

# 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. The prophets of the Bible, writing under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, foretold such a time, explaining that it would come about through the establishment of a world government or dominion that 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.

In the Bible's prophecies of this coming time of peace under a 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 powerful government, perfectly organized and powerfully equipped to perform every function assigned to it in the prophecies. It is the kingdom of Christ; and the kingdom of Christ, the Bible reveals, is a genuine 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." -- Isaiah 9:6,7

The coming world government, which will be the kingdom of Christ, is one of the prominent themes of the Bible. The Old Testament prophets glowingly foretold and described this divinely powered rulership. 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." -- Genesis 49:9,10

This prophecy was uttered while Jacob and his family were in Egypt. In Egypt at that time a couched lion was the royal symbol of rulership, and the right to rule. So the prophecy depicting Judah as a "couched lion" 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 promised - - the "Seed" who would be Messiah and King. To this Royal One to come, Jacob prophetically assigned the title "Shiloh," meaning peaceful one. His prophecy that the "gathering of the people" would be to Shiloh simply meant that this Ruler to be sent by Jehovah would, as The Prince of Peace, bring peace to the nations.

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 Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Later in his prophecy Isaiah referred to this coming Ruler of earth as the "Arm" of Jehovah, and foretold that this "holy Arm" would be made bare in the eyes of all the nations, and that "all the ends of the earth" would see "the salvation of God." -- Isaiah 52:10

Concerning the universality of the messianic kingdom, David 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 [Jehovah's] and he is the governor among the nations." (Psalm

22:27,28) David also wrote concerning Jehovah'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 Ms mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." -- Psalm 145:10-13

Daniel, in a prophecy pertaining to the rulers over the various divisions of the old Roman Empire, as they were enthroned in Europe prior to the first World War, 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 forever." -- Daniel 2;44

### **In the New Testament**

We have quoted but a 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 unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host sang, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:10,11,14) The angel also 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 the Messiah, the King, and the kingdom to be established by him are not exclusively in the nature of prophecies, for they identify the beginning of the fulfillment of the Old Testament forecasts. 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 goodwill toward men, in fulfillment of his promises, was now a reality.

John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, also spoke of prophecy fulfilled. He said, "The Royal Majesty of the heavens has come nigh." (Matthew 3:2, Diaglott) The Prophet Daniel had prophesied that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom. There must be a king in a kingdom, and now the Royal Majesty promised by the God of heaven had appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 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 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." -- Matthew 10:7

The nation of Israel knew about God's kingdom promises. This was particularly true of the religious rulers of the nation, the Pharisees, and others. They knew that many considered Jesus to be the promised King who would reign in this kingdom, and they demanded of him "when the kingdom of God should come." Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation [marginal translation reads 'with outward show'] Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [margin, 'among you'] -- 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 Jehovah's promised King, Jesus further explained, according to a proper translation of the Greek text, that the Royal Majesty of the heavens was among them, referring, of course, to himself. This was a bold assertion to hurl at these hypocritical religious rulers, but it was a good witness to them, although few, if any of them, 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 stands in our Common Version English translation it says, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." Those who do not believe the promises of God to establish a literal, world-wide government in the earth, which will bring peace and joy to mankind, have seized upon this mistranslated text to attempt to prove that the testimony of the Bible pertaining to God's kingdom refers merely to a wholesome godly state of heart and mind acquired by individuals who yield to the influence of Jesus' moral and ethical teachings, such as those contained in his Sermon on the Mount. The foretold "increase" of Christ's kingdom, they say, is represented in the increasing number of those who do thus yield 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 had more than once called hypocrites, whited sepulchres, and children of the Devil. How could the kingdom of God be within the hearts of such people? But when we realize, as already noted, that what Jesus really said was that the King in the foretold kingdom which the God of heaven had promised, was in the midst of the Pharisees, the thought is clear and is 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 will ever do anything specific for his human creatures. This lack of faith on the part of the professed people of God has been manifested throughout all the ages. They have imagined that the promises of God would have their fulfillment through human efforts; that the promises implied merely that God would place his stamp of approval on what 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 being established 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. 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, or Christ's kingdom. Millions of others, particularly in these later years of the 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.

### **Not of This World**

When Jesus was brought before Pilate by his enemies, 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 [Greek, **kosmos**, social order]: 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." -- John 18:36,37

Jesus' statement that his kingdom was not of this world and, if it were, his servants would fight, places divine condemnation upon all military operations 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 unauthorized by God.

Besides, Jesus' explanation this his kingdom was not of this world means that the human concept of civilization called "Christendom," meaning Christ's kingdom, has been a misnomer, and in reality a counterfeit of the real kingdom of Christ. Therefore all the various philosophies which have cunningly applied the kingdom promises of the Bible to one or another of the 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 have indulged in these human philosophies, or been misled by them, for Jesus made it crystal clear that no one should expect his kingdom to be established during the present 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 the same important truth. The parable concerned a certain nobleman (picturing 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, foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. They believed that he had come to establish that kingdom of promise, that "government" which would extend its sphere of influence until it embraced the whole earth and brought 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 led them to believe that they would be prominently associated with him in his kingdom, and in their limited vision of God's plan 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, "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 they would have to pay to be with him. He asked, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Their answer was, "We are able." -- Matthew 20:20-22

Jesus replied to James and John, saying, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (vs. 23) 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 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; Matthew 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?" (Romans 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 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." (2 Timothy 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." (Romans 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." (Revelation 3:21) Jesus also said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10) And 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." -- Revelation 20:4,6

### **Born of the Spirit**

In John 3:1-13 we are told of Nicodemus, a ruler in Israel, and of his visit to Jesus by night to learn more about his teachings. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that one needed to be born again in order to enter into the kingdom of God. This seemed very strange to Nicodemus, and he asked how it could be. It was not a natural birth to which Jesus referred, but a birth of the Spirit. He explained to this ruler in Israel that those who are born of the Spirit are as the wind; that is, powerful, yet invisible.

Nicodemus, of course, did not fully comprehend what Jesus meant, but in the light of the subsequent teachings of Jesus and the apostles we can now see clearly that those who share the rulership of the kingdom with him will first have to experience a change of nature, even as he did. Jesus gave his flesh, his humanity, for the life of the world. (John 6:51) It was this sacrifice of his human life that provided redemption for the world of mankind, and will assure all an opportunity to regain life during the time of Christ's kingdom. (Hebrews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-6) And, having

been put to death in the flesh, Jesus was raised from the dead a glorious divine being, with all power given to him in heaven and in earth. -- Hebrews 1:1-4; Matthew 28:18

Those who suffer and die with Jesus, and in the resurrection are exalted to live and reign with him, will also experience a change of nature from human to divine. Peter wrote that unto us are given "exceeding great and precious promises" that by these we might become "partakers of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4) Peter also wrote concerning Christians that the Heavenly Father has "begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you [margin, for us]." -- 1 Peter 1:3,4

It is promises like this which, being misunderstood, have led to the erroneous belief that all who are saved through Jesus Christ will spend eternity in heaven. But this is not the thought at all. These heavenly promises are only to the footstep followers of Jesus; those who deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him into sacrificial death. (Matthew 16:24) They are not invited thus to sacrifice in order to attain salvation, but to prove worthy of living and reigning with Christ in that glorious kingdom of promise, the kingdom which is to establish peace on earth and provide health and joy and everlasting life for all who obey its righteous laws.

This exaltation to heavenly glory is what Jesus meant by being "born of the Spirit." (John 3:5,6) While every true follower of the Master is, in this life, begotten to this heavenly hope, it is not until the resurrection that spirit birth takes place. This is in keeping with Jesus' explanation that those who are born of the Spirit are, even as the wind, invisible to human eyes, and powerful. Together with Jesus this class, called from the world and proved faithful during the present age, will constitute the spiritual phase of the messianic kingdom. In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, Jesus speaks of these as "children of the kingdom," and explains that they "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." -- Matthew 13:25-30, 36-43

### **"Keys" of the Kingdom**

The invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and thus to qualify for joint-heirship in his kingdom, is extended through the Gospel, the good news of redemption through Jesus and the opportunity of life that will reach the people through the agencies of his kingdom. Jesus explained that only by the denial of self could anyone become his disciple. (Matthew 16:24) But the narrow way of sacrifice was not actually opened until Pentecost, which was after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus had promised Peter that he would give him the "keys" to the kingdom of heaven; so it was Peter who, on the Day of Pentecost, proclaimed the glad tidings and officially opened the door into the kingdom. (Matthew 16:19) This was on behalf of Jewish believers. Later it was Peter who also first proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom to the Gentiles. This was in the home of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert. Thus Peter used the keys of the kingdom.

This did not mean that the kingdom was established at Pentecost, as many erroneously believe. It simply means that there began the selection of those who are to rule with Jesus in the kingdom. The keys of the kingdom of heaven used by Peter were keys into the opportunity of rulership in the kingdom as joint-heirs with Christ. The way into this high position in the kingdom is a difficult one. Paul said that it is through "much tribulation" that anyone can enter into the kingdom. -- Acts 14:22

Those who are called by God to this exalted position in the kingdom are not, as a rule, the great, the mighty, or the noble of this world, although there is no discrimination against these. It is merely that in their present positions of honor and authority the terms of the "narrow way" seem too costly. James wrote, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5) But whether rich or poor, small or great according to the standards of this world, Jesus taught that all must become as "little children" -- humble, innocent, childlike -- in order to enter into the kingdom. "Of such," he said, "is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:14,15) Jesus was not saying here that the Kingdom would be made up of babies.

### **John the Baptist**

Jesus said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matthew 11:11) If entering into the kingdom of heaven were, as traditional theology teaches, a means of escape from hell-fire, how strange indeed would be this statement by Jesus. But thank God for a better understanding than this of the kingdom. Here, as in so many other instances, Jesus uses the expression, "kingdom of heaven," to denote the spiritual or heavenly phase of that glorious government of promise that is eventually to reign over and bless all nations, and John the Baptist will not have a part in that phase of the kingdom

"The law and the prophets were until John:" said Jesus, "since that time the kingdom of God is preached." (Luke 16:16) In connection with the Law given at Mt. Sinai, and the rewards offered for obedience to it, the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, ... ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Exodus 19:5,6) The nation as a whole did not qualify for this promised position as a kingdom of priests. But the prophets and other faithful ones, as individuals, did qualify. Indeed, the ancient patriarchs, although not under the written Law, were faithful to the precepts it proclaimed, and God will make good his promise to them.

All of these Ancient Worthies served God loyally because they had faith in the messianic kingdom promises. God did not hold out to them a heavenly hope. Their expectation was to be restored to life as humans on the earth. Paul lists many of them in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, tells of their suffering for righteousness' sake, and explains that they endured and died, believing that they would have a "better resurrection." (Hebrews 11:35,39,40) That better resurrection will be to human perfection, and to a position of teachers and leaders among the people.

Jesus said to the people in his day, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets [including John the Baptist, the last of 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." Matthew's account says that they shall sit down with "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob." Matthew also identifies those "thrust out" as the "children of the kingdom." -- Luke 13:28,29; Matthew 8:11,12

The "children of the kingdom," those who by faithfulness to the Law could have qualified to be a "kingdom of priests," will, when raised from the dead, be greatly disappointed when they discover that they do not occupy this honored position. Their disappointment is described by the expression, "weeping and gnashing of teeth." But Jesus explains who will occupy that position. It will be the Ancient Worthies, "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets." The people

will go to them, in the sense of recognizing them as the representatives of the messianic kingdom which will then be in control of earth's affairs.

These then will be the earthly phase of the kingdom of Christ. In Psalm 45:16 we are told that they will be made "princes in all the earth." While John the Baptist will not be with Jesus in the heavenly phase of the kingdom, he will be one of these earthly "princes" who will represent the heavenly rulers -- Christ, and those who faithfully suffered and died by following in his steps of self-sacrifice.

Thus the organizational arrangements of the kingdom of Christ will be complete. Its personnel, both in the heavenly and earthly phases, will have been tested and trained in advance, and raised from the dead to take their positions as rulers and teachers in that kingdom. Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead, and throughout the present age he has supervised the calling and training of his joint-heirs. He has served as their Advocate at the throne of heavenly grace. He has been their Good Shepherd, their Counselor, and Guide. He has been their Lord and Master, their Head.

With the work of calling and training his joint-heirs completed, and their resurrection from the dead and exaltation to the divine nature accomplished, then will come the "better resurrection" of their human representatives, the "princes," and together, harmoniously and gloriously, these two phases of the long-promised kingdom will begin to function.

There will also be a "great multitude" of spiritual "servants" in the kingdom. These we are told will be "before" the throne, not on the throne, not rulers in the kingdom. While the Scriptures do not specifically state just how these will serve, seemingly it will be as liaison between the heavenly and earthly phases of the kingdom. This "great multitudes" is described in Revelation 7:9,10,13-17.

What a complete and perfectly organized "kingdom," or government, this will be! In Micah 4:1-4 it is symbolically described as the "mountain of the house of the Lord." The mountain is a symbol of the kingdom, and the house is God's ruling family, or ruling house. In this prophecy the two phases of the kingdom are symbolized as "Zion," the spiritual, and "Jerusalem," the earthly. The prophecy states that in the "last days" the "mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and people shall flow unto it."

"And many nations shall come" -- in a similar prophecy recorded in Isaiah 2:2, 3 it says "all" nations shall flow unto it. And "many people shall go and say, Come ye, 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 [Christ and his footstep followers], and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem [the Ancient Worthies]."

Micah 4:3 continues, "He," the Lord, the great King and Judge, "shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off." How evident it is from this that the kingdom of Christ will exercise a strong control over the affairs of men, even to "rebuking" strong nations which do not, at first, bow the knee to its righteous rulership. It is impossible to harmonize prophecies like this with the erroneous theory that the kingdom of God is merely a righteous spirit in the hearts of individuals.

As a result of learning the Lord's ways under the rulership of Christ's kingdom, and if necessary being "rebuked" or disciplined in the process, the nations will, the prophet continues, "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up 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." -- Micah 4:4

### **Subjects of the Kingdom**

In addition to the fact that the kingdom of Christ has both a spiritual and an earthly phase, it also has both rulers and those who are ruled -- the subjects. It is important in the study of the Bible to note this distinction. When Jesus promised his disciples that they would be with him in his kingdom, the reference is to the ruling aspect of the kingdom, that they would be "kings and priests" in the kingdom with him. (Revelation 5:10; 20:4,6) The thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, and Jesus replied, "Verily I say unto thee today, Shalt thou be with me in paradise," [the placing of the comma being incorrect in the King James translation]. (Luke 23:43) This was a promise to the thief that he could be one of the subjects of the kingdom.

The reason Jesus here used the word paradise is that his kingdom will restore paradise conditions throughout the whole earth. Our first parents disobeyed God's law and were driven from Paradise, but the will or law of God will be re-established by the kingdom, and Paradise will be restored. The whole earth will become as the Garden of Eden, and filled with the restored and perfected human race. These will be subjects of the kingdom. And what happy subjects they will be!

Using a "mountain" again to symbolize the kingdom, the Prophet Isaiah wrote that in this mountain the Lord would "swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." (Isaiah 25:6-9) Those who have died will be awakened from death and given an opportunity to enjoy the life-giving blessings of the kingdom. We are assured of this by the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 15 -- that wonderful chapter on the resurrection of the dead. First he describes the resurrection of those who will live and reign with Christ, explaining that these will be exalted to immortality. Continuing he says, "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory?" -- vss. 54,55

This will be included in the work of the kingdom. Paul explains that Christ will reign until all enemies are put "under his feet," and that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (vss. 25,26) In this glorious work of the kingdom Jesus' followers will share, for this is the kingdom which, according to our text, "shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High." (Daniel 7:27) It is also the kingdom foretold in Revelation 11:15, where we read, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever."

While thousands of years are consumed in the preparation for this kingdom, when the time finally arrives for it to be established it accomplishes all that God has promised. The kingdom authority is first manifested to the world in a great "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation," destroying the "kingdoms of this world." (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:3,21,22; Revelation 2:26,27) But beyond this, as Revelation 11:18 reveals, its setting up will mark the time for the resurrection of the dead, when the "saints" of this age are exalted to reign with Christ for 1000 years in the spiritual phase of the kingdom, and when the ancient prophets will be made "princes in all the earth."

Then, also, the whole world will be enlightened, and all, small and great, will learn to reverence the Lord. Those who continue willfully to oppose God and righteousness, described in this prophecy as those who "destroy the earth," will themselves be "destroyed from among the people." -- Acts 3:23

Then the work of the kingdom will be completed, and God, the Creator of heaven and earth will be, as Paul foretold, "all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) Thus through the agencies of the kingdom will have been brought about the complete fulfillment of every Christian's prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) No prayer that has ever been offered will have had a more complete and glorious answer!