

A View of the Semiquin- centennial

***“Write the vision,
and make it plain
upon tables, that
he may run that
readeth it. For the
vision is yet for an
appointed time,
but at the end it
shall speak, and
not lie: though it
tarry, wait for it;
because it will
surely come, it
will not tarry.”***
—**Habakkuk 2:2,3**

In July of this year, the 250th birthday of the United States, specifically known as the Semiquincentennial, captured the attention and sober thinking of many people. In terms of years, this nation is still quite young when compared with such European countries as England, France, and Spain. Yet the term of this nation's life has been during a period of some of the greatest increases in

knowledge and inventions since the beginning of recorded time. The United States was peculiarly adapted to provide the fertile ground that gave birth to these increases. More than this, the nation's business minds had the ability to develop

mass-produced products that resulted in an ever-expanding industrial base and marketplace.

The net result of all this is that the United States has enjoyed one of the highest standards of living of any nation and has often been the envy of people throughout the world. In spite of this country's accomplishments, however, it has not attained and will not attain, under its own power, to the position once envisioned by those of its founding fathers who had a sense of religious mission that came from the original Puritan settlers.

The extraordinary beginnings out of which our government and life as a nation emerged reach back even farther than the 250 years of our official age. They go back 175 years before that. The roots of the creative factors influencing our beginnings as a nation were not those that related to industry or business. Rather, they came from the great revolution of religious thought that began to dominate many people's beliefs beginning in the 17th century.

Historical Background

At that time, two lines of thought began to come to the forefront. The first was renewed belief in, and the teaching of, a coming millennium. The other theme was the belief in a revival of learning that was sparked by the invention of movable type. This meant that the printing press could dramatically increase the production of books, including the Bible and other religious writings. To the minds of the theologians at that time, prophetic texts of the Bible indicated that the advancement of learning would be important elements in the millennial arrangement.

Daniel, the 12th chapter, verse 4, speaks of the “time of the end,” and that then “knowledge shall be increased.” This became a major bulwark of the Puritan millennial concepts. This text was often reiterated and given new shades of meaning. It became central to the writings of the philosophers and theologians of the day, from whom the Puritans drew their inspiration.

One of these scholars was Sir Walter Raleigh. He penned the widely read, “History of the World,” which recounted the world’s history beginning with creation. Another was Sir Francis Bacon, who wrote in his “*Valerius Terminus: Of the Interpretation of Nature*,” as follows: “This is a thing which I cannot tell whether I may so plainly speak as truly conceive, that as all knowledge appeareth to be a plant of God’s own planting, so it may seem the spreading and flourishing or at least the bearing and fructifying of this plant, by a providence of God, nay not only a general providence but by a special prophecy, was appointed to this autumn of the world.” In support of his treatise, Bacon went on to quote a portion of Daniel 12:4, associating his “autumn of the world” statement with “the time of the end” spoken by the prophet, thus integrating it into his philosophical program.

It has been estimated that 70% of the ministers publishing new works between 1640 and 1653 subscribed to some form of millennial conception. The following is a quotation from “*The Great Instauration*” [renewal or restoration], published by Charles Webster in 1975. Referring back to the 17th century Puritan acceptance of the Bible and its prophecies, he wrote:

“To the author [John Milton] of *Paradise Lost*, the Garden of Eden represented an ideal state of affairs which had an indisputable historical basis. Raleigh conducted his investigation into the location, size, and physical description of the Garden of Eden with scientific precision. To the commentators on the *Apocalypse* [the Book of Revelation], the New Jerusalem was a concrete and attainable goal for the reformed church. Utopian town planners drew up their schemes with reference to the physical features of the city of Jerusalem. ... This was not merely an academic exercise; the reconstructions were presented in such terms as to provide an inducement to action; rewards were described in terms which were congenial to the mentality of the seventeenth century. ... Milton’s paradise was fertile and temperate, not unlike the landscape of the south of England. There were no thorns or weeds, but Adam was not permitted to lead a passive and indulgent life. Rather he was an active tenant farmer, charged by God to dress and keep his garden, and was granted dominion over all other creatures.”

One of the most detailed impressions of the New Jerusalem based on biblical sources was produced by John Stoughton, the influential 17th century minister of St. Mary Aldermanbury. Of him it is said: “He comforted his readers with the assurance that the catastrophic disruptions of the Thirty Years’ War would end with the fall of Babylon and the establishment of a millennial state. Diverse Bible texts were assimilated to give a vivid impression of the new age. This would be a period of perfect harmony, both in the celestial and terrestrial worlds.

The harmony of the heavenly spheres would be matched by aesthetic harmonies on the earth. There would be neither night, nor day; the sun and moon would shine simultaneously, both with a more radiant light. ... The earth would be more fruitful. The whole earth would bring forth exotic fruits of a kind which had hitherto been confined to limited regions; all crops would yield more heavily. The mountains would generate gems and precious metals in abundance. Imperfections in environment would vanish and there would be no limitations on human longevity. The wolf and the lamb would live together in peace, and no creature would prey upon another. This peaceful coexistence would extend to human society, which would evolve towards a Utopian state under the guidance of the saints. The divisions between the Protestant churches would be healed and they would unite in the blood of Christ. Besides this general state of grace, the general revival of learning, which was already underway, would be pressed to its conclusion. Philosophy and poetry would be purified; voyages of exploration would reveal new rich lands; technological labours would be rewarded; children would learn efficiently by new and effortless methods. ... Philosophers would be guided by a plan for the Great Instauration, which would direct both the course of systematic observation and search for new secrets of nature by means of fructiferous experiments."

In summary, the unprecedented upheavals of the period were seen as a prelude to the final judgment and rule of the saints. Puritan leaders were thus able to draw comfort from the conditions, lawmakers projected their policies as having divine

sanction, and their armies claimed to be Christ's armies in a holy war. The sciences were employed to add exactness to the millennial outline drawn up by theologians, and millennial ideas furnished the intellectuals with new premises and goals. It seemed that the fall of man that began with Adam might at last be on the verge of being reversed. It was claimed that some indications of restitution had already occurred. The Puritan revolution was therefore seen as a period of promise when God would allow science to become the means of bringing about a new paradise on earth. Science therefore assumed a position of considerable importance in the Puritan approach, and their leaders became dedicated to the concept of recovering man's dominion over nature.

Coming to the "New World"

After many years of prosperity and growth, the Puritans began to experience persecution from the Church of England. As the pressure increased, the Puritans began to look for a more favorable atmosphere in which to live and prepare for the establishment of the millennial kingdom. The new world offered an ideal place to preserve the spirit of the reformation. John White, one of the leaders in the Massachusetts colony, wrote in *The Planters Plea*, "God especially directs this work of creating colonies unto the planting and propagating of religion. Furthermore, God had ordained that this work would be undertaken in the Western parts of the World during the last age of history."

John Winthrop shared White's feelings, and it was in this spirit that he accepted the governorship of Massachusetts, believing that God had chosen

this country in which to plant his people. In 1643 the pamphlet, *New England's First Fruits*, was published. It gives the earliest report of the founding of the nation's first institution of higher learning, Harvard College. The original seal of the college bore these Latin words: In Christi Gloriam—"For the Glory of Christ."

Peter Bulkeley was a 17th century minister and one of the founders of Concord, Massachusetts. Around the year 1640, he preached a sermon to fellow Puritans in Boston entitled "*The Gospel Covenant*," in which he said concerning the people of New England, "We are as a city set upon an hill, in the open view of all the earth; the eyes of the world are upon us, because we profess ourselves to be a people in covenant with God."

This sense of mission permeated the thinking and attitudes of the early Pilgrims, and the theme of a holy mission was the basis of thousands of sermons and lectures. These have been referred to by some modern scholars as the "textbook of politics," for they prepared the people spiritually and intellectually for the political events that were to take place at a later time. They also prepared the people to foster and adopt the great scientific and technological advancements that were even then beginning to break upon them.

Premature Hopes

As we review in our minds these remarkable events that had such a profound influence in the forming of the undergirding of our country, we realize that the Pilgrims' hope for the millennial kingdom was premature and was based on many erroneous

concepts. However, their zeal helped to shape the character of our nation and indirectly the lives of the American people. They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.—Rom. 10:2

When Adam was created and put in the Garden of Eden, he was perfect. God required absolute obedience from him. He had communion with God and, as long as this relationship lasted, Adam possessed everlasting life. He was disobedient, however, and because of this he and his progeny were condemned to death.—Gen. 2:7-17; 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12

The purpose of God in developing the plan of the ages is to restore man to his original condition. The matter of having dominion and control over the earth is secondary, or an outgrowth of man's recovery. It is necessary to realize that it is only through the power of God operating through his various agencies that this great work of reconciliation is to be accomplished. One of these agencies is the kingdom, the establishment of which is the final grand step of the Lord in accomplishing the reconciliation of the human race to himself.—Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:3-5; Col. 1:20

The first step in the development of the Lord's plan was a period of time we refer to as the Patriarchal Age, which lasted from the flood in Noah's day to the death of Jacob. It was during this time that God dealt only with certain individuals, such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The principal fruitage of this age was God's promise to faithful Abraham, recorded in Genesis 22:16-18. The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3:8, referred to this promise as the Gospel: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through

faith, preached before [in advance] the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." This is the promise that is the basis for mankind's hope for salvation.

The patriarch Jacob had twelve sons, who later became identified as the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. For a time, the Lord dealt with this nation exclusively. (Amos 3:2) This period we may properly call the Jewish Age, which lasted from the death of Jacob to the crucifixion of Christ. The principal fruition of this step in God's plan of salvation was to bring forth the promised seed of Abraham.

The Apostle Paul again, in Galatians 3:16, states, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." In verse 19 we read, "Wherefore then serveth the law [the law covenant that God made with Israel]? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [Christ, vs. 16] should come to whom the promise was made." In the true sense of the word Christ did not become the long-promised seed of the covenant until he had died on the cross and was resurrected to the divine nature.—Acts 13:32,33

The visitation of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting apostles at Pentecost, fifty days following the resurrection of Christ, marked the beginning of the third step in the development of God's plan of salvation—appropriately denoted the Gospel Age.

The word Christ is the English translation of the Greek word *Christos*, which means "anointed." The equivalent Hebrew word is *Messiah*. The Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 12:12, identifies Christ, or

Messiah, as being one body, but that this body—like a human body—is composed of many members, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” See also Romans 12:5; Ephesians 1:22,23 and 5:30.

In Galatians 3:27-29 the Apostle Paul identifies the footstep followers of Jesus as being “one in Christ Jesus,” members of his symbolic body and therefore part of the seed of Abraham. These will share with Christ in the privilege of blessing all the families of the earth. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

The principal fruitage of the Gospel Age is the calling, character development, and proving faithful of each member of Christ’s body. The Apostle James, in summarizing the discussion of the elders who had gathered in Jerusalem regarding the Gentiles who were coming into Christ, stated, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first [or for the first time] did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.”—Acts 15:14-16; Amos 9:11,12

The Apostle James reminded the elders in Jerusalem that God had foretold the great work of taking from the Gentiles the remainder of the body of Christ. (Hos. 2:23; I Pet. 2:10) After this work is

done, however, God is going to fulfill his promises with respect to the “sure mercies of David”—that is, to establish upon the throne of Christ, the greater David, the long-promised millennial kingdom. “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. 55:3; 9:7

The Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 15:53,54, gives us a prophecy that describes how, in God’s due time, the long-expected and greatly desired kingdom will finally be established. He states, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Here the apostle is saying that when all the members of the body of Christ have been selected, have faithfully followed in the footsteps of Jesus even unto death, and then have been exalted to the divine nature, the prophecy then will be fulfilled concerning the destruction of death. This does not indicate that the completion of the church will bring the fulfillment of the prophecy, but rather that the means of bringing about the destruction of death will have been provided; for it is through the Christ—Christ and the members of his body, the seed of promise—that the world is to be blessed. This will be during what is styled the Millennial, or Messianic, Age.

The expression, “Death is swallowed up in victory,” is a quotation from Isaiah 25:6-8. It is a beautiful and vivid prophecy concerning the yet future millennial kingdom—a time when the great restoration will come to pass. Then the hopes and desires of the early Puritans, many of the founding fathers of the United States, and others who looked for a better day, will be fulfilled. As our opening text says, this blessed vision of the future for all mankind will surely come to pass—“at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”—Hab. 2:3 ■