

# Out of Bethlehem

*“Hath not the  
scripture said,  
That Christ cometh  
of the seed of  
David, and out of  
the town of  
Bethlehem, where  
David was?”  
—John 7:42*

## OUR OPENING SCRIPTURE

was spoken by the people in Jesus' day who had seen his great miracles and heard his teachings of love, kindness and hope. In making the statement that Christ, the Messiah, was to come out of Bethlehem, they no doubt recalled the prophetic words of Micah, who wrote: “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”—Micah 5:2

Indeed, the greatest news item of all time was announced as coming out of Bethlehem. This information was the brightest of all messages in this world's dark night of sin and death. It was the announcement of the birth of Jesus. No other single event has so changed the course of the world, nor given so many people a ray of hope for the future. For Jesus' followers, it has been a hope which has comforted and sustained them throughout their Christian journey.

## **TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY**

The circumstances associated with the birth of Jesus were unusual. Destined to be “The Prince of Peace” and the king of the whole earth, yet he was born in a stable. (Isa. 9:6,7) The world as a whole knew little or nothing of what was taking place, nevertheless the coming to earth of the Son of God was announced by an angel, who said to the shepherds on the hills of Judea, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Then the angel, together with a “multitude of the heavenly host,” praised God and said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:10-14

What an introduction this was to the world, and with what authority it was given! It was filled with hopes of peace and life for all mankind—“good tidings of great joy”—because a savior was born, one who had come to save mankind from sin and its penalty, death. No wonder the hosts of heaven cried, “Glory to God in the highest!”

## **DIFFICULTIES ARISE**

However, this one who was born to be a king was soon confronted with difficulties. His parents were instructed to flee with the young child into Egypt to save him from the wrath of Herod. From the beginning of his short ministry, he was hated and persecuted by the religious leaders of his own people. Finally, he was put to death upon a cross. A few years later the nation to which Jesus ministered, instead of entering an era of peace because of his

coming, was removed from its land, and the people scattered throughout the earth, and subsequently bitterly persecuted.

We are to have confidence, however, in the promises of God, and should not fear. Whatever the daily news may be throughout all the days of our lives, we can turn back with assurance to that Bethlehem dateline and recall the announcement which came from heaven, that a savior and future king had been born in Bethlehem, the city of David, and that this good news would be for all people in God's due time.

### **MANY ACCEPT JESUS**

As the present Christian age developed, many people and nations began to accept Christ and professed to practice his teachings. However, as it turned out, much of this was in name only. Instead of promoting peace on earth and good will toward their fellow man, they waged war upon each other, often doing so in Christ's name. Some of the bloodiest conflicts of this time period were waged by professed Christian nations under the banner of the cross.

There has hardly been a time since the birth of The Prince of Peace that the world, or some part of it, has not been plagued by war or the fear of war. Furthermore, the so-called advancement of civilization in recent centuries has not materially changed this picture. Even now, as the year 2022 draws to a close and many in the world commemorate the birth of Jesus, millions are wondering if and when the angels' announcement of peace and goodwill among mankind will ever come about.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year sent shockwaves throughout the world. People and world

leaders alike fear that Russia will enlarge its desire for conquest and expand its attacks into other neighboring countries. Then there is the fear among more distant nations that they will somehow be drawn into the conflict on one side or the other. Finally, considering the unpredictability of the Russian president, there is the ever-present possibility that he may choose to use nuclear armaments as a display of power and control. Certainly, the news coming out of this part of the world is presently far from being a message of peace and goodwill.

### **LACK OF PEACE**

The foregoing description of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict is but one example which points out the world's present state of affairs, in which "good tidings" are seldom part of the news of the day. Let us not conclude from this, however, that the purpose of Jesus' coming to earth has failed, or that its accomplishment has in any way been delayed. The storm clouds of human passion hovering over the distraught and fear-filled world today are the result of human failure. This was foreknown by God and foretold in the Bible. He has permitted it so that the human race might come to realize that the only way out of its confusion and perplexity is to look to him.—Luke 21:25-28

One of the basic teachings of the Bible is that the "peace on earth" proclaimed by the angels when Jesus was born is to be realized through the establishment of Christ's kingdom. This great truth was largely lost sight of during much of the Christian era. The viewpoint was gradually adopted that Christ's kingdom was to be set up through human

efforts, with the thought that whatever God had designed to do for the human race depended upon the efforts of men who would work and fight in the name of Christ. How shortsighted to suppose that the great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, would depend upon the feeble, imperfect, and misguided efforts of his human servants!

The Christian world has made its best attempts to set up Christ's kingdom, but its poor, and oftentimes appalling, results are what we see throughout the earth today. Failure is emblazoned upon all the monuments reared, and history written, which testify to human folly and selfishness. However, for those who have faith in the promises and prophecies of the Bible, the heart-cheering message is that God will do for the human race what it has not been able to do for itself.

## **GOD'S PROMISES**

Let us recall some of the promises in which God gives us this assurance. One of them is found in the prophecy of Isaiah, previously noted in part, pertaining to the birth of Jesus and to his future rulership as the world's king. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."—Isa. 9:6,7

There are two statements in this prophecy of Jesus' birth to which many fail to give proper

consideration. One is that the government here promised shall be upon “his shoulder.” The other is that the “zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” In the Hebrew text the word “LORD” denotes Jehovah, or God Almighty. Thus is emphasized the fact that God takes responsibility for the fulfillment of this promise. In other words, Christ will shoulder the commission for the successful establishment and functioning of his kingdom, and the zeal of Jehovah guarantees the results.

## **CHRIST’S KINGDOM**

For centuries Christians have been trying to set up Christ’s kingdom by their own zeal rather than by God’s. In devious ways they have also endeavored to shoulder the responsibility of establishing and ruling in Christ’s kingdom themselves, but this arrangement did not bring peace on earth. Instead, it fostered cruel persecution and bloody wars in order to force conformity. This was not the zeal of the Lord of hosts, but the work of ambitious individuals and groups whose fervor was contrary to the will and plan of God. They had a “zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”—Rom. 10:2

Christ’s kingdom is not set up by human intrigue and diplomacy. Such is true both of the past as well as the present. Its function will not come through balances of power brought about by the threat of destruction through the use of nuclear armaments or other humanly conceived means. Instead, the Messianic kingdom is established by divine intervention in the affairs of men, and thankfully, in spite of all the misguided efforts prompted by human selfishness.

In the prophecy of Micah, we are given this assurance. “In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But 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. 4:1-4

## **GOD’S KINGDOM THROUGH ISRAEL**

Beginning with David, the kings of Israel ruled as the representatives of God, with the headquarters of the government in Mount Zion at Jerusalem. (I Kings 2:11; Ps. 135:21) To the people of Israel, therefore, the “mountain of the house of the LORD” would readily be understood as meaning the kingdom of Jehovah, functioning through a ruling house of divine appointment. The ruling house of David was emblematic of this foretold mountain. However, this ruling house ceased to function with the overthrow of Judah’s last king, Zedekiah. A prophecy then given declared that it would be no more “until he come whose right it is.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

The one “whose right it is” was born as a babe in a stable at Bethlehem. In the annunciation to Mary, the angel Gabriel said, “Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:30-33

This is in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah previously quoted, which we recall stated that this “Prince of Peace,” Christ Jesus, would sit on the throne of David, to order, establish, and rule in his Father’s kingdom with judgment and justice forever. Thus it is that Jesus became the head of God’s divine ruling house. Starting with his earthly ministry, the selection and preparation began of a company called from the world of mankind to be joint-heirs with him in this ruling house. Through the begetting and birth of the Holy Spirit these are made members of the divine family with Jesus.—Rom. 8:14-17; I John 3:1,2

## **SELECTION OF THE ROYAL HOUSE**

For a time, the opportunity of becoming a part of this royal house of sons was limited to the natural descendants of Abraham. These were the people of God to whom the promises had been originally made, and it was among these that Jesus conducted his ministry. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) However, an insufficient number of the Jewish



nation responded to this call, so later, through the Gospel message, the invitation was extended to Gentiles.—Acts 13:46-49

The work of gathering and preparing these to live and reign with Christ has continued throughout the Christian age. As each one, through trial, has proven worthy, he has fallen asleep in death to be awakened at the close of the age in the “first resurrection” to live and “reign with him [Christ] a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) Just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God at the beginning of the age, so his joint-heirs are resurrected at the close of the age. They join Christ to make up the spiritual and all-powerful “mountain of the house of the LORD” which is established in the “top of the mountains,”—that is, dominating all the affairs of men.

One reason men have misunderstood God’s plan is that they have failed to take into consideration his mighty power. Thinking that he has been limited to what weak and imperfect humans are able to accomplish in his name, it has appeared that the divine purpose has failed. On the contrary, however, God is abundantly able to accomplish his purposes despite the efforts of fallen mankind in opposing directions.—Isa. 55:10,11

A good example of this is in the case of Jesus. He was born to be a king, and to sit upon the throne of his father, David. The religious rulers of his day hated him, and finally succeeded in having him put to death, one of the charges against him being that he claimed to be a king. (Matt. 21:4-9; Luke 23:38) They killed the King, but this did not thwart the divine purpose centered in him. Indeed, it was

necessary that Jesus die in order to redeem the world from death, and God raised him from the dead.  
—Acts 2:22-36

The significance of this, as it relates to God's promises pertaining to the ruling house of David, is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in a sermon preached at Antioch. "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David."—Acts 13:32-34; Ps. 2:6,7; Isa. 55:3

Just as it was good tidings that he who was to sit on the throne of David forever had been born, it was also glad tidings that, when his enemies put him to death, thus serving as cohorts of Satan in his efforts to thwart the divine purpose, God raised this greater David from the dead. Can we doubt the triumph of the Father's plan for the salvation and peace of the human race when power like this can be utilized to assure its successful conclusion? It is by the exercise of such almighty power that God's authority will be established in the earth.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S KINGDOM**

In God's kingdom, under the rule of Christ and his faithful footstep followers, the people and nations of the world will want to be taught the Lord's ways; and when they do, they will no longer

learn war nor practice the arts of war. All the time and resources now being devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war will be directed toward peaceful ends. Then there will be security for all. —Ps. 46:9; Isa. 2:4; Zech. 9:10

At that time, none shall make the people afraid. Today the world is filled with fear. At this very moment, as the year 2022 draws to a close, there is fear of escalating war, revolution, economic recession or depression, growing societal conflicts, political extremism on multiple sides, and increasing moral bankruptcy, just to name a few. There is no genuine peace and security anywhere. It is as though the angels' message of peace and good will upon the earth had never been proclaimed. This is because we are living at the end of the age when, as foretold by the prophets, the empire of Satan, the "god of this world," is being overthrown by means of a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." —II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:2,3; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22

To those unenlightened by the prophecies of the Bible concerning the meaning of the present "distress of nations," it appears as though the angelic message of peace on earth is just empty words. (Luke 21:25) This has led to an incorrect understanding of the angels' proclamation. Instead of peace on earth, and good will toward men, it is now more frequently stated as "Peace on earth among men of good will."

The angelic message, however, was that peace would come to the earth, not because of fallen mankind's goodwill toward one another, but because God's goodwill and purpose toward his human creatures was then being manifested through the

birth of Jesus to be the Savior and future King of the world. God's goodwill toward men had been shown in his promises to send a Savior, and then much more so when the Savior was born. God's goodwill toward the world of mankind was further shown by raising Jesus from the dead.

Although not recognized by the world, God's goodwill has continued through the preparation of Jesus' followers to live and reign with him in his kingdom. The world will, in time, acknowledge God's bountiful grace through the resurrection of these from the dead that they might be associated with Jesus in dispensing kingdom blessings of peace and life to the people of all nations.

## **GOODWILL MANIFESTED AMONG THE PEOPLE**

God's goodwill is to be manifested through the exercise of governmental control over all mankind. This will be by means of that foretold government upon the shoulder of the Prince of Peace. Through that long-promised righteous and just government, the people will be assured of peace and security, and be given the opportunity, by obedience, to be restored to perfection and live forever. All of this will be as a result of God's good will toward his human creatures.

Finally, and as a result of mankind's education in righteousness and in love during Christ's kingdom, all of the willing and obedient among mankind will learn what true and lasting "peace on earth" is. They will learn, also, to extend goodwill, good deeds, and love toward their fellowman throughout the ages of eternity—all this the result of that news "out of Bethlehem," proclaimed by angels so long ago. ■