

Our Lord's Return

Chapter I

OUR LORD'S RETURN

IN THIS day of chaos and threatened destruction by the misuse of nuclear fusion and by environmental pollution the hearts of the people are filled with fear as they look ahead to what may happen to themselves and to the human race if no solution for the world's troubles can be found. Students of the Bible who have faith in its promises and prophecies believe that the only solution to the problems which have been brought about by human sin and selfishness is the return of Christ and the setting up of his long-promised kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Views concerning this great event in the plan of God are widely variant. Some claim that Jesus returned at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples, and that since then, as each sinner is converted, it constitutes a further coming of Christ and that when all are converted he will have fully come. We are told that this is the way Jesus fulfills his promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [age]."—Matt. 28:20

On the other hand, many claim that Jesus will return to earth as a man and that he will be recognized by the print of the nails in his hands and in his feet and by the spear wound in his side which he received at the time of his crucifixion. This latter view depends to a considerable extent upon a literal interpretation of certain prophecies, such as that of Revelation 1:7, where we read, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him."

We believe that the truth of the matter, supported by the entire testimony of the Scriptures, lies between these two extreme and opposing views. The first view erroneously renounces the necessity of a personal coming of Christ yet approximates the truth concerning the nature of Jesus, in that it considers him to be so far above humans in nature that he can be said to be present with them without their being able to see him.

The second view holds to the clearly established scriptural fact of a personal return of the Master but circumscribes the grandeur and possibilities of that momentous event by the unscriptural claim that he returns to earth as a sort of glorified man and not the powerful, invisible divine being which he became when the Heavenly Father raised him from the dead and gave him a name which is above every name.

The Scriptures teach that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was no longer a human, but a powerful divine being, the "image of the invisible God." (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 5:16; I Pet. 3:18) This means that by nature Jesus is now invisible to the human eye, even as God is invisible. It is this divine Christ who returns to earth; hence the fact of his return will need to be recognized otherwise than by seeing him with the natural eye.

True, Jesus did appear as a man to his disciples on several occasions following his resurrection, but this does not mean that he was, by nature, still a human. The circumstances of his few brief appearances prove to the contrary. For example, he always appeared in a different body, which would not have been the case had the human body in which he appeared been his real body.

Only once did Jesus appear in a body similar to the one which was crucified, and that was because Thomas made it plain that he would not believe the Master had been raised from the

dead unless he could see his wounds. Jesus satisfied his lack of faith, although only this once did the disciples see any wounds, and this appearance is described by the Apostle John as one of the “signs” by which Jesus proved to them that he had been raised from the dead. (John 20:29-31) On the other occasions of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples after his resurrection, they did not recognize him by his personal appearance but by the things which he said and did.

Jesus’ appearances to his disciples after his resurrection were of the same nature as those of angels in more ancient times. For example, three angels appeared to Abraham. They talked and ate with him, but they were not humans—although for a time Abraham thought that they were.—Gen. 18:1,2; Heb. 13:2

Jesus was present with his disciples for forty days between the time of his resurrection and his ascension; but during only a very small portion of this time were the disciples able to see him, and then only when he miraculously appeared to them. It is this Jesus, who is able to be invisibly present among humans, who was to return to earth for the purpose of establishing his kingdom of righteousness by means of which the redeemed race of mankind is to have the problems of human selfishness solved, and be restored to happiness and life upon the earth.

Jesus’ Flesh a Ransom

Jesus was made flesh in order that he might give his humanity as a corresponding price—a ransom for Adam and his race. The Master said, “My flesh ... I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) Had Jesus been raised from the dead as a human it would have meant that the ransom was taken back and that the world of mankind would not have been redeemed.

But the Scriptures show that while Jesus was put to death in the flesh he was made alive in the Spirit, or as a spirit being. (I Cor. 15:44-47; I Pet. 3:18) Jesus had previously explained to Nicodemus that one who is born of the Spirit can come and go as the wind, that is, be invisible to the human eye and have great power. He proved this to be true in his own case, for after his resurrection his disciples could not tell from whence he came or whither he went when appearing to them.—John 3:8

That Jesus still has the power to appear to humans as he did to his disciples following his resurrection from the dead we do not dispute. However, the Scriptures do not say that his return to earth will be revealed to the world in this manner. His appearances to his disciples following his resurrection were evidently intended to establish in the minds of the disciples the fact that he had been raised from the dead; but this fact having been established we have no reason to expect their repetition.

In Romans 1:20 we read concerning God that “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Here is a key which will help us to understand the significance of the prophecies pertaining to the return of Christ. He is now invisible to human eyes, even as the Heavenly Father is invisible; hence at his return he can be recognized only by the visible things which transpire and which can be identified through the prophecies of the Bible as the “signs” which were to mark his second visit to earth.

Let us state the matter in another way: We believe in the existence of God, not because we have ever seen him, but because we see his works. With our limited abilities we survey the vast universe and we say there must be a powerful, all-wise Creator back of this. Similarly, in the divine Word we find set forth an impressive array of events which were to take place in the world following the return of the divine Christ; hence, if we can see that many of these events

are already taking place, the logical conclusion is that that which the Bible describes as Christ's second visit to earth must already be a reality.

God of This World Invisible

The Scriptures teach that there is a personal Devil, yet no human has ever seen him; but we have all seen the result of his nefarious influence. The Apostle Paul informs us that Satan is the "god of this world," the one who now works in the hearts of "the children of disobedience." (II Cor. 4:4) Paul also explains that Satan is a spirit who is the "prince of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2) Jesus spoke of Satan as the "prince of this world." (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) If we believe the Bible we must realize that this Powerful being has, throughout the centuries, been exercising control over the affairs of men.

The Devil is the invisible ruler of "this present evil world." Peter declares that he goes about as a "roaring lion" seeking whom he may devour. (I Pet. 5:8) This clearly indicates that Satan's field of operation is right here on earth; yet even those who realize this most fully have never heard him literally "roar."

With the return of Jesus, and as a result of his presence, a new world, or social order, is ultimately to be instituted, and in this new social order Jesus will be the King, supplanting the rulership of Satan. In vision John saw an angel come down from God out of heaven and lay hold upon Satan and bind him with a mighty chain. Following this, Christ and his church are seen to reign for a thousand years. As Satan, who is bound, is invisible, certainly the agencies which bind him must likewise be invisible.—Rev. 20:1-4,6

Satan's power and influence in this, the present evil world, are no less potent because of his invisibility. On the contrary, it has given him certain advantage in that, unseen, he has been a powerful force for evil. Thus he has been able to make his influence felt in the council chambers of the rulers and princes of earth, and to a considerable extent direct their affairs. Jesus' rulership will also be an invisible one, exercised through human agencies. He will rule the people with a rod of iron; but he will rule them in righteousness and not in unrighteousness as Satan has done. Even as the evil results of Satan's rulership are now easily discerned, so Jesus' reign will be recognized by all mankind through the righteous results that will be accomplished.

Truth Concealed by a Mistranslation

Important truths pertaining to the manner of our Lord's return have been long hidden by a mistranslation. As we all know, the Bible was not originally written in the English language, hence we who use the English language must depend upon translations from the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. While in most instances in our English Bibles very little of the richness of meaning has been lost through mistranslation, there are exceptions in which profound truths of the divine plan have been long hidden by unwitting mistranslations.

One of these exceptions is in the case of the Greek word *parousia* which is used by Jesus and the apostles to describe the Master's second visit to earth. In our King James Version of the Bible this word is almost universally translated "coming." The result of this has been that many students of prophecy have attempted to interpret the prophetic signs pertaining to our Lord's return as denoting that his coming was near. However, the true meaning of this Greek word is "presence," and it follows that the fulfilled signs of the Master's *parousia*, or presence, indicate that he is already here.

When, for example, the disciples inquired of Jesus, “What shall be the sign of thy coming [*parousia*; presence]?” they were not asking how they might know in advance when he would come, but how they would know of his presence when he had come. In other words, they wanted to know what visible things they were to look for as tokens that the invisible Christ had returned and that his kingdom would ultimately be established.

Archeological discoveries reveal that the Greek word *parousia* was used in ancient times to describe the visits of kings and emperors to various cities and provinces of their realms. One such discovery shows that taxes to pay the expenses of such a visit were raised by the issuing of a special “*parousia* coin.” How appropriate, then, that this word should be used in connection with the visit to earth of the King of kings and Lord of lords! (Ps. 8:4) But, as in the case of the earthly rulers whose visits are thus described, so with Jesus, *parousia* does not merely mean the moment of coming but covers the entire duration of the Visit.

The first presence of Jesus, when he was here on earth as a man, lasted in all but thirty-three and one-half years. He remained forty days longer as a divine being, invisible to the world, and then he returned to the heavenly courts. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Jesus’ first presence. Some tell of his birth, some of one or another part of his life and ministry. Some tell of his death as man’s Redeemer. The fulfillment of these prophecies did not, as a rule, run concurrently.

The prophecies and promises of Christ’s second visit to earth likewise cover a great variety of events, culminating in the destruction of death and Satan. The fulfillment of some of these prophecies runs concurrently, but in other instances there is a sequence of events. This calls for carefulness in our study of the prophecies relating to Christ’s second visit lest we fall into the mistake of expecting them all to be fulfilled at a given moment of time, or within a relatively short period of time.

Manner of His Presence

Jesus said to his disciples, “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth; behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning [Greek, *astrape*, bright shining] cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming [*parousia*, presence] of the Son of man be.” (Matt. 24:26,27) By these words Jesus is conveying to our minds that his coming and presence were not to be like that of a human. He was to return as a great divine being, the express image of his Father’s invisible person. You won’t find me, Jesus is saying, hidden away in some secret chamber, as you might find a man or a woman. Rather, you will discern my presence even as you discern the existence of God himself, and that is by the great things which you ascribe to him.

And so it is. We behold the sunshine and the rain, watering the earth and warming it that it may bring forth and provide for those upon it. So Jesus explained that we would know of his second presence because it will be like the lightning, or bright shining, which, similar to the sun, cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west. The blessings to be dispensed to humankind after being brought forth from their graves during the time of Christ’s presence are represented as coming to the people because the “Sun of righteousness” shall arise, bringing healing and life to the peoples of earth.—Mal. 4:2

An Increase of Knowledge

As we have noted, Jesus explained that his second presence would be like a bright shining. (Matt. 24:26,27) Here, unmistakably, is the idea of enlightenment, symbolizing increasing knowledge. The Prophet Daniel, describing conditions which were to obtain in the “time of the end,” declares among other things that “knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan. 12:4) The “time of the end” here referred to is the period in which the rule of sin, selfishness, and death is to be brought to an end as a result of Christ’s return and second presence. The world is even now experiencing this foretold increase of knowledge; but, because fallen man does not have the wisdom to use it properly, chaos results, even threatening the destruction of the race.

Due to man’s unwisdom and selfishness, his great strides in knowledge have already led to what the Prophet Daniel described as a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) In speaking of this same time Jesus said there would be tribulation on the earth so great that unless it was shortened no flesh would survive. We face this very situation today. The misuse of nuclear fusion, as well as the pollution of our environment, could well cause the destruction of all living things on the earth. Indeed, only divine intervention through the establishment of the long-promised kingdom of Christ will prevent this.

Through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom, when established, the increase of knowledge will be a great boon to humanity, especially in the fact that then it will include an understanding of God and of his love in providing redemption from sin and death through the sacrificial work of Jesus. The long reign of sin and death under Satan, the prince of this world, is described in the Bible as a nightmare of darkness. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” And in contrast we read concerning the time when Christ’s kingdom will be governing in the affairs of men, “The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”—Isa. 60:2,3; Luke 2:32

In John 1:9 it is said that Jesus is that “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” The prophecies clearly show that the complete fulfillment of this promise will be during the second presence of Christ; that ultimately the “earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Not until the end of the reign of Christ and his church will this prophecy be completely fulfilled.

“He Cometh in Clouds”

In Revelation 1:7 we are informed that Jesus returns in clouds, and that every eye shall see him. As Christ is a divine being, the express image of God himself, humans can see him only through the incidents and events which accompany his return. The time will yet come—and that time is not far off, we believe—when these events will be of such a pronounced character that all will readily recognize their true significance.

In Joel 2:1,2 there is further reference to the “clouds” which become so distressingly ominous in the period of Christ’s presence prior to the establishment of his kingdom. Here we are informed that this period is not to be a time of peace but, rather, the reverse. It is to be “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

It will be noted from this that the clouds here mentioned by the prophet really consist in this case of “a great people and a strong,” the like of which has never before been known. This is evidently a reference to the uprising of the discontented of mankind in such tremendous numbers

as to cause civilization to crumble and fall under the impact of the revolutionary struggle they precipitate.

These clouds of trouble are even now forming. Already the people of earth are filled with fear because of them, although as yet they do not “see” the Master’s presence as being associated with the forces which are gradually destroying “this present evil world.” Jesus said that there would be great mourning because of his presence, that there would be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity. (Luke 21:25,26; Matt. 24:30) How perplexed the peoples of earth are today! No permanent solutions can be found for the many baffling problems which combine to fill the world with chaos and the hearts of the people with fear.

God’s Hand over Israel

But how, some may ask, will the people in general be made to recognize that these worldwide troubles are the death throes of the present social order and are caused largely by the presence of the King of the new world? The Scriptures indicate that one of the ways in which this will be brought about will be through divine intervention on behalf of the Jewish people in Israel.

The experiences of the Jews throughout these days of trouble constitute additional evidence of Christ’s second presence. It is the time, according to the Scriptures, when their land was to be restored to them. What has occurred along this line since 1914 is miraculous and without doubt has been in preparation for the blessings which will be theirs in the messianic kingdom. This regathering of Israel was prophetically due at the very time when the nations as a whole were being gathered unto the final destructive battle of Armageddon. Joel 3:1,2 reads, “For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.”

This prophecy indicates that, while the Jewish people would be restored to their land, it would be amidst a time of trouble for them as well as for the nations in general; and other prophecies indicate that additional trouble is in store for them—which is not difficult to foresee, in view of the circumstances which have existed for several years, and which still exist.

It is not wise to go into detail concerning events which have not yet transpired, but the Scriptures do make it plain that near the end of the death-struggle of the nations, with virtual annihilation threatening them through the misuse of modern military implements of war and nuclear fusion, there will be an attack against the Israelites in their Promised Land, and that then the Lord will intervene on their behalf, rescue them from their enemies, and through their resurrected prophets and other worthies of ancient time establish his kingdom as a literal governing power over the whole earth.

Ezekiel 38:14-23 presents some of the details of this final trouble. The etymology of the names given to Israel’s enemies in this prophecy indicates that they are used prophetically to identify armies, particularly of Europe and the Middle East. The prophecy shows that these forces eventually will attack the Jewish people. Agreeing with the prophecy of Joel already quoted, Ezekiel explains that the clouds are the anti-God forces which finally will threaten the destruction of the returned Israelites.—Ezek. 38:16

It will be a time of “shaking,” the prophet explains. But the promise is that the Lord will deliver his ancient people, and that through this deliverance the “eyes” of the nations will discern the presence and power of the new King of earth who, as the agent and right hand of Jehovah,

will be directing the issue. (Ps. 110:5) Thus will all eyes discern the presence of Jesus in clouds (Rev. 1:7) and become convinced of his majesty and glory through the new kingdom arrangements which will then be put into operation.

This same series of events will lead to the opening of the eyes of the Israelites. We read, “So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen [nations] shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.” (Ezek. 39:7) What a change this will bring about in the outlook of the Israelites! The defense of Israel by divine power will be merely the first manifestation of the operation of the new world powers. From then on the kingdom agencies will rapidly calm the storm of human passions, which by that time will have brought the people of the whole earth to a state of desperation and despair.

Chapter II

THE KINGDOM AND ITS BLESSINGS

THE ultimate purpose of our Lord’s return is the establishment of a worldwide kingdom, or government, which will assure the people of peace and the opportunity to enjoy health and everlasting life. Concerning Jesus and his place in the divine plan, the Prophet Isaiah wrote: “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.”—Isa. 9:6,7

What will this new government be like? Will it be merely a holy influence that will sweep over the earth? It will indeed be such an influence, but in addition it will have a definite kingdom personnel. Christ will be the King, the invisible Ruler. The church—all those who, throughout the age now closing, have faithfully followed in his steps—will be associated with Christ in the spiritual, or invisible, phase of that kingdom. The promise to these 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. But now it is seen that in preparing the followers of Jesus to reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom, the Lord has merely been getting ready to save and bless mankind in general and will restore them 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 the 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 in the first resurrection 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, 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, from righteous Abel to those at 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] shall reign in righteousness, and princes [the Ancient Worthies] shall rule in judgment.”

Possible with God

Let us not say 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 a fundamental of the Christian religion that there is to be a resurrection of the dead? Surely if we are looking to the Bible for a solution of 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 the “better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

This “better resurrection” of the Ancient Worthies awaits the completion of the church class, made up of the Master’s faithful followers. Paul explains that “they [the Ancient Worthies] without us should not be made perfect”, that is, restored to perfection of life as humans. (Heb. 11:40) As for the faithful followers of Jesus being raised to spiritual life with him and with him reigning as invisible rulers for a thousand years, surely we should have no difficulty in believing this. Have not most Christians believed in 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 outcome of the “cycle of life.” This is not so! “The wages of sin is death,” and “the dead know not anything.” (Rom. 6:23; Eccl. 9:5) The Scriptures teach that the hope of life after death for both the church and the world depends upon a resurrection of the dead. The Scriptures also clearly teach that in the resurrection some are given spiritual bodies. Thus Christ was exalted, and the same is true of his faithful followers. Together, these powerful spiritual beings will, through their human representatives, the Ancient Worthies, exercise control over mankind throughout the thousand years of the messianic kingdom.

Of that time 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 Revelation 14:1 the faithful followers of Jesus, the Lamb, are pictured as being with him on Mt. Zion. Zion was “capitol hill” in the kingdom that ruled ancient Israel and therefore is an apt symbol of the supreme ruling phase of the messianic kingdom.

While the law of the messianic kingdom will go forth from “Zion,” the “word of the Lord” will go forth 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, and this is evidently what is meant by the word of the Lord going forth from “Jerusalem.” Besides, we think it quite possible that the visible phase of the messianic kingdom might have its headquarters in or near the site of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

New Heavens and Earth

The two phases of the messianic kingdom are also pictured in the prophecies of the Bible as a “new heavens and a new earth.” Through the Prophet Isaiah the Lord said, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. ... Be ye glad and rejoice forever 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: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”—Isa. 65:17-20

In vision the Apostle John saw the fulfillment of this wonderful prophecy. (See Rev. 21:14) 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 “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” (Rev. 21:9,10) The former heaven and earth, symbolic of Satan’s social order, is seen to pass away, and then “a new heaven and a new earth” appear—symbolic, as we have seen, of the heavenly and earthly phases of the messianic kingdom.

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, with the result 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.”

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

This is true also of the present symbolic heavens and earth. The social and governmental affairs of men have always been more or less under the influence of spiritualistic forces over which Satan has been the prince. (Eph. 2:2) These have frequently exercised their influence through false religious systems. Indeed, it has been chiefly through the religious emotions of men and women that Satan has held control over the world. In this social order false religion has been the medium, or the connecting link, between “the god of this world” and the social and governmental affairs of the people. One outstanding illustration of this has been in the union of church and state. Through this system “holy” wars have been fought and the “holy” inquisition employed to control the people through fear of torture.

The Apostle Peter, writing of events which would occur as a result of Christ’s second visit to earth, tells us that “the heavens and the earth, which are now, ... are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition [destruction] of ungodly men.” (II Pet. 3:7) In this same prophecy Peter speaks of the heavens and earth which were before the Flood as passing away, so we know that he is not discussing the literal heavens and earth, for these have never passed away and never will. We read in Ecclesiastes 1:4 that “the earth abideth forever,” and in Isaiah 45:18 that God created the earth “not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.”

In Peter’s prophecy, speaking again of the destruction of Satan’s social order, he said 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,” and adds,

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:12,13) Yes, this coming “new heavens and new earth” will be established in fulfillment of the word or promises of God; and when the work of this new kingdom is completed and the incorrigible and Satan destroyed, then shall come to pass the promise that “there shall be no more death.” This is a glorious outlook and will be the final result of our Lord’s return, his second visit to earth.

The River of Life

In Revelation 22:1-3 we are presented with another meaningful symbol, or picture, of the messianic kingdom and the blessing which, through its beneficent rule, will flow out to the people. John wrote, “He showed 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” symbolizing the sacrificial aspect of Jesus’ ministry on behalf of the people, the fact that he gave his flesh in sacrifice for the life of the world. It is this sacrifice, providing the redeeming blood of the Lamb, that makes available the blessings symbolized by the “river of water of life.”

John sees the tree of life growing by the river, bearing twelve manner of fruit, and yielding its fruit every month. This is a meaningful symbol of the fact that through the two phases of the messianic kingdom health and life will be provided for all the willing and obedient of mankind. John 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, and we rejoice that the loving God of heaven, through the returned Christ, has made such a meaningful provision for them.

Revelation 22:17 again mentions the “water” of this river of life, and in this text also we are given a wonderful assurance. We quote: “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 those who are the faithful followers of the Master throughout the present era in the divine 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, with these “made ready” ones united with their Lord as his bride, there will be a bride to say, “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 divine, miracle-working power, how wonderfully one after another of earth’s problems will be solved. Take the problem of war. When the kingdom first begins to function, it will find mankind devastated by the ravages of various types of warfare, “conventional” and otherwise. Revolution and anarchy will doubtless have resulted in chaotic conditions throughout much of the world. In due time the nations will recognize divine intervention on behalf of Israel; and, being bled to the point of exhaustion by the dreadful carnage of Armageddon, with their governments for the most part overthrown, they will, in this wilderness of despair, look to the power that defeated them, and 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 this divine solution of the war problem! It reverses the age-old axiom that in order to keep the peace the 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 arts and advantages of peace instead of war; and thus a genuine disarmament program will be put into effect. Then will the promises of God pertaining to Jesus as The Prince of Peace be fulfilled. Then will the angelic message of “peace on earth, good will toward men,” become a reality.

There is also the economic problem of today. How serious it is when seventy-five percent of humans go to bed hungry every night! This problem will be solved in the kingdom, for then the arrangements will be such that “every man shall sit 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.”—Mic. 4:4

The problem of poverty is, and always has been, a menacing one to millions. The poor, the underprivileged, have ever been a pathetic group. But these shall no longer be an army of the hungry and unsheltered, as heretofore, but will be considered and blessed in that new government to come. Concerning this the psalmist wrote, prophetically: “He [Christ] 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

Population Explosion

One of the serious problems facing the world today is the population explosion. This is at present one of the contributing causes of war, for governments are seeking living room for their expanding numbers of subjects. But 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 in the Americas, in Australia, in South Africa, etc. With these parts of the earth made habitable and productive and available for the people, surely there will be no need to shed blood in order to acquire additional territory.

But there is still another way—a permanent way—in which the population problem will be solved, and that is by the removal of man’s power of procreation. When our first parents were created, they were commanded to multiply and fill the earth. It should be observed that once a sufficient number of humans have been born to fill the earth, the purpose of this divine 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 will “neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” (Matt. 22:30) In other words, the populating of the earth was arranged by divine decree, and the process will be halted when divine wisdom decides 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 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. But 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 for essentially all the problems of fallen mankind. There could never be genuine peace and good will in the earth as long as selfishness plays such an important role in the affairs of men. Thank God that under the rulership of earth's new government the people will learn the value of love as against selfishness! Jeremiah 31:31-34 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 and that 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.

Death to Be Destroyed

Finally there is the major problem of sickness and death. Unless this problem is solved the people would still need to travel through "the valley of the shadow of death." 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 that now counts its victims by the millions every year.

Christ, the great solver of human problems, will solve this one also, for during his reign sickness and death are to 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) Isaiah 25:8 declares the Lord will swallow up death in victory and will wipe away tears from off all faces.

In solving the problem of death none are to be overlooked, for even those who have fallen asleep in death throughout the ages are to "hear his [the Son of man's] voice, and shall come forth" from the tomb. (John 5:28,29) The living room problem having been solved, there will be an abundance of habitable land to take care of all—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 that blessed One who broke up funerals at the time of his first visit to earth simply by restoring the dead to life, will again be exercised, not on behalf of a limited few, but for the restoration of all the families of the earth. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

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 prophecies 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, and this 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) And Jesus said that his faithful followers would also "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13:43) The healing rays of that Sun of righteousness will continually pour into the sin-sick and wounded hearts and lives of all mankind. From pole to pole 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 for good.

The enlightening rays of Christ's presence will fill the earth with a knowledge of the glory of God. This means that all "doctrines of devils," all nocturnal hallucinations and superstitions, all human creeds and dogmas, all the precepts of men by which people are taught to dread God rather than love him (Isa. 29:13), all political intrigues, as well as the thousand and one 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 any place 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; and through that rulership of love and healing light all sin, unrighteousness, sickness, death, and all sorrow will finally be destroyed. Such is the ultimate and divine purpose to be accomplished by Christ's second visit to the earth. 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

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