



No desire has been more eagerly expressed; no wish has been more sincerely wished; no need has been more earnestly felt than for a kingdom of peace, joy, and happiness to replace present conditions on planet earth.

Christians center their beliefs, their very lives, around Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus centered his life, and his teachings around this theme of a coming kingdom. He taught about it in his words: "But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35, 36).

Jesus illustrated the coming kingdom in his parables: "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). He demonstrated its power in countless miracles: he gave sight to the blind; he made the lame to walk, he even raised the dead!

This was the kingdom he promised; this was the kingdom he preached; this was the kingdom he died to achieve!

What Will That Kingdom Be Like?

Although this kingdom was the central theme of Jesus' life he did not originate the idea. The concept of this kingdom permeated Old Testament prophecy.

The prophets foresaw a kingdom of **health**, with **harmony** between man and his fellow. They foresaw a kingdom of **peace**, with total **economic security**. Isaiah spoke of all these promises: "They shall not hurt nor

destroy in all my holy mountain" (11:6-9); "they shall beat their swords into plowshares" (2:4); "mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (65:21, 22).

The prophets foresaw a kingdom with harmony between man and animal; natural enemies of the earth will dwell together in complete peace and harmony; and formerly harmful creatures will no longer be hurtful or dangerous.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:6-9).

They foresaw a kingdom of peace with harmony amongst men and no more war: "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall 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" (Isa. 2:4).

They foresaw a kingdom of total economic security; mankind will reap the rewards of their labor and live in security without fear of loss: "they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. . . . mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. 65:21, 22).

The New Testament apostles foresaw a kingdom in which even death would be done away;- "there shall be no more death" (Rev. 21:4). And the best part is that these were not idle dreams. They were not wishful thinking. They spoke of living verities for one simple reason-they knew what they were talking about for they had been witnesses. The Apostle Peter said:

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed" (2 Pet. 1:16-19).

And the Apostle Paul, when speaking of himself, wrote: "I knew a man in Christ . . . caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). In the next verse he calls this third heaven **paradise**. These Biblical writers could speak with such authority, with such sureness, for one simple reason; and to

most of their kingdom prophecies the reason for their positiveness is appended: "For the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it!"

Who Will That Kingdom Be For?

It will be for the **righteous** (Matt. 13:43)! That kingdom will be for the **Christian** (Acts 16:31)! The kingdom will be for the **Jew** (Ezek. 16:55)! The kingdom will be for the pagan of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15)! The kingdom will be for the heathen of Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 11:22)! In fact the kingdom will be for **all** people! "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28, 29 RSV).

ALL who are in their tombs will be raised to life-the Jew and the Arab; the Christian and the Atheist; the Catholic and the Protestant; the saint and the sinner; the priest and the master of voodoo-**ALL!** But that seems impossible! The Bible clearly says: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Yes! One must be a Christian to be saved. One must believe in Christ to live forever in that kingdom. Yet the Bible just as clearly states that the men of Sodom and of Gomorrah, of Tyre and of Sidon, will be there. Can both be true? Yes! Both are true because both are in the Bible. And the Bible is true!

The harmony between these seemingly conflicting concepts is in a simple statement of the will of God concerning man by the Apostle Paul: "God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:3-6).

God will have **all men to be saved!** Jesus Christ gave himself a **ransom for all!** How much plainer can it be stated! **ALL**-Jew and Gentile; saint and sinner; Christian and Jew and pagan -**ALL!** Yet . . . "there is no other name whereby men must be saved than that of Jesus Christ." Both are scriptural statements! Both must be true! But, How?

Two phrases in Paul's words to Timothy must be examined to answer this question. **FIRST**, let us look at the phrase: to be saved. Saved from what? What does it mean to be saved?

The answers come readily. Saved from death! Saved from sin! These answers are correct, but they reveal only half of the truth behind the words: all men to be saved.

The Bible is a complex book. But its central theme is simple. It is the story of redemption. It begins with man created perfect and placed in a

perfect garden home -Eden. It soon sees the original pair -Adam and Eve-sin and plunge the entire race into the consequences of sin -death.

The Bible closes with man restored to perfection in a perfect earth, an earth cleansed from the defilements of sin-including death itself. In between it weaves a story of promise and fulfillment, of despair and hope, of prediction and reality, of man being redeemed by one man -Jesus.

A Ransom for All!

The word "ransom" itself shows the principle on which the Bible's offer of salvation is based. It is taken from the Greek word anti-lutron, meaning a price to correspond.

A simple balance scale illustrates it well. Adam sinned and brought upon himself and his posterity the merited penalty of death. The scales of justice demanded it. Christ died as a corresponding price-a perfect man for a perfect man-to offset the sin of Adam and bring the scales of justice back into balance. Simple? Yes, it is simple! It is scriptural! And it is true!

Since all of Adam's children (and thus their descendants as well) were born after the first sin, they were born into a dying condition. The Psalmist David expressed it well: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5).

Since Adam's descendants include both good people and bad people, both saints and sinners, both believers and unbelievers, they are all guaranteed salvation through the shed blood of Christ, which was freely given for Adam and **all** his descendants.

The Apostle Paul summarized the whole of the Bible message into two short sentences: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21, 22).

It was from this death sentence on the human race, then, that all men are to be saved. This salvation is guaranteed by the death of Christ to all men-the good and the bad.

But it is one thing to obtain salvation; it is quite another thing to maintain that salvation. While the death of Jesus promises life from the grave for all, it does not promise that that life will be maintained forever.

Adam and Eve were given life in the Garden of Eden. They did not deserve it. It was simply a gift. It was God's grace. They could have maintained that life forever. They did not because they sinned.

In this same manner all men will receive life in God's kingdom. They do nothing to deserve it. It is simply a gift. It is of God's grace. They can

maintain that life forever. But will they? Just as with Adam and Eve, the option will be with men.

A Knowledge of the Truth

This is where the **second** phrase of Paul's statement to Timothy needs to be examined. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Notice the order! God will first have all men to be saved, and, second, come to a knowledge of the truth. Wouldn't you expect that order to be reversed? That men must first know the truth-know Jesus-before they are saved? That would seem logical. But that is not what the Bible says.

God's plan is for all men to "hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth" from the graves; and then to be instructed in "the knowledge of the truth." That's what God's kingdom is all about. It has two parts. First, raise all men from the grave. Second, instruct them in the rules of God so that they might keep them and maintain the life they have been given.

That is God's plan! That is the beauty of the kingdom! That assures the permanence of salvation! That is the promise of the Bible!

But is that not giving man a second chance? Indeed it would be if sin and evil had caught God by surprise. But they did not-more about that later. Because God permitted sin and evil for a purpose, life from the dead for all is not a second chance but merely the completion of what God had originally planned for man.

Why The Long Delay

But if God's kingdom is so wonderful, why is it so long delayed? Jesus died nearly 2000 years ago and there is still no kingdom. Instead of improving, many feel that world conditions have gotten worse. Why the long delay?

The Bible outlines three reasons for the delay. **FIRST**, to fully populate the earth; **SECOND**, to let man have a thorough experience with sin and its consequences; and **THIRD**, to develop a class of individuals to help Christ uplift the human race to life, perfection, and happiness.

When God first made man and placed him in the Garden of Eden he gave him a commission. "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (Gen. 1:28 RSV).

Demographic experts today say that this is just the problem. The earth has a population explosion which threatens our existence. But is this truly so? The Bible indicates that man has been on this planet for a little over 6000 years. The total population from creation to the present has been estimated at between thirty and fifty billions. That's a lot of people!

Yet the earth is a big place. Fifty billion people could each have 60 square feet of space on the island of New Zealand alone. But that's not much space, you say! True! But New Zealand is not a great part of the earth, either!

Not only does man need more space to live on, land is required to grow the necessary food for man's sustenance. This, too, has been provided in God's plan.

Notice, once again, the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God" (Isa. 35:1, 2).

The Desert Shall Blossom as a Rose

Thousands and thousands of square miles today are filled with desert—the Sahara, the Gobi, America's great Southwest Desert, the outback of Australia. Countless more miles are unproductive wilderness area and scrub land. Think of all of these blossoming as a rose. Think of the productivity of the world's breadbaskets: the Ukraine, the vast prairie provinces of Canada, the great plains of the United States. Think of these joined by the vast areas of today's deserts! Yes, there is room, and even enough room for more.

And God's commission was to "fill the earth." This "filling" is one of the reasons for the great delay in ushering in that kingdom for which we are taught to pray.

The Permission of Evil

Man's experiences on the earth have been hard ones. Not only has he had to earn his living by "the sweat of his brow," but the inhumanity of man to man has filled all decent men with revulsion. Natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, famines, volcanic eruptions, have added to the misery of the human scene. Does man really want to live forever in such conditions? If there is a God, why has he permitted such suffering?

There is a purpose—and a good one—for all of this evil. Listen to the words of King Solomon: "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" (Eccl. 1:13).

Sin was introduced on this earth through the intervention of an evil personality—Satan. His influence has made such evil epidemic. Every being who has ever lived can well identify with the words of David of old: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5).

One of the reasons for the success of the kingdom of God is based on a simple premise-that evil influences will be restrained-Satan will be bound.

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev. 20:1-3).

With Satan bound while man is educated in the laws of God and righteousness, human beings will have the wonderful opportunity to compare two life styles-sin, with its consequences of misery, sickness and death; and righteousness, with its consequences of happiness, health and life. Is there any question which they will choose! Certainly they will choose life.

Why God Permits Evil

Yes, as the wise man said, "this sore travail has God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."

Comparing the brief span of man's present life under sin and evil with an eternity of life under kingdom conditions, all will echo the sentiments of the Apostle Paul: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Kingdom Helpers

But there is still one more reason for the long delay. The work of the kingdom is a big work. God's plan is that there be helpers to assist Jesus in this great human uplift project. When Jesus reigns, there are those who will reign with him. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12).

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

It is the selection of this class and their training which has occupied the centuries since the death of Christ to the present. These will be with their Lord in heaven, assisting him in the work of restoring men to perfect life on the earth.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

For these three reasons-the filling of the earth, the full permission of man to experience evil and its consequences and the selection of a class of co-workers with Christ in the kingdom-there has been a delay of some twenty centuries in establishing that rule of righteousness. But come it will-in God's own due time.

When Will That Kingdom Come

How will we know when that kingdom comes? Is it near?

Yes! It is near! The Bible contains abundant signs of changes that would take place in world conditions introducing that kingdom. Many of these are found in a sermon by Jesus located in Matthew, chapter 24, based on a prophecy in the book of Daniel, chapter 12.

We will look briefly at just four of these:

A Time Of Trouble Threatening To Destroy All Flesh:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. 24:21, 22).

Not until the second World War let loose the age of nuclear warfare has man had this ability to destroy all flesh. Today the dreaded word "overkill" heightens man's fear with the ability to destroy all flesh many times over.

A Knowledge And Transportation Revolution:

"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:4).

With the introduction of compulsory education, the widespread availability of printed material, and the introduction of the computer age, knowledge has been exploding exponentially -doubling every five to eight years. Means of rapid transportation are so common that we may forget that our ancestors of only 150 years ago were restricted to the speed of a horse, and most died without traveling more than a few miles from their homes.

Israel:

"My people of Israel . . . shall build the waste cities and inhabit them . . . and I will plant them upon their land and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God" (Amos 9:14, 15).

In a modern miracle, a people wandering homeless for 2000 years, have returned to their ancient homeland. Despite numerous onslaughts by overpowering numbers of enemies, they have endured and stand strong today among the family of nations.

Preaching The Gospel:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

In the early 1800's Bible societies were established in Europe and the United States for the sole purpose of distributing the scriptures all over the world. Today the Bible is still a best seller and is available in more than one thousand languages.

Now, once again, hear the word of the Lord: "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Luke 21:31).

We are living in a day when man has the potential to destroy all flesh. We are living in a day when knowledge has been increased and many run to and fro. We are living in a day when the rebirth of Israel in her ancient homeland is a fact. We are living in a day when the Gospel-the Bible-is being published throughout the world.

Therefore we are living in a day when the kingdom of God is nigh at hand!

Yes, man has prayed for many things. He has prayed for nothing harder or more often than the kingdom. And that is a prayer that will soon be answered.

"Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9, 10).