

THE
KINGDOM
OF **GOD**
ON **EARTH**

God's plan for the world



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THE view of planet earth, seen from outer space, is very beautiful indeed. Pictures taken from space have confirmed this. The earth is a wonderful jewel in God's creation and the Bible tells us it is where He has promised to reveal His kingdom in all its glory.

The earth, of all the planets in the solar system, is the one that is perfectly suited to all forms of life and the one that orbits at exactly the right distance from the sun to provide comfortable conditions for the human race.

The Bible – sole source of information

The Bible alone explains why this should be. It reveals that it was the Lord God “who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it *to be inhabited*” (Isaiah 45:18).

We think it is logical to assert that if there is a God, and if He created a race of beings to inhabit this planet and no other, then there must have been an ultimate objective in His mind. Happily, we have not been left to guess what that goal might be. From the day that God put a human being on this earth, His one supreme purpose was that His creation should willingly respond to His own perfection: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). The final stage in fulfilling that intention is what the Bible describes as THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH.

A *real* kingdom

It may surprise you to learn that it will be in every physical and political sense a *real* kingdom. It will have a king, a government,

a capital, and an international system of laws. At the head of it will be the Lord Jesus Christ, for God has already delegated “all power in heaven and in earth” to him, the Bible tells us. When it will come about, we do not know, but “God has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom he has ordained” (Acts 17:31).

There are good reasons to believe that the kingdom of God on earth will soon be here. The abundant signs which confirm this are not the subject of this booklet; but we are mightily convinced that it is so! The coming era of the kingdom will be the most exciting the world has ever seen. It will overshadow all those periods in history labelled with names like ‘the age of enlightenment’, ‘the classical age’, ‘the renaissance’ and so on. The kingdom of God will provide a superb environment on this planet for all who will acknowledge God as supreme Creator and Jesus Christ as King of the world.

A beautiful world

Use your imagination for a moment! Think of a world at peace, its inhabitants healthy and well-fed and doing rewarding work. Imagine a world in which there is full employment, where people are not exploited and where they can live long and truly prosperous lives; a world in which famine and pestilence no longer kill one quarter of the population and where the resources of the land and the seas are harvested for the benefit of all. Already you are getting a picture of the kingdom of God.

Now ponder on the absence of religious bigotry or sectarian strife; imagine the benefits of internationally accepted laws, with justice administered by fair-minded yet uncompromising judges. Conjure up a mental picture of life without terrorism and child-abuse; where good-neighbourliness prevails and evil tendencies are discouraged, where governments establish good standards of behaviour, and implement just forms of punishment for wrongdoing. That will be the kingdom of God on earth!

To many people, the kingdom of God is just a vague hope that one day man will bring about a state of happiness on earth. To

others, the kingdom is a dream of heavenly bliss in the skies. But the realist knows that the aspirations of men are not producing a better world for us or our children. And anyone who reads his Bible carefully knows that there is no convincing evidence for the common belief in an afterlife in heaven. The kingdom has to do with a real, tangible world empire which will be set up on the earth when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven.

“Thy kingdom come”

The disciples of Jesus found prayer to God a difficult matter. What to pray *for*? What are the *priorities*? Jesus solved their problems by teaching them what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”. It established their priorities for them: God is a *Father*, the provider. God has a realm in heaven where His will is obeyed; God’s kingdom is to come to the earth. It was a powerful plea to make:

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever.”
(Matthew 6:9-13)

Many churches still repeat this prayer. Indeed, “Your kingdom come” should always be on the lips of faithful Christians.

Many human beings act as though there is no Creator and no purpose in the world around them. But they only have to look at the wonders of the human body and the miracles of plant life! Did these occur by chance or by design? Even atheists are forced to marvel at the incredible wonders of living cells. The Apostle Paul, a well-educated man of his time, declared that atheism is untenable because “what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are *without excuse*” (Romans 1:19,20).

If there is a God, and He has a future for the human race, then surely He has told us? Of course He has! The whole Bible, from beginning to end, reveals His plans for the earth. He spoke to the “fathers” and through the prophets, and “in these last

days ... by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:1,2). That is why the Gospel was the centre of Jesus Christ’s ministry: “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23). He left no doubt that the hoped-for kingdom would happen:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him ...”

(Matthew 25:31,32)

Where on earth will it be?

To answer that question let us spend a few moments looking back to Old Testament times. In those days the discerning Jew knew that God had promised Canaan (an earlier name for Palestine / Israel) to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:18; 17:8; etc). God looked on this part of the earth with special favour. It was *His* land, because in it and around it He would demonstrate His purpose with the nations. It was a good land, a land that “flows with milk and honey”, well-watered and suitable for good crops and fruits. Faithful Jews knew that their special status was due solely to the extraordinary faith of their father Abraham – and not to any merit of their own!

Subsequent events caused them to come to live in Egypt. But there, in time, their lives became hard and God turned their thoughts back to ‘the Promised Land’. Under Moses they left Egypt – an event referred to as ‘the Exodus’. After this they renewed their special relationship with God. He was their leader and they were His people. But of course there were conditions attached to this:

“If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people ... a *kingdom* of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5,6)

Israel did not live up to God’s expectations for long and often degenerated to the level of the nations around them. But in their prime, in the days of King David and his son Solomon, they had

some sense of what it was like to be the kingdom of God. They prospered and expanded and had peace in the land.

The failure of the kingdom of Israel

This phase of Israel's history was short-lived. Human failure, arrogance and disregard for divine standards prevented it from ever being truly 'the kingdom of God'. A few hundred years later God brought an end to the royal line. A Babylonian assault on Jerusalem was near – there was to be no more a visible kingdom of God for a long time. The last monarch was told: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, *until he come whose right it is*; and I will give it him" (Ezekiel 21:27, KJV). That statement was a forecast of the desolation of the royal line *until* the greatest heir to the throne should come – Jesus Christ! In other words, until the kingdom of God should again appear on the earth.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there was always a remnant of faithful Jews who were looking for a Messiah from the line of King David of the tribe of Judah. The disciples of Jesus were greatly excited at the prospect of the renewed kingdom of God in the land of Israel. After he had been raised from the dead they asked: "Lord, will you at this time restore *the kingdom* to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

They were, in fact, in too much of a hurry! They had seen his title "King of the Jews" placarded on the cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem. He had come out alive from the tomb where he had been placed after his death. Once more he was amongst them, alive and well, indeed immortal, and they were impatient to see the crown on his head and the kingdom of God restored there and then. It was not to be – yet. The Gospel of the kingdom had first to be preached to *all nations*. Jesus told them: "You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Jerusalem – crossroads of the world

We have seen that the concept of the kingdom of God developed from a Jewish State with a Jewish king. Every ruling king has a



residence and a capital, a central seat of authority. Jerusalem will be that centre – and what place more fitting? One thousand years before Jesus Christ the poets of Israel declared: “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King” (Psalm 48:2, KJV).

It will make a superb capital – more central than Washington, DC, Moscow or Beijing – and convenient to the great land continents of Europe, Africa and Asia.

This kingdom of God is to be a world empire and Jesus Christ the emperor. This was revealed long ago. The prophet Daniel, interpreting a vision which forecast the successive empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, to be followed by a fragmented world of strong and weak governments leading up to the coming of Jesus Christ, pictured God’s agent in the form of a “stone” descending to crush the rebellious nations at the time of the end:

“In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

(Daniel 2:44)

Here is another prophetic statement: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

Judgements on the world

Before we go any further let us remember that the return of Jesus Christ will bring its terrors as well as its blessings. The takeover of the nations will meet a great deal of resistance. Let us note four aspects:

1. "All nations" gather against Israel but Jesus will destroy the invaders (Zechariah 14; Ezekiel 38,39).
2. Jerusalem will suffer a major earthquake, with devastating results, when "his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:4).
3. Some governments will challenge Jesus Christ and will "set themselves ... against the LORD and against his Anointed (i.e., Christ)" (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:26), but there will be judgements on those who oppose him (Isaiah 34; Revelation 18).
4. There will be a resurrection and judgement. Those who are rejected, because they failed to respond to God's grace, will be bitterly disappointed. On the other hand, what joy there will be for those to whom the King will say: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the *kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

Readers will find more details of these dramatic happenings in the companion booklets, *Christ is Coming!*, *Your Share in God's Promises*, and *Resurrection and Judgement*.

The kingdom begins

With these events over and the King having led his triumphant army of faithful followers into Jerusalem, the real work of Christ's kingdom can begin. There is a new temple to be built and the tribes of Israel are to be allocated divisions in the land of Israel.

National ambassadors will begin to arrive to pay their respects to the King: "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles (Western nations) will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba (Middle Eastern nations) will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before him" (Psalm 72:10,11). Even the survivors of those hostile

nations who invaded Israel will come to worship, for “everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

Nations will be rallying their peoples: “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD.” They will do this because:

“He will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.
For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the
LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:3)

The effect of this education will be remarkable. Nations will “beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks” – a colourful way of describing disarmament. There will be no more war.

The people of the kingdom

We ought to clarify one or two matters about the inhabitants of the kingdom of God. There will be two kinds of people: firstly, the rulers and spiritual leaders, who will be *immortal* (that is, never-dying) and, secondly, the citizens of the kingdom, who will be *mortal* (that is, subject to death).

The first group will include Jesus, the universal king; Abraham, David and other great ‘worthies’, who will have positions of honour in the empire; the twelve apostles, and the faithful followers of Jesus – the “saints” – who will be the administrative rulers and educators of the new age. The second group will consist of the mortal peoples of the world who, at Christ’s return, survive the judgements on the earth and are willing for Jesus to be their King. This will include Jews who are allowed to live in Israel.

The immortals

Immortality is the gift of everlasting life that God will give to those who have faithfully obeyed and practised His commandments – those of all ages of history up to the return of Jesus to the earth. These will be those who are:

“Redeemed ... out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us *kings and priests* to our God; and we shall reign on the earth ... They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (Revelation 5:9,10; 20:4)

We must not think of an immortal being as something like a ghost. Jesus, after his resurrection, was immortal; but he ate and drank with his followers and showed himself to have remarkable physical powers. The immortal body has flesh and bones like others, but is energised by the Spirit of God, suffering no disease or disability (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). More importantly, those who are immortal will be free from sin, no longer frustrated by their moral weakness or lack of emotional control. They will share the divine nature.

Jesus, like any wise ruler, will delegate much of the conduct of his empire to others who have been suitably trained. Prominent among those to be closely associated with the King will be the great Biblical examples of faith: men like Abraham, described as the “heir of the world” in Romans 4:13, and “my servant David shall be their prince for ever” (Ezekiel 37:25). Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Samuel, will be there; Sarah, Rahab and Ruth, Mary and Elizabeth.

Rulers with Christ

There will be a special role for the Lord’s twelve apostles – as he promised:

“In the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

(Matthew 19:28)

In the book of Daniel, the prophet saw a vision of the kingdom of God on earth, and he was told about those who should be in charge: “The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever” (7:18).

What is so special about these immortal rulers called “saints”? “Saint” means a holy or separated one – someone chosen for his dedication to divine principles. Like the men who were first

selected and given the Spirit of God to help Moses to govern ancient Israel, they will be “able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness” (Exodus 18:21). But there will be one big difference: those in times past *died* – but the rulers of the future will not die, and their qualities will not be lost with age.

The King will have the discernment to select the right men or women for the jobs on hand and to utilize the skills of mind and body which they began to develop during their service in this present life.

The quality of eternal life

Eternal life will convey marvellous benefits on these governors and teachers. With healthy minds and physically perfect bodies, they will not suffer the crippling effects of disease or disablement: “They shall neither hunger any more nor thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat ... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16,17). Like their Master, they will “know what is in men’s hearts” and, with the unerring ability to diagnose the source of human problems, will have the capacity to root out troublemakers and to promote trust between neighbours. Think what that could accomplish in some of the world’s present trouble spots!

What a transformation will begin to work its way across the earth when Christ’s immortal administrators are sent out from Jerusalem. New laws, based on Biblical principles, will have the effect of cutting through partisan politics and will rapidly remove the cause of so much bigotry among contesting religions.

A thousand years of peace

Of course, it will take time for adjustments to be made and for people to see the benefits to their way of life. It will not happen overnight; but there is to be a period of a thousand years for the glorious “refreshing” of the earth’s peoples before God’s programme is complete.

We must not think of the coming age as a fanciful, too-good-to-be-true fairyland. It will be a very real world, peopled with those

who have survived the judgements and have come to accept that Christ is a world ruler who, for the good of the whole civilisation, is prepared to rule with “a rod of iron”. But the mortal nations will still have their own characteristics and cultures, and their own racial backgrounds. The rulers will have the gift of speaking in other languages; but it may be some time before the world’s dialects are completely changed into the one universal language that will reverse the confusion of Babel (see Genesis 11) and allow the suspicions and difficulties of multi-language communication to be dispersed.

A fair system of justice

At every level of civilisation throughout the world there are forces at work which undermine happy and rewarding coexistence between people. No ideology, capitalism or communism, even the tyranny of cruel despots, has been able to handle them. They are the forces of greed, corruption, subversion, bribery and personal power. All this is going to change. There will be justice for the poor, and the underprivileged will get fair treatment. Jesus will see to that:

“He shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.” (Isaiah 11:3,4)

When “princes will rule with justice” (Isaiah 32:1) the whole balance of society will change: no longer one law for the rich and one for the poor! The same rules will apply whether you live in Jamaica, Kenya or Japan, because they will be based on the Sermon on the Mount and on divine principles laid down by the King and his court in Jerusalem.

How will this affect the lives of the people? When criminals and hooligans perceive that the judges can see right through them and that the punishment will always fit the crime, the majority will soon learn that loving one’s neighbour and the virtues of honesty and truth are much to be preferred in the attainment of a happy and prosperous life. Not only does it mean that families and

neighbours can live in complete harmony, but it will spill over into a release from national and international tensions. As Isaiah said: “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17).

The restraints imposed by the immortal rulers will prevent the worst excesses of human nature. Unrepentant sinners will suffer summary execution and the otherwise long lives which people might enjoy will be cut short. “With the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked”; and, “The sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isaiah 11:4; 65:20).

Good health

Isaiah also tells us that:

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old.” (65:20)

This suggests that infant mortality, which is still a scourge in many developing countries, will be wiped out. If someone only reaches the age of 100 he will still be accounted a child. What a change from the present, when life expectancy in some countries is only 40 years or so, and even in the medically advanced countries it often only attains what the Psalmist described as “threescore years and ten”. Childhood will be a joy, and old age no disgrace, for, “old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zechariah 8:4,5). It seems clear that married life for the mortals will be based on the divine principles established from the beginning. This in turn will create the conditions for a stable and happy society.

If Jesus, the Great Physician, in his first ministry could heal the sick, cure blindness-from-birth, make cripples walk, exorcise mental disorders and raise people from the dead, then there is every certainty that he and his aides will do that, and more, in the future. The good news is that:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.” (Isaiah 35:5,6)

World resources for the good of all

It is a sad commentary on our modern civilisation that despite large deposits of minerals and the abundant potential in the soil for the production of food, man seems unable to feed the ever-growing population. He cannot distribute the resources or organise the labour so that everyone can have satisfying work and lead a prosperous and contented life. But it *can* be done! The resources have been there since the Creator designed this bountiful earth. What it needs are right-minded people, with the commitment and authority to solve the physical problems and to organise the bounty.

It is worth remembering that Jesus was a great organiser as well as a great teacher. What he could do in feeding thousands of men, women and children in well-ordered groups of fifty or a hundred, with a dozen assistants, he will surely do when he is God’s King on earth among the millions who struggle to find enough food for their families. As the world’s population increases in the twenty-first century, so the problem is getting worse.

The Bible foresees the curse on the ground being removed, and plentiful crops for all who will labour for them. “There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon”, said King David (Psalm 72:16). “The mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water”, said Joel (3:18; see also Amos 9:13). The farmer’s crops will be abundant, for “the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew” (Zechariah 8:12).

Then there is the prophet Isaiah’s vision of the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose (35:1). Think of the vast areas of Africa, the Middle East and Asia where every year the sands are encroaching on fertile ground and millions are dying. Governments

seem unable to find the huge sums of money necessary to bring up the water that often lies just below the surface! What a blessing it will be for desert peoples to be engaged in huge irrigation schemes and to benefit from the new fertility of their lands. These are the wonderful things that will be possible in the kingdom of God.

Living life to the full

It seems likely that there will be less concentration of population in large cities: city-dwellers will move out into pasture and woodland areas made available by worldwide conservation schemes. God has never encouraged people to live in large cities, where the worst traits of humanity are expressed and where evil men hide in dark places. On the other hand when, under the improved conditions of Christ's reign, human fitness reaches its peak and men's minds are expanded to their full potential, there will be abundant room for utilising those skills, to the tremendous benefit of all the world's inhabitants. Everyone will achieve job-satisfaction:

“They shall build houses, and *inhabit* them (a contrast with former times!); they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and *another* inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people, and my elect shall long *enjoy* the work of their hands.”
(Isaiah 65:21,22)

Arabs working with Jews

One of the happiest prospects will be the harmony that will exist between ancient enemies. The prophet's vision of the wolf and the lamb feeding together (Isaiah 11:6-8) is not only a beautiful description of a restored harmony between man and the animal creation, but it also has a special reference to future peace between previously warring nations. Isaiah speaks of the Arabs coming to Jerusalem to “proclaim the praises of the LORD” (Isaiah 60:6). He pictures them helping to build up the walls of the new city, working with their former half-brothers, the Jews, and feeding their flocks and becoming farmers and vine dressers.

That will be a wonderful reversal of the present state of affairs in the Middle East: a fulfilment of major promises which God made long ago to the Arab branch of Abraham's family.

How long will it last?

Will this benevolent state of affairs last for ever? In the sense that God has designed the earth for man to live on for ever, the answer is, Yes. But Christ's kingdom, controlled by immortal rulers, will still have a predominantly mortal population. That is to say, human propensities and sinfulness will still be there and that is why God has set a *time limit* on it. By God's reckoning it will take one thousand years fully to educate the inhabitants of the world to divine standards of behaviour. By then they will have a long-term understanding of the marvellous benefits to be enjoyed by possessing eternal life themselves.

Eventually the Millennium (the 1,000 years) will come to an end. It will be marked by a deliberate easing of the King's strong reign in order to allow vestiges of rebellion among some of his subjects to come to the surface in a final desperate challenge to his will (see Revelation 20). These disloyal subjects will attack Jerusalem, but will be utterly destroyed. It will be mankind's last death fling. It will provide the necessary marker, a Millennium-end "sign of the times", to the people of the world that the finale is about to take place.

When the rebellion is over, Christ's work as Saviour and King is nearly done. The dead of the thousand years must be raised from their graves, to meet again their King and Judge:

"And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened ... and the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."
(Revelation 20:12)

Alongside those raised will stand the millions who are alive at that time. They must now await Christ's righteous judgement. The rebels and those who represent the worst elements of human nature will die, consigned to the "lake of fire", the death from which

there is no returning. On the other hand, the faithful subjects of Christ's kingdom on earth will then receive their reward, everlasting life, just as their rulers had done a thousand years before.

“Thy kingdom come”

Following these dramatic events, the earth is to be inhabited only by men and women who possess eternal life. The work of the Lord Jesus as King is done. He has no mortal subjects to reign over and the great destroyers of man's potential, sin and death, have been conquered. God's will is now truly done on earth, and the “Lord's prayer” has been answered. The Apostle Paul summed it up in 1 Corinthians 15:

“Then comes the end, when he (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death ... Now when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” (verses 24-28)

We may find it difficult to think that far ahead, or to visualise what is meant by God being “all in all”. But it will be the climax of the Creator's great purpose with the earth – and it will be very wonderful! “As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Numbers 14:21).

Don't let this marvellous future slip away from you! Jesus may be here soon. Please, read your Bible, and pray with all your heart: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

STANLEY OWEN

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