

Peace for Israel and the World

*“Of the increase of
his government
and peace there
shall be no end.”*

—Isaiah 9:7

WARS HAVE LONG PLAGUED

the human race. The history of the world has been written in human blood. Wars increase, both in the amount of armament involved, and in their power to destroy. Many people are asking, “Will there ever be peace?” As the year 2023 draws to a close, we can readily see that the events of the last two years cast a grim outlook in answer to this question.

First, in February, 2022, Russia invaded the country of Ukraine, starting a war that continues even now. As of this writing, Ukraine has suffered the loss of about 70,000 of its soldiers, with another 120,000 wounded. Russia’s losses are significantly higher, with around 120,000 deaths and 180,000 wounded. In total, the dead and wounded from this armed conflict will soon surpass 500,000, and there appears no end on the near horizon to this war between neighbors.

Most recently, just one month prior to this writing, violence once again erupted in the Middle East, this time between Israel and Hamas. On October 7th,

over 1,000 Hamas militants invaded Israel, killed over 1,400 Israelis, and took more than 200 people hostage. The next day, Israel formally declared war on Hamas, vowing to destroy them. Now, one month since the war began, over 10,000 people have died and more than 33,000 wounded on both sides of this conflict, and these numbers will certainly continue to rise.

What do the Scriptures say about such wars, especially this most recent one involving the nation of Israel? God, through the Prophet Isaiah, spoke concerning the Jewish people, “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. ... I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; ... I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.” —Jer. 32:37,40,41, *New American Standard Bible*

Israel was driven away from the land which God had promised to them—modern-day Palestine. (Num. 33:51-53; 34:1-29; Josh. 11:13-21) This was because of their disobedience to God and their rejection of the Messiah—Jesus. Jesus prophesied this, saying: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:37,38, *NASB*) He added, as recorded in Luke’s account: “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”—Luke 21:24, *NASB*

Israel's punishment was to be only temporary as the Apostle Paul wrote: "I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery ... that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:25-27, *NASB*) While Israel lost their relationship with God under the Law Covenant due to disobedience, they were not cast off forever. God promised to regather them from all the lands to which he had scattered them and make with them a new, an everlasting covenant.

"Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."—Jer. 31:31-34, *NASB*

The Apostle Paul quoted this prophecy, adding that Jesus is the one who makes this covenant possible. "We have such a high priest, who has

taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ... He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them [the Jewish people], He says, behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Heb. 8:1,6-8, *NASB*) Because of their imperfection, the Jewish people could not keep their first covenant, established at Mount Sinai. They needed a better high priest and a better sacrifice—a ransom for Adam—to be cleansed from sin so they can come back into harmony with God. (I Tim. 2:5,6) Jesus provided that better sacrifice with his death on the cross and as a result, became a better high priest. As that high priest, Jesus is the guarantor and “mediator of a better covenant,” the New Covenant under which Israel and eventually all mankind will be cleansed from sin and restored to life and to God’s favor.

For nearly a century and a half, God has been steadily regathering the Jewish people back to their land of promise in preparation for the establishment of this New Covenant. When it is established with Israel, Paul writes, “What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15, *NASB*) The New Covenant will result in “life from the dead,” that is, the resurrection of all mankind from the grave, and we are promised that both Jew and Gentile, Arab and Israeli, will be included in this great work.—John 5:28,29

As we have seen the Jewish people being regathered to their promised homeland, many surrounding peoples and nations have raged against it. This, too, is a sign that God's plan for Israel's and all mankind's salvation is progressing toward the promised result of blessing all the families of the earth. (Ps. 2:1-9; Gen. 22:16-18) God's purpose to gather Israel to their homeland and bring them back into harmony with himself will not be thwarted by any earthly nation or organization. Neither will it be thwarted by spiritual wickedness in high places—Satan and the fallen angels.—Eph. 6:11,12

By regathering Israel back to the promised land and establishing a New Covenant with them, God says, "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, ... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when I prove Myself holy among you [the Jewish people] in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."—Ezek. 36:23-28, *NASB*

God has promised in this regathering of Israel that they will never be uprooted again. "I will bring My exiled people of Israel back from distant lands,

and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. ... I will firmly plant them there in their own land. They will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God.” (Amos 9:14,15, *New Living Translation*) “They will possess their land forever, for I will plant them there with my own hands in order to bring myself glory.” (Isa. 60:21, *NLT*) “They will live in the land I gave my servant Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived. They and their children and their grandchildren after them will live there forever, generation after generation.”—Ezek. 37:25, *NLT*

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

Thus far our discussion has centered mostly upon Israel and the wonderful promises God has made for their full restoration to his divine favor. However, as we have alluded to, the blessings promised to them will be extended to all nations and peoples of the earth in the Messianic kingdom, now near at hand.

As our opening text states, universal and lasting peace ultimately will be established in the earth. However, it will not come by human efforts, nor will it be induced by mutual fear of destruction, nor by armament races and wars. It will be established by the kingdom of Christ, a worldwide government that will exercise control in the affairs of men. Those who believe the promises of the Bible pertaining to the coming of Christ’s kingdom can thus look into the future with a great deal of optimism.

The Bible says that “the desire of all nations shall come,” and we know that fundamentally the vast majority of nations and people of the earth

desire peace. (Hag. 2:7) However, some quote Jesus' statement that there shall be "wars and rumors of wars," and add to it his words, "then shall the end come," as proof that wars will continue on this earth until the world comes to an end, which to these mean the destruction of the literal earth and the end of all human experience.—Matt. 24:6,14

When Jesus spoke of "wars and rumors of wars" it was in answer to questions asked him by his disciples pertaining to the time of his return and the end of the age. "What shall be the sign of thy coming," they asked, "and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3) The *King James Version* of the disciples' questions is misleading, for it incorrectly translates the Greek words *parousia* and *aion* used in the text. With these words properly translated the questions are, "What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the age?"—See *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*; *Young's Literal Translation*

When Jesus said that there would be "wars and rumors of wars," after which the end would come, he simply meant that the many centuries following his earthly ministry would be characterized by intermittent wars, and that this would continue right down to the end of the age. He did not mean that the end of the age would mean the destruction of the earth, nor the end of all human experience on the earth. As the prophecies of the Bible point out, the end of the age of "wars and rumors of wars" marks the beginning of a new age, the age during which Christ's kingdom will be the controlling factor in the affairs of men. Then, as our text declares, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

HUMAN EFFORTS FAIL

The lesson of history is that armament races and balances of power do not prevent war. With fallen human selfishness dictating the policies of nations, the only hope for peace is in the establishment of an authority in the earth powerful enough to impose laws of justice and righteousness which transcend the petty jealousies and selfish ambitions of individual leaders and nations. Such an authority cannot stem from any existing nation or government of earth. Only the kingdom of God is capable of exercising such an authority and of executing justice and righteousness in all the earth.—Zech. 14:9

In this regard many earnest students of the Bible have failed to realize that in the outworking of the divine plan there is to be an actual government of righteousness established in the earth, a government that will effectively rule the nations and assure peace and happiness to all mankind. Despite all the marvelous references in both the Old and New Testaments to this “kingdom” which is to rule from “sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,” many insist that God’s kingdom is merely a righteous spirit, or disposition, in the hearts of individuals.—Ps. 72:8

This concept of the kingdom is based on the expression, “The kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21) These are purported to be the words of Jesus, but they are a faulty translation of what he actually said. The Pharisees had asked Jesus “when the kingdom of God should come.” (vs. 20) Replying, he said, quoting verses 20-21 from *The Emphatic Diaglott*, “The kingdom of God comes not with outward show; nor shall they say, Behold here! or there! for, behold, God’s royal majesty is among you.” A more exact

translation of this statement would be, "The King is among you." This brings it into harmony with the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The Pharisees did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the great King of the Old Testament prophecies. From their standpoint, how could he set up a kingdom in opposition to Rome, liberate Israel, and extend peace and joy to all nations? He had no army. His friends were not people of importance. What could embarrass Jesus more, the Pharisees thought, than to ask him just when he expected to set up his kingdom?

Jesus knew what was in their hearts and answered accordingly. The kingdom of God, he explained, was not to come into power in the manner of other kingdoms or governments. There would be no outward show—no armies, no wars of conquest, and no display of armament. As a matter of fact, as he pointed out, the future King was even then in their midst, although they refused to believe it. Jesus' work at his First Advent was related to his future kingdom, but no soldiers were needed to accomplish it.

The faulty translation, "The kingdom of God is within you" could not have been true, for Jesus was talking to the Pharisees whom he had styled hypocrites, whited sepulchres, children of the devil. (Matt. 23:27; John 8:44) How could the kingdom of God be within them? It was not, and later Jesus cast them off from having any share in the rulership of his kingdom.—Luke 13:28

NOT OF THIS ORDER

Another statement of Jesus which also has been greatly misunderstood is the one he made to Pilate,

when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This has been taken by many to mean that all the promises of God pertaining to a kingdom are to be fulfilled in the experiences of Jesus’ followers when they die and go to heaven. After all, say these, Jesus said that the kingdom promised in the Bible has nothing to do with this world of sin.

The difficulty here lies in the use of the word “world” to translate the Greek word *kosmos*, which means order or arrangement of things. What Jesus said was that his kingdom was not of this present order of society. The Bible reveals that there are different “worlds” or social arrangements in the plan of God. The coming kingdom, or new social order, is the one which follows the present one. This new order or arrangement is ushered in by the return of Christ at his Second Advent. It is then that his kingdom is established and that the “government shall be upon his shoulder.” It is then that the promise will be fulfilled, “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The disciples at first did not understand this, so Jesus related a parable to illustrate it, concerning a certain nobleman, which referred to himself, who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return. (Luke 19:12) In his introduction to this parable Luke explains that Jesus gave it because his disciples thought that his kingdom “should immediately appear.”—Luke 19:11

All of Jesus’ teachings were related directly or indirectly to God’s promised kingdom. They do not all pertain to the blessings which will reach mankind through the agencies of that kingdom. Many of them relate to various aspects of preparation for

it. Jesus' death as man's Redeemer is in this category, for God's plan is that the Messiah of promise was not to rule over a dying race, but a race redeemed from death. Thus, each individual could be offered the opportunity, upon conditions of obedience, to live forever.

The followers of Christ are offered the opportunity of reigning with him if they are willing to suffer and die with him. (II Tim. 2:11,12) The Gospel call to those willing to accept these terms of discipleship has been going out during the entire age since Pentecost, and this has also been in preparation for the kingdom. Many of Jesus' parables relate to the work of this present age, being illustrative from one standpoint or another of the joys, blessings, difficulties, and trials of these "children of the kingdom." —Matt. 13:38

Not understanding the plan of God, it has been easy to conclude that all the kingdom promises of the Bible simply refer to the enjoyment of a home in heaven for all eternity; for there are many heavenly, or spiritual, promises associated with the theme of the kingdom. However, these promises are to those called to be rulers in that kingdom, and not to its subjects. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he was highly exalted to the divine nature, having given his flesh for the life of the world; and the promise is that those who will live and reign with him in his kingdom will be made like him, and share his heavenly home and nature.—Phil. 2:8,9; John 6:51; I John 3:2,3

These spiritual rulers in the kingdom of God will have human representatives. The religious rulers of Israel thought they were to represent God in his

kingdom, and they could have, had they qualified through humility and obedience. These were in line to be the “children of the kingdom,” but when the kingdom is established on earth they will discover that through unfaithfulness they forfeited the right to any official position therein. Jesus explained this, saying, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.”—Luke 13:28,29

The expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is descriptive of the chagrin and disappointment to be experienced by those who, while once in line to be used in the kingdom, find when they are raised from the dead that this desired position is occupied by “Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets.” These faithful ones also will be raised from the dead in what the Apostle Paul speaks of as a “better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

These restored worthies of the ancient past are prophetically referred to in Psalm 45:16 as those who will be made “princes in all the earth.” We might speak of them as the leaders of the earthly phase of Christ’s kingdom. They will represent and operate in conjunction with the kingdom’s spiritual phase, made up of the glorified Jesus and his faithful followers who, in the “first resurrection,” are exalted to live and reign with him.—Rev. 20:4,6

These two phases of the kingdom of Christ are symbolically described in Micah 4:1-4 as “Zion”—the spiritual or heavenly—and “Jerusalem,” the

human or earthly. This prophecy also refers to Jesus and his followers, the “sons of God,” as the ruling “house of the LORD,” symbolized in this prophecy as the “mountain,” or kingdom, of the Lord. The prophecy reads:

“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.”

Thus will peace come to all mankind, Jew and Gentile, through Christ’s world government. It will not be a peace through mutual fear, nor by submission of one nation to another, but a peace so complete and enduring that there will be peace and freedom from fear for all people. As the prophet states, “none shall make them afraid.” Peace alone, however, even peace with economic security as symbolized in this prophecy by the idea of dwelling under vine and fig tree, would not be wholly satisfactory. Even with these much desired and sought-after blessings

attained, there would still be sickness and death. However, another Old Testament prophecy in which a “mountain” is used to symbolize Christ’s kingdom, assures us that even death is to be destroyed.

“In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:6-9

“All people,” “all nations,” “all faces,” “all the earth,” the prophet states. What more clear statement could there be that the blessings of Christ’s kingdom will be for people of every family, city, town, nationality, race, in every country and continent upon the face of the earth? How apparent it is also that these inspiring kingdom promises mean so much more than merely a righteous sentiment in the hearts of individuals, that they describe a literal and genuine government which will rule the world in righteousness, bringing peace and health and life to all mankind. We long for these wonderful promises to be fulfilled, for they will mark the end of man’s nighttime of sorrow and death and the beginning of a bright, new day in the experience of all mankind, both Jew and Gentile.—Ps. 30:5 ■