Peace through Christ's Kingdom

"The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."
—Daniel 7:27

THE PAGES OF HISTORY are stained with the blood of war. Disputes among nations have almost invariably been arbitrated on the battlefield. Seers and sages have envisioned a day when this ruthless and senseless practice would be stopped, and the peoples of the earth would adopt a sane and righteous method of living with one another.

OLD TESTAMENT TESTIMONY

The prophets of the Bible, writing under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, foretold a future time of blessing, explaining that it would come about through the establishment of a world government, or dominion, under the administration of Truth and righteousness. That kingdom under Christ would arbitrarily impose upon the people of

all nations just and righteous laws, through the keeping of which universal and lasting peace would be assured for all people.

In the Bible's prophecies of this coming time of peace under a future world government, the assurance is given that there will be no miscarriage of the Divine plan, because the kingdom of promise is to be a literal and righteous government. It will be perfectly organized and powerfully implemented to perform every function assigned to it in the prophecies. It is the long-promised kingdom of Christ, and the Bible reveals that it will be a genuine and lasting government. Concerning this kingdom, and Christ the chief ruler in it, the prophet foretold "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."—Isa. 9:6,7

The coming world government—the kingdom of Christ—is one of the prominent themes of the Bible. The Old Testament prophets glowingly foretold and described this divinely empowered rulership that will be set up over all the earth. One of the first references to it was by Jacob, who, on his deathbed, prophesied, "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."—Gen. 49:9,10

This wonderful prophecy was uttered while Jacob and his family were in Egypt. In Egypt at that time, a couched lion was the recognized symbol of royal rulership, and thus represented the right to rule. The prophecy depicting Judah as a 'couched lion,'

therefore, was a pictorial way of saying that from this royal tribe of Israel would come the one whom the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob had long promised. This seed of Abraham would be Messiah and the king, and to this royal one to come, Jacob had prophetically assigned the title 'Shiloh,' which means 'peaceful one.' His prophecy that the 'gathering of the people' would be to Shiloh, simply meant that this future ruler who would be sent by God would, as "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6), bring peace to the nations.

The Prophet Isaiah foretold the birth and ultimate exaltation to rulership of this great king, saying, "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." Later in his prophecy, Isaiah also referred to this coming ruler of earth as God's "arm." "The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."—Isa. 52:10

Concerning the universality of the Messianic kingdom, David also foretold this time when he wrote, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations." (Ps. 22:27,28) Again, David wrote concerning the LORD'S kingdom, "All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."—Ps. 145:10-13

The Prophet Daniel, in a prophecy pertaining to the end of this Gospel Age and the breaking up of the present social order in readiness for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, wrote, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44) With the displacement of some of these long-established earthly kingdoms as a result of World War I, we see manifest evidence of God's powerful hand in preparation for Christ's future kingdom over the nations of the world.

NEW TESTAMENT TESTIMONY

We have quoted only a very few of the many promises recorded in the Old Testament pertaining to the kingdom, or government, which in God's due time is to rule the world. The New Testament continues with the same reassuring kingdom theme. The angel, who announced the birth of Jesus, said to the shepherds, "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. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward

men." (Luke 2: 10-14) The angel said that this announcement of the birth of Christ, the promised Messiah, was good news which would ultimately reach all people.

The New Testament references to Messiah, the king, and the kingdom to be established by him, are not exclusively in the nature of prophecies, because they identify the beginning of the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets had forecast. While, for example, the Old Testament foretold that the king would come, the angel announced to the shepherds that now he was born. This first expression of God's good will toward men, in fulfillment of his promises, had now become a reality.

John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, speaks of prophecy being fulfilled when he said, "The Royal Majesty of the heavens has approached." (Matt. 3:2, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) The Prophet Daniel had prophesied that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom. (Dan. 2:44) Obviously there must be a king in a kingdom, and now that Royal Majesty promised by the God of heaven had indeed appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus also preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17) A more literal translation of this text suggests, even as announced by John the Baptist, that the king, in the kingdom promised by the God of heaven, had indeed come and was 'at hand,' or in the midst of the people of Israel. When Jesus sent his disciples into the ministry, his commission to them was, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand."—Matt. 10:7

The nation of Israel knew about God's kingdom promises. This was particularly true of the religious

rulers of the nation, including the Pharisees, and others. They knew that many had considered Jesus to be the promised king who would set up this kingdom, and they sought answers from him. "When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation [with outward show, *Marginal Translation*]: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [among you, *MT*]."—Luke 17:20,21

The Pharisees had little or no faith that Jesus was sent into the world by the God of Israel to set up the Messianic kingdom. They could not visualize anyone accomplishing a task like this without the support of a huge army with which he could conquer the Roman Empire and release the nation of Israel from its bondage to the Caesars. Jesus sensed what was in their minds, hence his explanation that the kingdom in which he would be the king would not be set up in this way. It would not come, he said, with an outward show of splendor and glory such as the world was accustomed to seeing displayed by a conquering ruler.

Knowing that the Pharisees doubted that he was God's promised king, Jesus further explained, according to a more proper translation of the Greek text as noted in the above *Marginal Translation* of the scriptural text (vs. 21), that the Royal Majesty of the heavens was among them, which he was applying to himself. This was a very bold assertion to hurl at these hypocritical religious rulers, but it was a powerful witness to them, although few, if any of them, then believed it.

A poor translation of this text has led to a great deal of confusion as to just what the kingdom of heaven really is. As it appears in our *King James Version* Bible, the translation says, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' Those who do not believe the promises of God to establish a literal, worldwide government in the earth, which will bring peace and joy to all mankind in due time, have seized upon this mistranslated text in an attempt to undermine its true significance. They try to prove that the testimony of the Bible pertaining to God's kingdom refers merely to a wholesome, godly state of heart and mind that may be acquired by individuals who yield to the influence of Jesus' moral and ethical teachings, such as those contained in his Sermon on the Mount and others. The foretold increase of Christ's kingdom, these skeptics say, is represented in the increasing number of those who have thus yielded themselves to Christ and seek to obey his commandments.

The incongruity of this viewpoint is at once apparent when we take into consideration the fact that the statement in question was made to the Pharisees, men whom Jesus more than once had called hypocrites. Without hesitation he said to them, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matt. 23:27,28) How could the kingdom of God be within the hearts of such people as those? But, when we realize what Jesus really meant when he said that 'the kingdom

of God is within you [among you, *MT*],' was that he was that future king, he was in the very midst of the Pharisees and they had failed to recognize him. The thought is then made clear and in harmony with the general testimony of the Scriptures on the subject.

Seemingly it is difficult for our finite minds, fallen and imperfect as they are, to exercise faith in the idea that the Creator has any intention of ever doing anything to help his human creation. This lack of faith on the part of the professed people of God has been manifest throughout all the ages. They have imagined that the promises of God would have their fulfillment through human efforts. The promises implied merely that God would place his stamp of approval on whatever his human servants conceived to be right, and in their zeal endeavored to accomplish.

Since Jesus was put to death by his enemies, and centuries went by with no evidence of a visible and literal kingdom ever being established on earth by him—even though he had been raised from the dead—it was easy and natural to conclude that the kingdom promises of the Bible referred merely to what the followers of Jesus could accomplish by their own means. Devious notions developed as a result of this lack of faith and understanding. The great mass of professed Christians eventually united with civil governments, and called their unholy union Christendom. Millions of others, particularly in these later years of the Gospel Age, have seized upon the idea as noted, that the kingdom of Christ is merely a righteous influence, or holy impulse, in the hearts of Christian believers. *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) **NOT OF THIS WORLD**

When Jesus was brought before Pilate by his enemies during the closing time of his earthly ministry, the charge they leveled against him was that he claimed to be a king. Such a claim, if true, would make him guilty of treason against the Roman Empire. Jesus acknowledged that he came into the world to be a king, but explained, "My kingdom is not of this world [social order—Greek, *kosmos*]: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."—John 18:36,37

Jesus' statement that his kingdom was not of this world and, if it were, his servants would fight for him, places Divine condemnation upon all military operations that have been promoted and executed in the name of Christ and claiming to be for the purpose of promoting the interests of his kingdom. According to this rule of action expressed by Jesus, all the so-called holy wars of the centuries have not been holy at all, but unholy, and thus unauthorized by God.

Jesus' explanation that his kingdom was not of this world, means that the human concept of civilization called "Christendom," which means Christ's kingdom, has been a misnomer, and in reality a counterfeit of the real future kingdom of Christ. Therefore, all the various philosophies which have

cunningly applied the kingdom promises of the Bible to one or another of these devious human efforts to establish a better world, have been out of harmony with, and contrary to, the Divine plan for the fulfillment of God's promises.

There has been no valid reason why sincere and reverent students of the Bible should indulge in these human philosophies, or be misled by them, for Jesus made it very clear that no one should expect his kingdom to be established during the present Gospel Age. Only a few days before Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world, he related a parable to his disciples which was designed to teach them this same important truth. The parable concerned a certain nobleman [Jesus] who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return. The introduction to the parable explains that it was related by Jesus because his disciples thought that his kingdom was to appear immediately.—Luke 19:11,12

THE DISCIPLES' HOPE

The disciples of Jesus thoroughly believed that he was the Messiah, the great king, that had been foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. They believed that he had then come to establish the long-promised kingdom, that government which would extend its sphere of influence until it embraced the whole earth and would bring everlasting peace and happiness to all mankind. They were right in this belief, but they expected that Jesus would at once set up this marvelous and powerful government. In this they were wrong, as the parable of the certain nobleman revealed.

This wrong viewpoint on the part of Jesus' disciples was quite excusable, for he had let them believe that they would be prominently associated with him in his kingdom. In their limited vision of God's plan at that time, this implied that Christ's kingdom would of necessity have to be set up within their natural lifetime. How else, as they reasoned, could they hope to share with Jesus in the rulership of the kingdom? How else could Jesus' promise be fulfilled when he said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"?—Luke 12:32

The apostles were much concerned over the prospect of being associated with Jesus in the rulership of his kingdom, and had many discussions about it among themselves. James and John were particularly anxious to secure favored positions in the kingdom, and had their mother ask Jesus if one of them might sit on his right hand and the other on his left hand in his kingdom. Jesus did not say that they could not and would not be with him in his kingdom, for he had given them reason to believe that they would be. He merely called attention to the high price that they would have to pay to be with him. "Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."—Mark 10:38-40

Thus, while Jesus did not promise these two beloved apostles a specific position in his kingdom, explaining that he did not have the authority to make such designations, he did confirm their understanding that they would share in the rulership of the kingdom with him if they proved their worthiness by drinking of his 'cup' and being baptized with his 'baptism.' While they affirmed that they were able, or willing, to meet these requirements, it is doubtful if they understood at that time just what was implied by the drinking of Jesus' cup, and by being baptized with his baptism. Actually, as subsequently revealed in the New Testament, Jesus was inviting his disciples to suffer and die with him. Had they understood this, they would have known that they could not in any case be with Jesus in the glory of his kingdom until they were raised from the dead, and this they knew would not be until the end of the age.—John 11:24; Matt. 13:39

Jesus' cup was one of suffering and death, and he drank it faithfully to the bitter dregs. His baptism was a baptism of death, of which his immersion in water by John the Baptist was merely a symbol. Paul wrote, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3) Nothing is made more clear in the Bible than the fact that the disciples of Jesus in this age are invited to follow in his steps of self-sacrifice even unto death. Associated with these conditions of discipleship are the promises that those who prove faithful to them will reign with him in his kingdom.

Paul further wrote, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If

we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (II Tim. 2:11,12) Again, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:17) After his resurrection, Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21 Jesus also confirmed, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) Then there is that wonderful promise to these faithful ones that they shall come forth from death in the "first resurrection" to live and reign "with Christ a thousand years." (Rev. 20:4,6) This is the wonderful hope of our High Calling in Christ Jesus concerning his future kingdom to be set up over all nations and people. ■