemed worthy of God’s special favor because of their faith. Psalm 45 says in prophetic language that these faithful “fathers” will be princes in all the earth in God’s kingdom.

The faithfulness of these is attested in the book of Hebrews. “These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (Heb. 11:39,40) That “better thing” is the heavenly reward promised to the church, Christ’s footstep followers of the present Gospel Age. These faithful ancient ones will also be rewarded, by being made the earthly representatives of the kingdom—“princes in all the earth.”

The operating mode of the kingdom will be one of righteousness, according to another psalm: “In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.” (Ps. 72:7) The concept of peacefulness is also described by the Prophet Isaiah, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

It is easy to emphasize these positive aspects of the kingdom. We are also told, however, that all opposing elements will be destroyed. “It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that

prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23) At the conclusion of Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats, we read about the final end of those who, after being given ample time to reform and come to righteousness, fail to do so and are judged unworthy of continued life in the kingdom. Likening this to the separation of goats from sheep, those who will not learn righteousness are placed on the left hand—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment [Greek, curtailing]: but the righteous into life eternal.”—Matt. 25:46

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We have examined here many of the features of the coming kingdom and how it will result in the blessing of all mankind. We have considered some basic questions and given answers to them as provided by the Scriptures.

It is God’s desire and plan that mankind be perfect and live forever. This is exactly what the Scriptures promise is to happen through the kingdom arrangement. Although the parable of the sheep and the goats describes the destruction of those unworthy, it also tells us about the enthusiastic welcome of those who become righteous. “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34) God has promised a glorious day. By the eye of faith we see it draw near! ■