

Our Lord's Return

The Kingdom and Its Blessings

“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. ... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”
—Isaiah 9:6,7

THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE

of our Lord's return is the establishment of a worldwide kingdom which will assure the people of peace and the opportunity to enjoy health and everlasting life. What will this new government be like? Will it be merely a holy influence that sweeps over the earth? It will indeed be such an influence, but in addition it will have a definite system of government and administration. Christ will be the king, the invisible ruler, whose position in that kingdom is beautifully described

by the Prophet Isaiah in our opening text. The

church will be associated with Christ in the spiritual, or invisible, phase of that kingdom. These, throughout the age now closing, have faithfully followed in his steps, and the promise has been that if they suffer with Christ they shall also reign with him.—II Tim. 2:12

God's promises to the faithful followers of the Master are spiritual, or heavenly. Jesus said to his disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3) Misunderstanding the intent of these promises, many have concluded that it has been God's purpose to take as many of earth's inhabitants to heaven as believe on Christ in this life, and that all those who do not believe would be forever lost. However, now it is seen that in preparing the followers of Jesus to reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom, God has actually been preparing to save and bless mankind in general and to restore all the willing and obedient to perfect human life here on earth.

The Scriptures reveal that while Christ and his church, exalted to heavenly glory, will be the invisible rulers of the world in the coming new social order, there will be present on the earth human, or visible, representatives of this heavenly government. Just as Satan, the invisible prince of the present evil world, has operated chiefly through visible agencies, so Christ and his exalted followers who are brought forth to live and reign with him, will have visible representatives.

The Bible tells us who these will be. Jesus explained that in the kingdom, men will "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” with “Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets.” (Luke 13:28,29) In Psalm 45:16, those of this same class are described as “fathers,” and the prophecy states that they will become the “children” of the Christ, and will be made “princes in all the earth.” This class will be made up of all the worthy ones of past ages who lived prior to the first coming of Jesus. In Isaiah 32:1 both the heavenly and earthly phases of the Messianic kingdom are identified. The prophecy reads, “Behold, a king [Jesus and his church] shall reign in righteousness, and princes [the Ancient Worthies] shall rule in judgment.”

POSSIBLE WITH GOD

Let us not hastily conclude that the establishment of such a kingdom is impossible. For the worthy servants of God of past ages to become the visible phase of the millennial kingdom means that they will have to be raised from the dead. Is it too much to believe that God is able to do this? Is it not fundamental to Christian teaching that there is to be a resurrection of the dead? Surely if we are looking to the Bible for a solution to the world’s problems, we should be prepared to believe that God is able to do all that he has promised to do, and he has promised to restore his ancient servants to life in what is described in the Bible as a “better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

The resurrection of the Ancient Worthies awaits the completion of the church class, made up of the Master’s faithful followers. Paul explains that these faithful ones of old will not “be made perfect”—

restored to perfection of life as humans—"without" the church having first been resurrected. (Heb. 11:40) As for the faithful followers of Jesus being raised to spiritual life with him, surely we should have no difficulty in believing this. Most Christians believe in a spiritual existence after death and that those possessing it are invisible to human eyes.

However, some have erroneously supposed the spiritual existence described in the Bible to be a natural extension of the present cycle of life. On the contrary, we are told, "The wages of sin is death," and "the dead know not any thing." (Rom. 6:23; Eccl. 9:5) The Bible teaches that the hope of life after death for both the church and the world depends upon a resurrection of the dead. (I Cor. 15:13-23) The Scriptures also point out that in the resurrection some are given spiritual bodies. (vss. 38-44) Thus Christ was exalted, and the same is true of his faithful followers. Together, these powerful spirit beings and their human representatives, the Ancient Worthies, will exercise righteous authority over mankind throughout the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom.

Of that kingdom we read, "The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (Mic. 4:2) Here the heavenly phase of the kingdom is symbolized as "Zion." In ancient Israel, literal Mount Zion was denoted as representing God's authority over his chosen people. In Revelation 14:1, the faithful followers of Jesus, the Lamb, are pictured as being with him on Mount Zion. Thus, Zion is an apt symbol of the spiritual rulership of the Messianic kingdom.

While the law of the Messianic kingdom will “go forth of Zion,” the “word of the LORD” will proceed from Jerusalem, Micah declares. When Jesus said that in the kingdom the people would “sit down” with the Ancient Worthies, the thought is of pupils sitting at the feet of their teachers, or masters. These teachers will communicate the “word of the LORD” as they receive it from the exalted Zion class. This is evidently what is meant by the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem. Hence, we believe it quite probable that the visible phase of the Messianic kingdom will have its headquarters in the ancient city of Jerusalem.

NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH

The two phases of the coming kingdom are also pictured in the prophecies of the Bible as a “new heavens and a new earth.” Through the Prophet Isaiah God said, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. ... Be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days.”—Isa. 65:17-20

In vision the Apostle John saw the fulfillment of this wonderful prophecy. The “Jerusalem” which is identified in Isaiah’s prophecy with the new heavens and new earth is seen by John to be the exalted church class, described as “a bride adorned for her husband,” and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” (Rev. 21:2,9,10) The former heaven and earth, symbolic

of Satan's world order, is seen to pass away, and then "a new heaven and a new earth" appear, symbolic of the heavenly and earthly phases of the Messianic kingdom.—vs. 1

With the new heaven and new earth functioning, and the "new Jerusalem" established, God's favor will be manifested toward the people through this governmental arrangement. The result will be that "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."—vss. 3,4

The symbolisms of the Bible are always appropriate and fitting. The literal heavens and earth bear a certain relationship to each other which well illustrates the operation of the spiritual and the earthly phases of the kingdom. The heavens, for example, control earth's tides, atmospheric conditions, and seasons. Similarly, the arrangements of earth's new order will be under the direct influence and control of the heavenly phase of that government.

This is true also of the present symbolic heavens and earth. The affairs of men have always been more or less under the influence of powers over which Satan has been the prince. (Eph. 2:2) These have frequently exercised their influence through false religious systems. Indeed, it has often been through the religious emotions of men and women that Satan has held control over the world. Throughout the centuries, various so-called religions have been the connecting link between "the god of this world" and the social and governmental affairs of the people. Many wars have been fought, and much persecution has come about, in the name of religion.

The Apostle Peter, writing of events which would occur as a result of Christ's return, tells us that "the heavens and the earth, which are now, ... are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment." (II Pet. 3:7) Earlier in this same prophecy Peter speaks of the heavens and earth which were before the Flood as passing away. (vss. 5,6) Thus we know that he is not referring to the literal heavens and earth, for these have never passed away, and never will. The Bible states that "the earth abideth for ever" and that God "created it not in vain," but "formed it to be inhabited."—Eccles. 1:4; Isa. 45:18

In Peter's prophecy, speaking again of the destruction of Satan's evil order, he says that we should be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." Then he adds, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:12,13) This coming "new heavens and new earth" will be established in fulfillment of the promises of God. When the work of this new kingdom is completed, and Satan and the willfully disobedient are destroyed, then shall come to pass the promise that "there shall be no more death." (Rev. 21:4) This is a glorious outlook and will be the final result of our Lord's return—his second presence concerning the affairs of earth.

THE RIVER OF LIFE

In Revelation 22:1-3, we are presented with another meaningful symbol of the Messianic kingdom and the blessings which, through its beneficent

rule, will flow out to the people. John wrote, "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Here the kingdom is symbolically described as "the throne of God and of the Lamb." The Lamb symbolizes the sacrificial aspect of Jesus' ministry, and the fact that he offered up his flesh for the life of the world of mankind. It is this sacrifice, providing the redeeming blood of the Lamb, which makes available the blessings symbolized by the "river of water of life."

In vision, John sees the "tree of life" growing by the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, and yielding its fruit every month. This is a meaningful symbol of the fact that through the two phases of the kingdom health and life will be provided for all the willing and obedient of mankind. John further wrote that the leaves of the symbolic tree of life will be "for the healing of the nations." How sorely in need of healing are the people of all nations today. We rejoice that the loving God of heaven, through the returned Christ, has made such a meaningful provision for mankind.

In verse 17, John again mentions the "water" of this river of life, giving us another wonderful assurance: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Here again the "bride" refers collectively to the faithful followers of the Master throughout the present age in God's plan. Revelation 19:7 speaks of the marriage of the Lamb that takes place after his "wife hath made herself ready." The making ready of the bride class is still in progress,

although we believe it will soon be completed. Then, being united with the Lord, their bridegroom, the bride will announce the invitation to all to come and “take the water of life freely.” What an incentive this is for every follower of Christ to “give diligence” to make his “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10,11

SOLVING WORLD PROBLEMS

With such a kingdom arrangement in force, supported by righteous, divine power, how wonderfully one after another of earth's problems will be solved. Take the problem of war. When the kingdom begins to function, it will no doubt find mankind devastated by the ravages of various types of warfare. The “time of trouble” and “great tribulation” foretold in the Bible will have resulted in chaotic conditions throughout much of the world. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) The people, at the point of exhaustion from the results of Armageddon, with their governments for the most part overthrown, will, in this wilderness of despair, finally turn to God and his divine power.

Man will say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain [kingdom] 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.”—Mic. 4:2,3

How wonderfully simple is God's solution to the problem of war. It reverses the age-old axiom that in order to keep the peace, nations must be prepared for war. It also casts aside the wisdom of fallen man which has devised the theory that through a "balance of power" war can be averted. It starts, instead, at the very foundation of the problem, with a program of education in the blessings and advantages of peace, and thus a genuine and permanent disarmament program will be put into effect. Nations and people will "learn war" no more. The promises of God pertaining to Jesus as the "Prince of Peace" will be fulfilled, and the angelic message, "on earth peace, good will toward men," will become a reality.—Isa. 9:6; Luke 2:10

ECONOMIC AND POPULATION PROBLEMS

According to statistics from 2016, it is estimated that nearly one billion people in the world suffer from chronic undernourishment. The vast majority of these live in low-income countries. This problem will be solved in the kingdom. Then "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." Mankind will "eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD."—Mic. 4:4; Joel 2:26

The problem of poverty is, and always has been, one which affects large segments of earth's population. However, in the kingdom the poor and underprivileged will no longer be an army of the hungry and unsheltered, but will be richly blessed in that new righteous order to come. Concerning this the psalmist wrote, prophetically, of Christ: "He shall

judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. ... For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.”—Ps. 72:4,12

Another of the serious problems facing the world today is population growth, particularly in less developed countries and in areas where arable land is scarce. Such conditions are, in fact, one of the contributing causes of war and conflict, as governments seek more useful territory for their expanding populations. The Lord has provided a solution for this problem also. First, we have the promise that all the waste places of earth will become habitable and productive. “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose,” we are told. (Isa. 35:1,2) Think of all the unused lands on the continents of earth. With these made habitable, productive and available for the people, surely there will be no need to shed blood in order to acquire sufficient land for all people.

There is another way, however, in which the world’s population problem will be permanently resolved. That is by the removal of man’s power of procreation. When our first parents were created, they were told to multiply and fill the earth. (Gen. 1:28) It should be observed that once a sufficient number of humans have been born to fill the earth, the purpose of God’s command will have been attained. Hence, the provision by which it was implemented will be withdrawn.

Jesus gave a hint along this line when answering a question concerning the resurrection. He said that in the resurrection the people “neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” (Matt. 22:30) In other

words, the populating of the earth was arranged by God's decree, and the process will be halted when divine wisdom determines that the earth has been sufficiently filled. Thus there will be no need for concern along this line, for the matter will be adjusted to the entire satisfaction of all, and to the glory of God.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Closely associated with the population explosion is the increasing menace of environmental pollution. Naturally, the greater the number of people who live in an area, the greater is the threat of pollution in the air, the water, and on the land. Governments are doing what they can about this problem, but human selfishness is hindering the effort so that progress in solving it is painfully slow. Additionally, conservation efforts are most often restricted to countries with more advanced technology. However, the Lord, through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom, will know how to solve this problem also.

Human selfishness has always been a contributing cause to nearly all the problems of fallen mankind. There can never be genuine peace and good will in the earth as long as selfishness plays such an important role in the affairs of men. We thank God that under the rulership of earth's new government the people will learn the value of love as opposed to selfishness. The Prophet Jeremiah assures us that during the glad day of the Lord's kingdom the law of God, which is the law of love, will be written in the hearts of the people. Eventually, all are to become so well acquainted with the Lord and his ways of love that no one will need to say to his

neighbor, “Know the LORD,” for all shall know him
“from the least of them unto the greatest of them.”
—Jer. 31:31-34

DEATH TO BE DESTROYED

Finally there is man’s worst problem of all—sickness and death. Unless this problem is solved, people will continue to travel through “the valley of the shadow of death.” (Ps. 23:4) In such an event there could be no lasting peace and happiness anywhere. Every peaceful and happy home would intermittently be blighted by the dread enemy, Death, which now counts its victims at a rate of over 60 million per year.

Christ, the great solver of human problems, will eliminate this one also, for during his reign sickness and death will be destroyed. Paul affirms that Christ “must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (I Cor. 15:25,26) The Prophet Isaiah declares that the Lord will “swallow up death in victory.”—Isa. 25:8

In solving the problem of death, no one will be overlooked. Even those who have fallen asleep in death throughout the ages will hear the “voice of the Son of God,” and “shall come forth” from the tomb. (John 5:25-29) There will be an abundance of habitable land to provide for all—both the living and those who will be raised from the dead. This means that no one will need to lament the fact that Christ’s kingdom did not come sooner—before father or mother or other dear ones died, because these will be restored to life. The power of Christ Jesus, which at the time of his First Advent was exercised to

restore the dead to life, will again be exercised, not on behalf of a limited few, but for the restoration and blessing of all mankind.

This does not imply universal salvation, for in order to continue living and to be restored to human perfection it will be necessary to obey the laws of the Messianic kingdom and to accept the provision of life through the redeeming blood of Christ. Christ in his kingdom role is referred to in the Scriptures as “that prophet,” and Peter said, “It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear [obey] that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” —Acts 3:23

SUNSHINE OVER ALL

Thus it will be that the various problems now plaguing fallen man will be solved. This will come about as the increasing light of the Master’s second presence permeates one after another of the dark places of earth. One of the prophecies pertaining to the time of Christ’s rulership over the earth refers to him as “the Sun of righteousness.” (Mal. 4:2) Jesus likewise said that his faithful followers would “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) The healing rays of the Sun of righteousness will continually pour into the sin-sick and wounded hearts and lives of all mankind. From one end of earth to the other, that Sun will shine, and upon every continent and the isles of the sea the soothing, life-giving powers of that divine light of the Lifegiver will be felt.

The enlightening rays of Christ’s presence will fill the earth with a knowledge of the glory of God. This means that all false doctrines, all superstitions,

all human creeds, all precepts of men by which people are taught to dread God rather than love him, all political intrigues, as well as the myriad other evils that have plagued a dying world, are to be swept away and replaced by a true knowledge of God and of his love.

There will not be a nook or corner anywhere in the earth where the light from that glorious Sun will not penetrate. The warmth of its healing rays will assure a blessed reign of righteousness. Through that rulership of love and healing light all sin, unrighteousness, sickness, death, and all sorrow will finally pass away. Such is the ultimate divine objective to be accomplished as a result of our Lord's return. May we rejoice in this purpose and continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10 ■