

THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST

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Prior to the year 2,000, there was a lot of speculation and anticipation about the new millennium. Some even questioned if it was attainable in view of the stock-pile of nuclear weapons and the inevitable extermination of life on our planet in the event of an all-out nuclear war.

During the year or so leading up to the year 2,000, the prospect of the new millennium created a lot of media interest. And on the eve of the new millennium, millions around the world hyped up into party mode, with extravagant and expensive celebrations and fanfare.

The question is: What was all the celebration about? Did the sun look any different as it rose in the east? Did it rise faster or slower? Was it brighter or dimmer? Film crews from all around the world converged on Gisborne in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands where the rising sun would first be seen, inaugurating the year 2,000, in order to film it. But they could have filmed it anywhere in the world on any day of the year, and no one would have known the difference.

Did famines and pestilences, poverty and pollution cease when the new millennium ticked over? Did earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, depletion of the ozone layer cease to be a threat? Did all wars, violence, murder and crime stop? Did all governments become righteous, causing justice and equity to prevail and oppression and exploitation to disappear? Did all forms of sickness and disease get abolished. No! Nothing changed. Not even the price of eggs came down! Everything remained the same and will continue to remain the same and get worse under man's rule. It takes more than a page turned on the calendar, drinking champagne, fireworks displays, streamers and popping balloons, to change those things and put the world right.

So what was all the hype about? What was everyone so excited about? Why the celebration? Optimism for the future caused some to celebrate. They hoped that the new millennium would produce a new and better world. But as long as mortal fallible man is in control, and as long as human governments prevail, such hope is a vain optimism. Man is a war-monger at heart; very proud and selfish, and history testifies to the truth of what the Bible says, that it is futile to put our trust in man. Time and again the bubble of hope put in human governments and rule has burst and disappeared, resulting in disappointment and despair. No sooner are peace pacts signed, then war breaks out again somewhere else. For this reason many did not have an eager anticipation for the new millennium but an apprehension due to the prospect of more of the same of wars and man's inhumanity to man. In addition to this, there are the fears of the effects of over population, global warming, the rising level of oceans, changing weather patterns, pollution of the air, land and sea; not to

mention man's weapons of mass destruction.

Bible prophecy confirms these apprehensions. It teaches that the history of man and human rule will, in the end, reach a crescendo of trouble, involving wars, violence, famines, pestilences and earthquakes on an unprecedented scale. References to "stars" falling from heaven upon earth also indicate that projectiles such as meteorites or even asteroids will bombard planet earth.

This climactic period is referred to as "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1. Matt. 24:21). Jesus said there will be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity (Lk. 21:25). The word "perplexity" means in a state of quandary; at one's wits end due to no solution; being at a loss how to solve the dilemma. As a result, Jesus goes on to say that men's hearts will be failing them for fear due to what confronts them. He also said that if he did not return, i.e. if divine intervention did not take place, no living thing would survive (Matt. 24:22). Under man's rule, the world clearly has a bleak future.

What the world needs is one ruler, one government and one religion. If the world could be united under one and the same ruler, government and religion; all conflicts between the different ideologies of governments and the different doctrines of religions would cease. Such a ruler of course would have to be immortal, righteous and infallible, unable to be assassinated or die, and never make mistakes or errors of judgement. He would have to be absolutely fair, just and impartial. 2 Sam. 23:3 says: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Obviously no ordinary man could qualify for this. It requires someone supernatural who possesses divine power by which he could exercise control over both the nations and the elements, able to enforce his will, establishing justice, righteousness and peace. Such a man could never be produced by the normal course of nature. Only divine power could produce such a man. And it has - 2,000 years prior to the new millennium. The year 2,000 has been dated from that event, testifying to the historicity of it.

Jesus Christ of course is the man, divinely begotten around 2,000 years ago. And his ultimate destiny and mission is to rule the earth and establish righteousness and peace. This is what the ultimate kingdom of God is all about.

Now, if you could start a new millennium with this, that would be something worth celebrating and getting excited about! Well, the good news is that such a millennium is coming, and it will be the millennium - the millennium of millenniums - the mother of millenniums. All other millenniums in history and their celebrations will pale into insignificance by comparison. All the fireworks displays and razz matazz which inaugurated the year 2,000 around the world, will be totally eclipsed by

the display of divine power that will inaugurate the millennium of Christ's reign.

The word "millennium" is derived from the Latin word "mille" which means "one thousand," and "annum" which means "year" The word millennium does not actually occur in the Bible, but references are made to "a thousand years." Reference is made 6 times in Rev. 20:2-7 to the specific period of one thousand years in relation to Christ's future reign on earth. Although many Scriptures relate to the reign of Christ, nowhere else in Scripture is this time period given in relation to his reign. It is a "revelation," as the title of the book indicates.

The passage in Rev. 20:2-7 clearly states that those who belong to Jesus will reign with him for a thousand years, and other passages in the book of Revelation teach that his reign will be upon the earth (Rev. 2:26-27. 5:10. 11:15. 19:15). The one thousand year reign commences at Christ's return, for it is stated in Rev. 20:4-6 that it commences at the time of the first resurrection, which is elsewhere referred to as occurring at the second coming.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS BELIEVED IN THE MILLENNIUM

The millennial reign of Christ promises a glorious future for the earth in which the nations will be blessed with righteousness, peace and prosperity. Unfortunately considerable indifference is shown in many churches towards this glorious hope, due to misconceptions of the purpose of God. As a result, a hope has been embraced which conflicts with, and negates the doctrine of Christ's reign on earth.

Due to the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the hope of many has no relation to the earth. Their hope is to leave the earth at death and wing their way to heaven and receive their reward and inheritance there. But although the doctrine of Christ's millennial reign on earth is lightly regarded today, there is evidence that in former days it held a much more important place in the church. Gibbon, in his history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire (Ch. 15) declared:

"The ancient and popular doctrine of the millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ ... a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years, when Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints, and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth ... The assurance of such a millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Iranaeus who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostles, down to Lactantius ... Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers ... But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary

support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ's reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory; was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism."

This is a valuable piece of evidence, showing that the nearer we approach the apostle's days, the more prominent this doctrine becomes. But as we journey down the stream of time, we find it losing its hold upon the minds of men, until it is at length rejected as heresy. This should not surprise us because the apostles warned that the church would not continue to hold the truth, but would, in course of time, depart from the faith and turn to fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). History has shown the fulfilment of this prophecy in regard to the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. The doctrine of the second coming of Christ to reign on the earth, upon which the hope of the early Christians was set, was eventually rejected, and hope in an immortal soul going to heaven at death was embraced instead as a substitute.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE MILLENNIUM

Before Christ can reign, his kingdom must be established. He will do this at his second coming, and the details of this work are revealed in the Scriptures. In fact, a complete programme of events leading up to the millennium is given in the Word of God. Time and space will not allow a detailed presentation of all the events, but it will be sufficient to look at the principal features.

The first event of course will be the second coming of Christ. When he comes, the resurrection of the dead takes place, and those among Christ's followers who are judged to be faithful, will be gathered up by the angels and caught up to meet him in the air as he, along with all the angels and the city of God, descend to the earth. Those who are judged to be unfaithful will be banished from his presence and fail to gain entrance into the city of God.

When Christ returns, a confederacy of anti-Israel armies will have invaded the land of Israel and occupied it for three and a half years, during which time many Jews will have been killed and the surviving remnant will have suffered great tribulation. Were it not for the return of Christ, the nation would be exterminated (Ps. 83).

Upon his return, Jesus enters into battle with the enemy in order to save and deliver Israel. The battle is known as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16). It is at this time that an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude shakes the land and indeed the whole earth, causing the cities of the nations to collapse and mountains to tumble into valleys. The Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem will split in half and all the surrounding hill

country of Judea will be levelled into a plain, while the site of Jerusalem will be heaved up to a much greater height (Zech. 14). Hailstones weighing over 50 kilos, torrential rain, fire and pestilence will also be unleashed from heaven upon the anti-Israel and anti-God armies, causing panic among them, resulting in mutual slaughter (Ezk. 38:18-23. Rev. 16:14-21).

As the feet of Jesus come down upon the Mount of Olives, the city of God will probably come down to the newly elevated Mount Zion. Various Scriptures state that myriads of angels will be seen coming with Jesus, but myriads of saints who are caught up to meet him in the air will also accompany him on his descent. The reference in Zech. 14:5 to the Lord coming “and all the saints with thee” could refer to this. The reference in Rev. 19:14 to armies in heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, following Jesus, could also refer to the saints (Cp v7-8).

Jesus is also depicted in Rev. 19 leading the saints on a white horse, and out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword with which he smites the nations, and he rules them with a rod of iron. The saints who follow him on white horses no doubt share in the same mission of smiting the nations and ruling them with a rod of iron. We read in Rev. 2:26-27 that Jesus will give all overcomers power over the nations and authority to rule them with a rod of iron. In view of this, it seems that the saints will do battle with Jesus against the nations at the battle of Armageddon.

Ps. 149:5-9 also relates to this: “Let the saints be joyful in glory (i.e. rejoice in the glory of God of which they partake); let them sing aloud upon their couches in the city of God. Let the high praises of God be upon their lips and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the nations and punishments upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgement written (preordained): This honour have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord.”

According to Zech. 12 and Mic. 4:11-13 the Jewish remnant in the land of Israel at the time of the battle of Armageddon will also be encouraged and strengthened to smite the enemy. After the battle is over they see that their Messiah who delivered them has pierced hands and feet and realize that it is Jesus who they crucified. This results in a national repentance and mourning, followed by restoration (Zech. 12:10-14). Eventually, all 12 tribes of Israel will be restored in their land (Ezk. 48). This leads to “ten men from the nations of every tongue taking hold of the robe of a Jew, saying: we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:20-23).

GOD’S JUDGEMENTS EXTEND TO ALL NATIONS

The judgements of God that fall at the battle of Armageddon upon the invading armies will not be confined to those armies in the land of Israel. According to Ezk. 39:6 and other prophecies, fire will also be sent upon the nations from which the armies come. Combined with the devastating earthquake which flattens cities and levels mountains, along with the pestilence that follows, the death toll throughout the earth will be huge - astronomical. For example, we read in Isa. 24:5-6 that due to the earth being defiled by its inhabitants who have transgressed God's laws, His curse will: "Devour the earth, and those who dwell therein will suffer for their guilt. The inhabitants of the earth are scorched and few remain."

Isa. 51:6 makes this declaration: "... the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wear out like a garment, and those who dwell in it shall die like flies" (i.e. in swarms).

Again Isa. 66:15-16: "For behold the Lord will come with fire and his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebukes with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord execute judgement and those slain by the Lord will be many." Also Jer. 25:33: "And those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. No one will mourn for them and they will not be taken away and buried. They will stay lying on the ground like dung."

THERE WILL BE SURVIVORS

In the days of Noah when God's judgements fell upon the earth, there was wholesale destruction. Except for Noah and his family, everyone else in the earth perished. However, in the end time judgement that takes place at Christ's return, although multitudes will perish, there will be survivors. This is indicated in a number of Scriptures. For example Zech. 14:16 says: "All the survivors from the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go there each year to worship the king." These survivors are not the soldiers involved in the attack on Jerusalem, but the civilian population of the nations from which the soldiers came. All the soldiers involved in the invasion of Israel will be killed in the battle of Armageddon, but there will be survivors among the civilian population of all nations.

Isa. 66:23-24 also refers to "all flesh" (i.e. mortals from all nations) coming up to Jerusalem to worship after God's judgements have been poured out upon the earth.

There is no way of knowing how many will survive God's judgement, but due to the huge population of the earth prior to the judgement, the number of survivors could be substantial. This is indicated in Isa. 2:2-3 where reference is made to "all nations" and "many people" going up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

Another Scripture which speaks of a mortal population during the millennium is Isa. 65:17-25. In these verses we are told that after the Lord has created a new heavens and a new earth, and Jerusalem a joy, “no longer will babies die when only a few days old; no longer will men be considered old at 100. Only sinners will die that young and it will be the sign of a curse.” Reference to babies in this passage also indicates that marriage will continue to take place among the mortal population during the millennium, resulting in reproduction and an increasing population.

Reference to “all flesh,” “men that have transgressed” and their dead “carcasses” covered with “worms” in Isa. 66:23-24, along with the reference to “the sinner” and those who “die” in Isa. 65:20, reveals that the survivors of God’s judgements will be the same mortal sinful flesh that we are at the moment, able to sin and die. Although sin will be greatly restrained among this mortal population due to the “rod of iron” rule of Christ, resulting in the average length of life being extended and increased, it will not stop sin. This is evident in Zech. 14:16-19 where we are told that nations will be able, if they so choose, to refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, resulting in them being punished.

We also read in Rev. 20 that nations will rebel against Christ’s rule at the end of the millennium, probably as a result of the divine restraint being lifted in order to manifest their evil hearts and deal with them. It is evident from this that there will be a mortal population upon earth until the end of the millennium.

It is an unfortunate fact that the flesh is weak and one of its weaknesses is that it allows familiarity to breed contempt. Because of this, even the visible divine presence of the Lord does not stop sin or rebellion. This was evident during the Exodus when God led Israel through the wilderness by a cloud of glory during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Being able to see and witness this presence of the Lord day after day, did not prevent them from sinning and rebelling. Due to the power and deceitfulness of sin, no matter how powerful, influential and impactful the presence of the Lord might be, it can lose its impact on the flesh due to familiarity and lack of discipline, control and respect.

TO RULE REQUIRES SUBJECTS TO RULE OVER

It is evident then, from Scripture, that there will still be ordinary mortal people upon the new earth during the millennial reign. Were this not so, who would Christ and the saints rule and reign over? There could be no rule or reign without people to rule over. A kingdom not only requires a king and co-rulers, but also subjects, i.e. people in subjection to the rule. The many Scriptures therefore which refer to Christ and the saints ruling, imply that there will be subjects.

The saints of course who will reign with Christ, will be immortal like Christ himself. Jesus bestows immortality upon them at his second coming. So it will be a case of immortals ruling over mortals. However, this will only be a temporary and transitional arrangement, for it will terminate at the end of the 1,000 year reign. At that time, those who lived and died during the millennium will be raised at the second resurrection and judged. Those who qualify for eternal life will join the immortal saints, and those who are rejected will perish, as a result of which death and hell will be abolished. The final result will be that there will no longer be any mortal flesh, sin or death upon the earth. All will be immortal and equal with the angels. At that time all things will be subdued to Christ and he will hand it all over to God his Father who shall be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

A PREDETERMINED NUMBER REQUIRED

Now, it would be natural to wonder why the millennial reign is necessary. Why couldn't Christ wrap things up at his second coming and be done with it? Why spend another 1,000 years giving mortals the opportunity to become immortal and further increase the number of the redeemed in the divine family? The obvious answer to this question is: Because the number redeemed for immortality prior to the millennium does not fulfil the number required by God to complete His family!

It can be inferred from Scripture that God has a predetermined number that He desires to make up His family and fill His house. But, because so few (relatively speaking) respond to His call in each generation (Matt. 7:14. 20:16) it has required many generations to make up that number.

The fact of the matter is that when Jesus returns, the number of people who qualify from the preceding 6,000 years from Adam to the second coming, shall not be sufficient to make up the number required by God. It will require another 1,000 years of a special dispensation of God - the millennial reign of Christ - a harvest time of souls, to make up the number. But whatever the total number of people redeemed prior to the millennium might be, it will be insignificant compared to the number redeemed as a result of the millennium. Those who are called to the kingdom prior to the millennium are “firstfruits” (cp Jam. 1:18); the “harvest” will be gathered at the end of the millennium.

That God has a predetermined number that He requires to fill His house is taught in a parable in Lk. 14:15-23. In this parable Jesus refers to a certain man who invited many to a great supper, which refers to God inviting many to His kingdom. But those who were invited made excuses for not being able to attend. So a second invitation went out into the

streets and lanes to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, but there was still room for more. So, for the third time an invitation was sent out into the highways and hedges to “compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” This parable reveals God’s intention to fill His house and His determination to do it, even if it takes several attempts. Some relate the three attempts in the parable to the call of the Jews, the call of the Gentiles and the call during the millennium.

NOT FAIR?

Some may feel that it is not fair that those who live prior to the millennium do not have the advantage of Christ’s physical presence and his kingdom upon the earth, whereas the mortals living during the millennium do, making it easier for them to believe. However, those who live prior to the millennium who qualify for immortality, have the advantage of ruling and reigning with Christ in his kingdom during the whole millennium. Those who qualify for immortality during the millennium do not have this advantage. They live out their mortal life and die and will not attain their immortality until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. This is a fair arrangement which you would expect from a righteous God.

AN IRON RULE

As a result of the awesome and destructive judgements of God which shall come crashing down upon the earth at the second coming, the nations will be plunged into disarray and humbled. Governments and law and order will be in tatters and will cease, resulting in anarchy, chaos and confusion. If left in this state, conditions would go from bad to worse, resulting in many more millions of people suffering and dying with no hope for the future.

But into this vacuum Christ and the saints will step and take control, and establish a new world-wide government - the kingdom of God which has its power centre at the new Jerusalem, the city of God. This is depicted in Dan. 2 where Christ’s return is likened to a stone hurtling down from heaven, smiting and pulverizing the kingdoms of the world. After smashing them to pieces, the stone then gradually grows larger and larger, eventually filling the whole earth. The meaning of this is stated in Rev. 11:15: “The kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Scripture assures us that: “All the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the sea covers the depths” (Hab. 2:14. Num. 14:21).

As has been stated before: what the world needs is what it is going to get in Christ, namely: an immortal, infallible, righteous dictator. Not only

will his rule be infallible, but it will be omnipotent. He will have absolute power to enforce his wise decrees, like no other ruler in history has been able to do. Due to the limitations of man's power and authority, not to mention the many rulers who have been corrupt; evil has continually triumphed in the world and wickedness has abounded. The world needs a government with absolute power to compel righteousness and justice among the nations, and this will be a special feature in Christ's reign. "He shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15). His government will be absolute and vigorous, firm and irresistible, enforcing obedience and compelling submission. He will reign until all his enemies are his footstool (Ps. 110). In vain will it be for the oppressor, the tyrant or the unrighteous to strive to evade his law. "Every soul who will not hear him, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Act. 3:23).

RAIN WITHHELD

An example of the power in Christ's hands to enforce obedience can be seen in Zech. 14:16-19. We are told here that the rain will be withheld from any nation which refuses to come up to Jerusalem to acknowledge and worship the Lord. And, if the nation of Egypt (which would not be so badly affected by lack of rain due to having the river Nile) refuses to come, then she shall be inflicted with the plague. The Lord will also smite other nations in the same position, with the plague. Who would dare to resist a king with such power and authority as this?

However, there is a prophecy in Isa. 19 which indicates that Egypt will comply with the Lord's requirements and will not need to be inflicted with the plague. Reference is made in this prophecy to Egypt giving allegiance to the Lord and offering worship to him. According to Dan. 11:40-, Egypt will be invaded and smitten at the same time and by the same armies which invade and smite Israel prior to Christ's return. When Jesus deals with those armies at the battle of Armageddon, and delivers the remnant of Israel, Egypt will be delivered as well. Jesus will be their Saviour as well as Israel's Saviour. It is no wonder therefore that they will worship him!

Isa. 19:23-25 says that "In that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria (Iraq today) and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall worship (the Lord) with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third (i.e. united in worship of the Lord) with Egypt and with Assyria, and become a blessing (instead of a curse) in the centre of the region, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying: Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." Also see Isa. 11:15-16.

Not only will Christ rule with a rod of iron, but so also will the saints.

Rev. 2:26-27 records a promise made by Jesus to each overcomer: “To him will I give power over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of Iron ...”

In one of his parables, Jesus taught that when he returns, he will give his faithful servants authority over cities. Some will be given authority over 10 cities and others over 5 cities, all depending on the degree of diligence they have demonstrated while waiting for their Lord’s return (Lk. 19:12-19). The city of God will be their home base with which they will be in contact and to which they return, as do ambassadors today who are sent out to other countries to represent their government. They all have a home base in their mother country.

As Christ’s ambassadors, ruling and reigning with him, the saints will be invested with his power and authority and will employ his “rod of iron rule” in his name and on his behalf. This is signified by his promise in Rev. 3:21 that: “To him who overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne ...”

The 12 apostles will actually be given 12 thrones in the land of Israel, from which they will exercise authority over the 12 tribes and rule over them (Matt. 19:28).

THE LAW SHALL GO FORTH FROM ZION

Many illustrations are given in Scripture of the power and authority that Christ will exercise to enforce obedience among the nations when he rules from his throne at Zion. Many Scriptures also describe the beneficial effects on mankind and the environment as a result of the righteous reign which the nations will experience. Isa. 2:1-5 presents a beautiful picture of Christ’s millennial reign. Starting at v2 we read: “It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain (Zion) of the Lord’s house (temple) shall tower above the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it.” Reference is made here to the nations coming up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in the 1.6 kms (1 mile) square temple prophesied in Ezk. 40:48 which will be situated on the southern side of the elevated site of Zion. “And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (v3).

This speaks of an amazing turn-around among the nations. Today, many nations worship false gods and idols and many are atheists and do not believe in God. Many of the world’s religions have no respect for the God of Israel. But when Christ returns and becomes king of the nations, reigning from Jerusalem, all nations will acknowledge that he is indeed

Lord, the only begotten son of the God of Israel. Polytheism will be a thing of the past and there won't be a single atheist or evolutionist upon earth! As Zech. 14:9 declares: "The Lord will become king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one."

The prophecy in Isa. 2 indicates that people will take the initiative to go up to the house of the Lord, desiring to be taught His ways and wanting to walk in His paths, which involves being obedient to His Word. The education and enlightenment of all nations in the way of God will be an outstanding characteristic of the millennium. There will be no argument or controversy about Bible in schools or prayer in parliament and government functions in that day! The result will be that the moral and spiritual standards of the world will rise to a higher plane and so also will the standards of hygiene and sanitation. The world will become a much cleaner and healthier place.

No human law shall govern the world when Christ reigns. "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The days will be over when men in every nation devise their own laws according to their own wisdom. There shall be one law for the whole earth proceeding from the one centre - Zion, where Christ will be enthroned. The laws devised by man are weak and imperfect, and require continual reform and amendment; but "the law of the Lord is perfect," and "the Word of the Lord is sure." There will be no defects in that law; it will require no amendment. Being devised by divine wisdom, it will go forth from Zion a perfect law for the utmost good of the nations, perfectly adapted to human needs.

Isa. 2:4 says: "And he shall judge (decide disputes) among the nations and shall rebuke many people." Today there is not a single man who has the power and authority to deal with a nation that steps out of line by oppressing and exploiting its people, or by making war with neighbouring nations. Even The United Nations is powerless most of the time to act and help due to its members disagreeing on issues and engaging in vetoes, resulting in atrocities continuing while they helplessly look on. What a contrast the reign of Christ will be! He won't have to depend on a majority vote among members of a council to take action. He will, without hesitation, lay down the law and command instant obedience or else his iron rod will come crashing down upon the offender.

NO MORE WAR

Isa. 2:4 continues by saying that as a result of the Lord judging among the nations and rebuking many people, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall there be any more training for war."

A marvellous change is predicted here involving the abolition of war. Defence departments will be defunct and military camps will be empty. Armies, navies and airforces along with their weapons of destruction, will be a thing of the past - obsolete. During human history, nations have squandered and wasted billions of dollars on weapons of destruction while people lived in poverty, suffering starvation, sickness and disease. But conditions will be radically different when Christ is in control! There will be an entire absence of war and strife among the nations. He shall "speak peace to the nations" (Zech. 9:10) and for that reason he is called: "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

He shall compel the nations to destroy all weapons of war and use all their energy and resources for positive and productive purposes, instead of negative and destructive purposes. Turning swords into plows and spears into scythes signifies this.

If nations today harnessed all their energy and utilized all their resources for production, and didn't fritter it away on weapons of destruction, there would be plenty of food for everyone. Millions of tonnes of food are even dumped by some nations just to inflate the price, while people are starving to death for lack of it. There is a terrible imbalance caused by greed. So God cannot be blamed for suffering. Man's inhumanity to man is the cause. It all comes down to human selfishness and greed, but it will change when Christ takes control. At that time, the promise in Lk. 2:14 will be realized: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

In the grounds outside The United Nations headquarters in New York, stands a statue of a man turning a sword into a plow. It represents the mission of the U.N.O. The United Nations Organization was formed as a result of the second world war. Their goal was to stop war and prevent a third world war. The League of Nations was set up in Geneva in 1920 after the first world war for the same reason. But it failed because nations failed to remain in league. The U.N.O. has also failed because nations have failed to remain united. There have been more wars among the nations since the U.N.O. was set up, than what there were before! No wonder some call the U.N. "United Nothings."

The failure of their mission was predictable because the statue of a man turning a sword into a plow, was based on the prophecy in Isa. 2:4 which relates to Christ's mission, not the mission of the U.N.O. or any other human organization. The U.N.O. has in a sense, attempted to usurp Christ's role and it was presumptuous and foolhardy to do this.

Only God knows how many billions of people have been killed, maimed and suffered damage to themselves and their property as a result of war throughout human history. Well, the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of God is that it is all going to stop at Christ's return. Instead of

living in fear of the carnage of war and running for cover, people will, as we read in Mic. 4:4: “Sit under their fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it.”

It will be said in that day, as we read in Isa. 16:4-5: “The extortioner is at an end; the plunderer has ceased; the oppressors have been consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established; and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.”

A MERCIFUL AND JUST KING

We only need to reflect upon the character of the coming king to realize the blessings that will prevail under his rule. Not only is he all-wise and all-powerful and unerring, but he is merciful, kind and pitiful. He can be touched with the feeling of human infirmity and have compassion. His rule therefore, will not be actuated by pride and selfishness. It will be framed for the benefit of those who are in need, especially the humble and poor, whose needs are so often neglected and unheeded by human rulers and governments.

Ps. 72 is a beautiful messianic chapter which presents a glorious picture of Christ’s millennial reign. It refers to him having “dominion from sea to sea to the ends of the earth,” and of rulers of the nations bowing before him, being in subjection to him and bringing gifts to him. As is stated in v20, the Psalm is a prayer of David and initially relates to his son Solomon during whose reign the kingdom of Israel reached its peak of power and prosperity and peace. Being a type and foreshadow of Christ, the Psalm was prophetic of the ultimate greater and more glorious reign of David’s greater son, Jesus Christ.

In connection with this, an interesting speculation has been made. During Solomon’s reign, the queen of Sheba came to pay her respects to him and gave him gifts. Sheba occupied the country now known as Aden, which used to be a British protectorate in subjection to the reigning monarch in England. At the moment queen Elizabeth is the reigning monarch, and in Hebrew, Elizabeth is “Elisheba” which means “God of the oath.” On this basis some have wondered if Christ will return while Elizabeth is still reigning as queen. If so, it would not be difficult to imagine her paying homage to him and giving him gifts as did the queen of Sheba to Solomon. Queen Victoria is reputed to have said that if Christ returned during her reign, she would like to be the first to lay her crown at his feet.

Ps. 72 also refers to the king exercising justice for the poor and needy and breaking in pieces all who exploit and oppress, resulting in righteousness flourishing, and peace prevailing.

INCREASED FERTILITY IN THE EARTH

Reference is also made to increased fertility in the earth, no doubt due to a change of climatic conditions, not to mention the eradication of crop pests and weeds. Various prophecies predict that Christ will create a new heavens and a new earth when he comes. This means he will renew the atmosphere and the earth, and this will involve the eradication of all pollution in the air, land and sea.

On account of sin, the earth was cursed as we read in Gen. 3:17: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you.” The consequence of this cursed condition of the ground is that toil and arduous labour are necessary to cause it to bring forth its produce for the sustenance of man. Adam was told that “in the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,” and such has been the lot of mankind from the day Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, where life had been much easier and more pleasurable.

Man has become so accustomed to the cursed condition of the soil, that it is regarded as a natural characteristic. Scripture however declares that the curse on the ground is a temporary condition and will disappear when Christ returns and removes it. Rev. 22:3 affirms that the time is coming when “there shall be no more curse.” Paradise will be restored! Speaking of this, Ps. 67:6 declares: “Then shall the earth yield her increase.”

Ps. 72:16 says: “There shall be abundance of grain in the earth upon the highest hills.” High hills are normally more likely to be the least fruitful places. The prophet Amos also declared that “the days are coming says the Lord, when corn will grow faster than it will be harvested, and grapes will grow faster than the wine can be made” (Am. 9:13). The earth will yield in such profusion that the people will not be able to gather its fruit before time again comes round for ploughing and sowing seed.

A similar prediction is made by God in Ezk. 36:29: “I will call for the corn and will increase it, and will lay no famine upon you; and I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field.” It is evident from these prophecies that the fertility of the ground is going to be greatly increased in the renewed earth.

Isa. 35:1-7 even goes so far to say that the wilderness and desert shall burst into bloom, and that water shall gush forth from the desert, causing the burning sand to become pools of water, resulting in grass sprouting. Vast deserts and sterile tracts of useless land will be transformed into fertile plains, abounding with vegetation and blossoming with flowers. Such a transformation could only occur as a result of a change of climatic

conditions and weather patterns, and only the supernatural son of God will be able to do that!

Isaiah the prophet was inspired to declare: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree” (55:13). “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree and the myrtle and the olive. I will set in the desert the fir tree and the pine and the box tree together” (41:19). This marvellous change will be a source of blessing to all the inhabitants of the earth, and allow huge populations to be sustained.

HARMONY BETWEEN MAN AND CREATION

Not only will the earth be transformed and nations united and at peace, but even wild animals will be transformed and brought into harmony with the rest of creation. Their savage nature will be tamed, and the enmity existing between them and man will be removed. All creation will be brought into that state of peace and friendship which originally existed in the paradise in Eden.

This is what we read in Isa. 11:6-9. 65:25: “The wolf will 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 together and their young ones will lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. Even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a poisonous snake. 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 oceans cover the depths.”

Reference to the lion not attacking and devouring a calf and eating straw like an ox, and of a wolf not attacking and devouring a lamb, indicates that carnivorous animals will become herbivorous, which they originally were in the Garden of Eden.

The effect that the curse upon earth has had due to sin, is expressed in Rom. 8:22: “The whole earth has been groaning and travailing in pain together until now ... waiting for redemption ...” For 6 millenniums there has been conflict, pain and misery in every department of creation. The sky produces storms or drought; the ground produces thorns and thistles, poisonous plants, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; the insect kingdom produces poisonous pests and spreaders of disease; the reptile kingdom produces potent poisons that kill humans and animals; the animal kingdom produces wild and vicious animals which also kill humans and animals; the marine kingdom produces man-eating sharks and a variety of highly toxic creatures. And man himself is his own worst enemy, having killed millions of his own fellow man, and is in the process of destroying his own environment.

What dramatic changes must therefore be going to take place to put an end to all the groaning and travailing that has been taking place in creation. Every single aspect of life and living will be changed, be it political, economic, military, medical, education, environment, agriculture, climate, zoological etc.

SICKNESS AND DISEASE DECLINE

The millennial reign of Christ will certainly bring to an end all medical problems. Sickness and disease will be, if not things of the past, at least heavily reduced. So too will physical defects. Life will lengthen and good health will be evident everywhere. Hospitals, pharmaceuticals, doctors and all the paraphernalia of the modern powerful medical establishment, will be redundant and swept away.

According to Rev. 22:1-2 a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The throne is, of course, in the city of God which towers above Mount Zion, and the tree of life is on either side of the river. "The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

It can be inferred from Ezk. 47 that the river of water must flow out of the city down Mount Zion to the mortal worshippers' temple on the southern side of Zion, exiting from under the southern entrance from which it flows east. According to Zech. 14:8, half of the river flows down into the Dead sea, and the other half flows into the Mediterranean sea. Having its source at the throne of God, it must be impregnated with the healing virtue of His Spirit for we are told in Ezk. 47:8 that the Dead sea will be healed as a result of the water flowing into it and will teem with fish of the same varieties that swim in the Mediterranean sea. It is also stated in Ezk. 47:12 that trees will grow on each side of the banks of this river and their leaves will be used for medicinal purposes.

Many medicines today are extracted from leaves, but the medicinal value of these leaves will be much more powerful and effective for good health and long life due to having drawn their nourishment from the river of water of life that proceeds from the throne of God! Access to such leaves, along with improved food supplies, hygiene, sanitation and less stress, will dramatically increase life expectancy among the mortal population - men and women in all nations will live longer. This is conveyed in a passage of Scripture quoted earlier in Isa. 65:20: "There shall no longer be an infant that lives but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days. To die at the age of 100 will be to die young. Not to live to be 100 will be the sign of a curse."

All the information given in the Bible about the 1,000 years reign of Christ describes a wonderful era of peace, safety, good health and

contentment upon the earth. It will not be a time of complete perfection because sin and death will still exist among the mortal population. But when the millennium has run its course and God becomes all in all; sin, mortality and death will disappear forever.

In view of the fact that during the millennium there will be no more wars, famines, pestilences or premature deaths; and the life expectancy of the mortal population will be increased; the human population will obviously rapidly increase during the 1,000 years period. Although the earth's population will be greatly depleted as a result of God's destructive judgements at Christ's return, it shall be repleted during the millennium.

THE POTENTIAL TO SIN REMAINS

However, although the devil power of sin will be greatly restrained during this period, due to the iron rule of Christ; the potential to sin will remain in the flesh as strong as ever and will be as deceitful as ever. As has always been the case: the flesh hates being denied the pleasures of sin and hates being told what to do. It reluctantly buckles under the restraint of authority but secretly resents it and uses any excuse to challenge it and rebel against it. Such is "the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Due to its pride and selfishness, self-centredness and ingratitude, sin is capable of incredibly dumb and outrageous actions, and history is full of examples of this. An example is of Israel rebelling against God and seeking to kill Moses in spite of the visible presence of God being with them in the form of a cloud of glory during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Familiarity with the divine presence led to very contemptible attitudes and actions, resulting in being deceived by sin to follow a foolish course that proved to be suicidal. Truly: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

During king Josiah's reform, he enforced righteousness, resulting in sin being restrained. Everyone was forced to tow the line, giving the impression that all his people had turned to God with their whole heart. But it is pointed out in Jer. 3:10 that it was not genuine or deep rooted. God declared: "You have not turned to me with your whole heart but feignedly." It was not sincere but false - a pretence and hypocrisy - a sham! When the presence and restraining influence of Josiah was withdrawn at his death, the nation reverted to its old rebellious and wicked ways, resulting eventually in divine judgement falling heavily upon them, bringing to an end the era of their kingdom.

A similar thing will happen at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, bringing that era to a dramatic end. While the saints occupy the cities of the nations during the millennium, and exercise the iron rule of Christ, sin will be restrained preventing revolt, rebellion and war. From year to year all nations will be compelled to send representatives up to

Zion to worship the Lord. But not everyone will be pleased with the new order. Secretly in their hearts many will be resentful and will be saying: “We don’t want this man to rule over us, let us break the fetters and cast away the yoke.”

In order for the true condition of hearts to be exposed, the restraint on the devil power of sin will be removed. The symbolic language of Rev. 20:7 puts it like this: “When the thousand years have expired, satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations.” The following verses reveal that the nations will be deceived into marching up against the city to attack it. It should be evident that they would not be able to organize such a rebellion while the saints are ruling over their cities. In order for such a rebellion to take place, the saints and their restraining influence would need to be withdrawn. The saints would need to retreat from all parts of the world. This is clearly what will take place because it is stated in Rev. 20:9 that the saints will be in the city of God when the nations march up to attack it.

TWO CATAclySMIC EVENTS

It is interesting that the millennium is inaugurated and consummated with two cataclysmic events. It begins and ends with the direct intervention of God, both of which involve very similar dramatic circumstances.

The millennium begins as a result of the fiery judgement of God falling upon the forces of Gog from the land of Magog, which invade the holy land and attack Jerusalem (Ezk. 38). And it ends as a result of the fire of God falling upon Gog and Magog and their forces from the four corners of the earth, which come up to attack the holy city (Rev. 20).

The rebellion is obviously very wide-spread, involving all nations and multitudes of people, for it is stated in Rev. 20:8 that the nations deceived are in “the four quarters of the earth ... the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” This indicates a huge world-wide dissatisfaction and discontent with the restraint placed upon the flesh during the millennium.

Fire falls from heaven upon the army of rebels and devours them before they even reach the gates of the city of God. The second resurrection and judgement then takes place for those who lived and died during the millennium. Those approved by the Lord will be made immortal, and live on endlessly with those who were made immortal at the first resurrection, who lived and reigned with Christ during the millennium. Those rejected will be consigned to the second death from which there is no recovery. There is not a third resurrection.

These events will formally and officially close the millennium. The result will be that no mortals with sinful flesh will be left on the earth. All

will be righteous and immortal, and for the rest of eternity will live with Christ in the city of God in the presence of God.

1 Cor. 15:23-28 tells us that Christ must reign till all enemies have been put under his feet. It is therefore inevitable that rebellion is doomed to failure. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. "And when all things shall be subjected unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject to Him (his father) who put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (i.e. "everything to everyone"). At that time, God's Spirit and power will indwell every single soul redeemed from the human race. All will be equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36). Mortality, death and hell will be things of the past and will be confined to oblivion (Rev. 20:14).

So then, the millennial reign of Christ is both a consummation and a transitional period. It is a consummation inasmuch as it will bring to a close God's work of calling mortals to be part of His divine immortal family. And it will also be a transitional period because it will be a temporary phase during which there will be a mixture of mortals and immortals. But it eventually leads into a fullness of immortality which will never end, described as God being "all in all."

The biblical revelation ceases at the end of the millennium. We are not told what lies beyond throughout eternity. All we know is that we shall forever be with Christ in glory in an idyllic and euphoric atmosphere, and utopian conditions in which there will be no pain, suffering, sorrow or sadness, but everlasting joy and happiness. Borrowing the words from 1 Cor. 2:9: "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Consider this: If mortal finite man has been able to invent and create things that could not have been conceived or believed by former generations, which have given mankind much enjoyment and pleasure, then think what an immortal infinite God who created man could create for those who love Him! One thing is certain: God is a master at creating new things! Living eternally with God will not be boring!

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