

“His Government and Peace”

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”

—Isaiah 9:6,7

WITHIN THESE PAGES DURING the year 2017, we have highlighted many of the headline news stories of this country and of the world. The end of the year is now approaching, and the beginning of 2018 draws nigh. The sincere hopes of many at the start of 2017 were perhaps lofty, as they contemplated the desire for peace, security, and happiness, both at home and abroad. There was, no doubt, even anticipation among some that this year would, perchance, be different from past disappointments in this regard. Has it been so? A brief recap of world events in 2017, many of which have been cited during the course of the year on these pages, likely provides the answer:

—The inauguration of this country’s 45th president, Donald Trump, in January, and the resulting charges and counter-charges of collusion and interference in the 2016 election.

—Renewed threats and fears of cyber-terrorism and hacking, especially at the top levels of government.

—Repeated, failed attempts by Congress to repeal and replace current health care laws with new ones, though at the same time admitting that the existing system needs changes made.

—A deadly chemical attack by the government of Syria against its own people in April, highlighting the ongoing civil war which has raged there for over five years, taking the lives of nearly half a million people.

—The related question of the United States' involvement in the affairs of other nations—to intervene or isolate ourselves—which continues to perplex our leadership and citizens.

—Changes in religious adherence, with Christianity declining and Islam increasing, but most notably, atheism and agnosticism now ranking third in the world.

—Society's continuing moral decay, where it now seems that every kind of lifestyle is deemed acceptable.

—Escalating violence on various fronts, such as has occurred because of increasing racial tensions, frequent terrorist attacks in various parts of the world, and the growing threat of nuclear conflict with North Korea or possibly Iran.

—The ongoing immigration debate, and the related argument concerning construction of a wall at the United States and Mexico border to prevent illegal entrance into this country.

—The phenomenon of “fake news” and “leaks,” with government leaders on all sides making claims and

counter-claims, leaving the people to wonder—what is truth?

—Natural disasters, such as fires in the northern plains and in California, devastating hurricanes—Harvey, Irma and Maria—and major earthquakes in Mexico, all of which have taken many lives, and caused billions of dollars in damage.

—The October mass shootings in Las Vegas, which left over fifty dead and hundreds wounded, and was the worst act of its kind in modern United States history.

—Most recently, the ongoing controversy surrounding the United States flag and the national anthem, and the question of appropriate forums for Americans to show dissent.

We can surely ascertain from the foregoing recap of the year's major news events that any hopes for a more peaceful, secure and happy world in 2017 have long since been dashed. The trend concerning man's ability to properly rule over himself continues downward. This is true both among leadership of the nations as well as with the people. At every level, and in all facets of present institutions—political, social, economic, and religious—current world conditions are resulting in increased uproar, instability and gloominess among earth's inhabitants.

Thanks be to God, however, that such will not be true of world conditions when Jesus is the sovereign Ruler, the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Rev. 19:16) How appropriate it is, at this season of the year, and with current world conditions as they are, to review the blessed assurance of God's promises centered in Jesus, whose birth much of the world will celebrate this month.

CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE

Under Christ's righteous rule, the "increase of his government" will also mean a corresponding manifestation of peace and goodwill. This will be a monumental change for mankind. Never in the history of man has the expanding influence of a government brought with it the assurance of lasting peace. Had the kings of Israel been obedient to the laws of God, that kingdom would have been an exception, but they were not obedient. When we compare the better with the worse, there have been some noble rulers who have sought the best interests of the people over whom they have ruled. Even these, however, have been tainted with selfishness, and have lacked the necessary wisdom to be entrusted safely with unlimited influence in world affairs.

Today a divided, troubled and fearful world bears stark testimony to the failure of all human efforts to govern the nations properly. The despair of the people which has resulted from this failure haunts the human race and is as a plague which is robbing mankind everywhere of genuine peace and joy. In the face of this dire extremity, the people continue to turn in every direction to seek a way out of their dilemma. The vast majority, however, do not realize as yet that there is only one way out, which is God's way, the way of his kingdom, in which Jesus will be the King.

How meaningful should be the Christmas message this year to those who can grasp its real significance and have faith in all that it implies. It should mean much more than merely the singing of beautiful carols or the display of attractive decorations or the

exchange of simple gifts. These, at the most, should be but reminders of the greater event which we commemorate by them. This was God's gift to the world, the gift of a Savior, a Redeemer, and a King who is soon to rule all nations—indeed, God's "unspeakable gift." (II Cor. 9:15) At no time has this knowledge been so important as a basis for hope in the hearts and lives of the hopeless. At no time has there ever been a greater opportunity on the part of those who understand the real meaning of Jesus' birth to herald wide the glorious message of his kingdom, that it is soon to be manifested for the blessing of all nations and the solution of all the problems of a dying world.—Gen. 22:18; Ps. 22:27; Acts 3:25

SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," wrote the prophet. (Isa. 9:6) This is one of the many prophecies concerning the birth of Jesus, that glorious one who was hailed by the angel. We recall those momentous words, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10,11) Indeed, the promised child was born, the foretold son was given, and, as the promised Christ, or Messiah, he was to be the Savior of the world.

Then, to emphasize the importance of the event and to explain further its significance, "a multitude of the heavenly host" were heard "praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:13,14) Hardly

any passage in the Bible is more familiar than this one. It will be repeated by millions again this year. Throughout the centuries, however, and more so now than ever, it has seemed merely the expression of mankind's wishful thinking. It serves as an inspiration for a few days, but is soon forgotten for another year as the world continues on its downward course.

In reading the prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus, the Son whom God would give, many have failed to notice the prophetic assurance that "the government shall be upon his shoulder." The world-wide kingdom of peace and life which is guaranteed by divine power will be a blessed reality at exactly the due time foreordained by God, and will become operative by the authority vested in his Son, Christ Jesus. By contrast, for many centuries the view of most has been that the world must bring about its own kingdom of peace by human efforts. Only those who have seen the matter as it is set forth in the Scriptures, and have exercised full confidence in the promises of God, can be truly blessed by the Christmas message.

To make sure that we understand the thought that the kingdom government will rest upon Christ's shoulder, and not man's, the prophet adds, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." (Isa. 9:7) "This," which will be performed by the zeal of the Lord, refers to those things that the prophet has spoken of in his preceding words. Let us note what the prophecy says.

First, there is the promise of the child, the son, who would be born and upon whose shoulder the responsibility of the new world government would

rest. Jesus was this child. His birth was not by the will of man, for the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy was accomplished by God's direction and power. When the angels sang of peace on earth and goodwill toward men, they meant that through this one and through the kingdom in which he would in due time rule, God would bring peace to the nations. They meant, also, that his birth was an expression of God's goodwill toward men, not that men would suddenly and of their own volition begin to exercise goodwill toward one another.

“WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR, THE MIGHTY GOD”

“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6) All of these titles are ascribed to Jesus by God and are indicative of the various ways in which the “increase of his government” will be manifested for the blessing of the people. The title “Counsellor,” for example, aptly describes his role as “mediator between God and men.” (I Tim. 2:5) One of the fundamental causes of all suffering, death, and problems in the earth is the fact that the human race is estranged from God through rebellion against his law. One of the functions of Christ's reign will be to bring about reconciliation between God and men. Peace with God is a necessary prerequisite to peace among men. As long as men are at enmity with God and disobedient to his law, they will be enemies of one another.

The first step toward the reconciliation of the world by Jesus was the sacrifice of his life as man's Redeemer. This outstanding act of love for the subjects over which he was later to be Ruler is one of the

things which entitles him to be called “Wonderful.” The rulers of this world are considered wonderful if, through their ability as leaders, they can induce their subjects to die for them and for the cause they represent. Jesus, however, reversed this procedure. The foundation of his greatness, and of his world rulership, was laid by his own sacrifice, the giving of his own life that his subjects might live.

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus merits the title, “The mighty God.” This does not mean that he is the Almighty God, the Heavenly Father and Creator. It simply means that Jehovah has exalted him to such a high position in the carrying out of the divine plan for the reconciliation and salvation of the human race that he is to be recognized as God, a mighty one, to whom honor is to be accorded. We, his followers of this present Gospel Age, are bidden to honor the Son even as we honor the Father. (John 5:23) During Christ’s kingdom reign, mankind is prophetically represented as saying of this mighty one, this divinely provided Counsellor, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us.” (Isa. 25:9) The thought seems to be that the people will come to recognize Jesus as the “mighty God,” through whose death and kingdom rule they are being reconciled to Jehovah and saved from the clutches of sin and death.

“EVERLASTING FATHER”

The thought of salvation from death is further emphasized by the title, “The everlasting Father.” Christ Jesus is the one who will give everlasting life to the people. The word “Father” means life-giver. No other ruler in the earth has even attempted to

give life to the people. Yet, how essential this is to the lasting peace and joy of mankind. We might visualize a world enjoying all the blessings of peace and security that human governments have ever promised, yet it would still be a sin-sick and dying world. However, the “increase” of Christ’s influence among the nations will be so widespread and all-comprehensive that even the great enemy Death will crumble before him in defeat and destruction.

“He must reign,” Paul writes, “till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (I Cor. 15:25,26) Think what this will mean to a dying race! The destruction of death, while it will first be manifested in the restoration to health of the living, will not stop there. All the victims of this great enemy—the billions who have been struck down throughout all the ages of the past—are to be awakened from the sleep of death. Thus, they too will take their places in the kingdom arrangement, and have the opportunity to gain everlasting life through obedience to the just and righteous laws of that new order.

Here again we are reminded that the responsibility for the fulfillment of all the wonderful things promised through the kingdom of Christ will be “upon his shoulder,” and that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” If we were thinking of these wonderful promises of the Bible from the standpoint of what human beings might be able to do, our thoughts and our wishes would be but vain imaginations. It is not so, however, when we take God’s viewpoint. Jesus’ birth was a miracle. During his brief ministry he demonstrated what miracles of healing and of raising the dead are possible when

divine power is employed. He was raised from death by a miracle. The “zeal of the LORD of hosts” performed this, and we have the blessed assurance that divine power will also be used for the restoration of all the dead. In a world in which death is universal, how blessed is the promise of the time coming when “there shall be no more death.”—Rev. 21:4

“PRINCE OF PEACE”

The prophet also describes Jesus as “The Prince of Peace.” We have already noted that in his role as Mediator, or Counsellor, Jesus will establish peace between God and men. This peace will be based upon obedience to the divine laws of righteousness and justice. All those who are obedient to God will be at peace with one another, for they will all have acknowledged the one supreme authority. The Prophet Micah tells us that “people shall flow unto it,” recognizing the authority of Christ’s kingdom. Being taught the Lord’s ways, nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks, . . . neither shall they learn war any more.” (Mic. 4:1-3) When this prophecy is fulfilled there surely will be “peace on earth,” not because men have devised a way of living at peace with one another, but because of God’s goodwill toward men in providing a Prince of Peace to teach them the principles of justice and love embodied in his laws.

This peace on earth established by The Prince of Peace will be more than peace among nations. It will also be peace within nations—economic peace, symbolized by the expression: “They shall dwell—every man—under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, with none to make them afraid.” (vs. 4, *Rotherham*

Emphasized Bible) It will mean peace in every community and in every home. It will mean peace of heart and mind, which will never be disturbed again by the fear of war, or poverty, or sickness, or even death. Nothing will be permitted to “hurt nor destroy,” says the prophet, in all that holy kingdom. (Isa. 11:9) In this promise, the reason ascribed for the conditions of peace, tranquility, and safety assured by the reign of Christ is that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

When the earth is filled with the knowledge of God and the people live in harmony with that knowledge, they will enjoy peace among themselves and within themselves. This peace will be the outgrowth of their peace with God, which they will have found through the acceptance of the redemptive work of Christ. Upon this basis, and through obedience to the divine standards of righteousness, man will live in peace, security and happiness, and gain everlasting life.

ON THE THRONE OF DAVID

Isaiah also prophesies that the reign of The Prince of Peace will be upon the “throne of David, . . . to order it, and to establish it.” (Isa. 9:7) This is a reaffirmation of the promise that the Messianic kingdom reign would come through the lineage of David, and that his dominion would be reestablished by God through Christ. The kings of Israel were recognized by God as representing him, and the nation of Israel was his kingdom. Of Solomon, we read that he “sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his Father.”—I Chron. 29:23

However, this arrangement ceased when King Zedekiah was overthrown and the nation was taken into captivity in Babylon. "Remove the diadem," the prophet said, "and take off the crown. . . . It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." (Ezek. 21:26,27) Jesus is the one referred to in this prophecy as having the right to reestablish the throne, or kingdom, which was then overthrown. From this standpoint, his rulership will be upon the throne of David.

From the time God's typical kingdom was overthrown until Christ begins his reign over the nations, the earth is without a divinely established government. From this standpoint, the reestablishment of the throne of David by Christ Jesus is the prophetic manner of assuring us of the divine authority to rule which is vested in him. While the kingdom of Christ will be vastly more powerful and more far-reaching than was the typical kingdom of Israel, it will in many respects be like it. God was Israel's Lawgiver, and if the people had obeyed those laws, and if their kings had administered them properly, they would have been blessed indeed.

KINGDOM ADMINISTRATION

The laws of God's kingdom will also be divine laws, to be administered by Jesus, the divine King. He will have associated with him those who have proved their worthiness of that high position by suffering and dying as he suffered and died. These will come forth in the "first resurrection" to live and reign with Jesus. (Rev. 20:6) Thus we are assured that all the rulers in the new kingdom will be righteous administrators of God's law. Their earthly

representatives, described as “princes in all the earth,” and who “obtained a good report through faith,” will also have been previously trained and prepared for their positions of responsibility. (Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:39) Upon their resurrection from the dead, they will be capable of administering the visible phase of the new kingdom wisely and in harmony with the righteous laws and instructions which will be given to the people through them.

The throne of David—symbol of divine rulership—will be established, not temporarily, but as the prophet says, “from henceforth even for ever.” (Isa. 9:7) The mediatorial phase of the kingdom, under the Christ, will continue for a thousand years, sufficiently long enough to restore the human race to life and to full harmony with God. In the complete sense of the word it will not be until the close of the reign of Christ that the prayer, “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth,” shall be fully answered. Christ’s rulership will be the means by which this prayer will be answered. When he shall have completed the work of reconciling the world to God, Christ will, as Paul explains, turn over the kingdom to the Father. (I Cor. 15:24-28) Then the supreme and everlasting reign of God himself shall have come, and his will shall be recognized and obeyed in earth even as it is in heaven.

Truly, the prophet was right when he wrote concerning Jesus that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” It will have no end because it will not stop short of removing from earth every element of unrighteousness and every enemy of God and men. He will extend his sphere of influence until everything which has disturbed

the peace, security and happiness of the people and robbed them of God's blessings shall be destroyed. This is the blessed hope which may be ours now, even as this most tumultuous year comes to an end. With full faith in the promises of God's Word, let us once more commemorate the birth of The Prince of Peace. ■

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Joan Dudney, Hartford, CT—September 23.
Age, 101

Brother John Mercer, Kensington, Australia—October 1. Age, 86

Brother Ebe Manohar, Coimbatore, India—November 7. Age, 70

Sister Florica Cap, Cluj, Romania—November 8.
Age, 57

Sister Anne Boychuk, Winnipeg, Canada—November 13. Age, 81

Brother Daniel Larson, Chicago, IL—November 13.
Age, 77

Sister Eloise Long, Zanesville, OH—November 15.
Age, 94

Brother Ralph Gottshall, Clearwater, FL—November 16. Age, 101