

The Millennial Reign

Verily I say unto you, that ye are chosen out of the world to declare my gospel with the sound of rejoicing, as with the voice of a trump; lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father; and it is his good will to give you the kingdom; . . . and ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect, for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place, upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts, and be prepared in all things, against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked; for the hour is nigh, and the day soon at hand, when the earth is ripe; and all the proud, and they that do wickedly, shall be as stubble, and I will burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that wickedness shall not be upon the earth; for the hour is nigh, and that which was spoken by mine apostles must be fulfilled; for as they spoke, so shall it come to pass; for I will reveal myself from heaven with power and great glory, with all the hosts thereof, and dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand years, and the wicked shall not stand.—D. and C. 28:2.

People of many nations and many ages have looked for a "golden age." Some have looked forward to it in the future. Some have nostalgically looked for it in the past and have tried to recapture it. A few times in the history of the world men have reached great heights of culture, of learning, of achievement, and have lived for a short time in peace and prosperity. Enoch's city, so briefly mentioned in the Bible, was one such golden age. The Book of Mormon describes another which followed immediately after the visit of Jesus Christ to the peoples of the American continent shortly after

his resurrection. But within four hundred years after the coming of Christ to them, they had reverted again into darkness and beastlike warfare, cannibalism, and savagery.

Latter Day Saints believe that the golden age lies in the future, not in the past. We believe that this golden age will be ushered in by the final advent of our Lord, Jesus Christ, whose coming will usher in the millennial reign of a thousand years of peace, happiness, righteousness, and prosperity under the government of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. In other words, we are premillennialists, rather than post-millennialists. We believe that Christ will come to begin and to usher in the millennial reign; that he will come *before* it, not after it. Post millennialists believe that Christ will not come until *after* men have perfected themselves and dwelt together a thousand years in righteousness, as a preparation for his coming.

GOD'S PART IN THE MILLENNIUM

Men have no power within themselves to overcome wickedness and sin and evil, alone and unaided, and bring about the golden age. Even if we grant that a group of very good men and women could perfect themselves as a group, there would always be those outside the group, if not within, who would make peace impossible and righteousness most difficult. Human wickedness must be restrained and judged in all its forms and in all places before we can have the golden age. This is a task for Deity. Man can help in many ways, through organized religion, through education, through various social and philanthropic organizations, through the efforts of government. Nevertheless history does not record the story of a single nation or group of people who alone and unaided have been able to build *and maintain* a golden age. On the contrary, Toynbee, one of the greatest of modern historians, says that sixteen out of the twenty-six great world civilizations known to history have already perished, that

there is little hope of nine of the ten remaining, and grave danger even for the tenth one, our own Western civilization. When men do reach the heights through their own efforts, leaving out God, they become lifted up in their pride and self-sufficiency which inevitably lead them down to destruction.

Jesus taught that his coming would usher in the millennial reign, not follow it. He commanded the apostles to preach the gospel in all the world, to every creature, but he did not promise that it would be universally accepted. He warned that there would be persecution of the righteous by the wicked until the end. In the parable of the wheat and the tares he pointed out that good and evil should grow together until the time of harvest, the end of the world. There can be no golden age, no millennial reign, while the bad grow unrestrained alongside the good, while some still rebel against the dominion of the King. In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27), when the Lord returned to claim his earthly kingdom, he found it necessary to destroy his rebellious disloyal enemies who would not have him to reign over them, before he could reign in peace. The coming of our Lord will precede, not follow, the millennial reign.

At the final coming of Christ in glory, the Scriptures assure us that the first of two great resurrections will take place. All who are Christ's, Paul says, will rise at his coming (I Corinthians 15:23). I Thessalonians 4:16 tells us that the dead in Christ shall rise first. Revelation 20:4-6 tells of the resurrection of those who had not worshiped the beast, nor received his mark in their foreheads, and says that they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years; "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." This is the first resurrection. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first* resurrection." John 5:29 speaks of two resurrections, the resurrection of life, and the resurrection of damnation, or judgment. These passages indicate rather

clearly that there will be two resurrections, a first in which all the righteous come forth at the final advent of Christ, and a second in which the wicked come forth to judgment at the end of the thousand years' reign. The two resurrections are also taught in the Book of Mormon, and in the modern revelations given through the prophet Joseph Smith.

One of the beliefs which is to some degree distinctive with Latter Day Saints is the belief that the "heathen nations" and all those who "died without the law" will have part in this first resurrection, and that it shall be tolerable for them. No man is to be condemned simply because he had no opportunity to hear Christ's gospel preached while dwelling on earth. There will be a ministry given to the heathen nations in the spirit world which will give them opportunity to accept Christ and have part in the first resurrection. All little children who died before attaining an age where they were morally accountable for their acts will also have part in the first resurrection.

The principal reason for the millennium is indicated or suggested in these facts just presented. Christ will not deliver up the kingdom to his Father until after the thousand years, the second resurrection or the resurrection of the wicked, and the final judgment and destruction of Satan and all who are still determined to obey him rather than God. There will be many in the first resurrection who want to serve Christ as their King, but who are completely lacking in the knowledge of *how* to serve him and the enriching and educational *experience* of serving him, who need the example of his life, his teaching, who need the spiritual development which comes from living in fellowship with Christ and with those dedicated to serving him. For these reasons the millennium is provided as a training school. During this thousand years there will be opportunity for those who have made their choices on the side of righteousness and peace and truth, who have named the name of Christ and accepted him as their

King, to perfect their spiritual natures under his personal ministry, his teaching, his example, and his living presence.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MILLENNIUM

There are many beautiful passages of Scripture which look forward to and describe this millennial reign. The thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah tells how the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, that the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame man leap as a hart, and that a highway shall be cast up, over which the ransomed of the Lord shall return. The eleventh chapter of Isaiah prophesies the coming of a rod out of the stem of Jesse, who shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall slay the wicked. It describes the new peace that shall exist between man and man and between man and beast, and says, "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" (Isaiah 11:9). The second chapter of Isaiah and the fourth chapter of Micah tell how the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and how the nations of earth shall go up to it to learn of His ways, and shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. When the nature of men is changed, the very nature of the earth itself will be changed.

There are some who believe and teach that there will be no one left on earth during the millennium, that the righteous will be caught up into the heavens to reign with Christ, and the earth and all the wicked who dwell on it will be destroyed by fire. Satan will be "bound" in the sense that there will not be a single man left on earth to tempt. There are two things wrong with this theory. First, *this earth* is always designated in Scripture as the final and eternal abode of the righteous. "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Psalm 37:11;

see also Matthew 5:5). Second, though Jesus returned to his Father to receive the kingdom, that kingdom, according to the parable of the pounds, was to be *on this earth*, where he was to rule as King of Kings, and where the kingdoms of *this world* were to become his kingdom. Killing and destroying every soul on earth so that Satan would no longer have anyone left to tempt would be just about as sensible as killing all the inhabitants of a city so that no burglar could rob them. Why not jail the burglar instead?

Preceding the final advent of Christ and the millennial reign there will be judgments upon the wicked, and many shall be destroyed. But there will be many people, and even many nations, remaining upon the earth, who shall say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord; . . . and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3). There will be "nations" remaining at the end of the thousand years, when Satan goes out to tempt them. (See Revelation 20:8.) The center or focal point of Christ's earth-wide rule will be the Zion, or the New Jerusalem, which has been the gathering place for the righteous of earth, and which during the judgments preceding the millennium has been the city of refuge, and the only people on earth that were not at war one with another. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

Those who are living on earth at the beginning of the millennium will continue to live in the flesh, and to beget children. Their children shall grow up without sin to salvation, free from the evil temptations which surround our children today, enjoying the personal example and presence of the Christ, surrounded by righteousness and peace. There will be no more sickness or pain; no more death as we know it today. When maturity and old age come and it is time for a man to die, a physical change will come which is the equivalent of death, but the body shall not sleep in the dust. Isaiah

says (65:20), "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." (See Doctrine and Covenants 98:5, 63:13.)

During the thousand years, Satan will be bound, not literally bound with chains, for he is a spiritual rather than a physical being, but bound in the sense that the righteous people on earth will refuse to listen to him, and any wicked people remaining on earth will be restrained through fear of the glory and power of God as manifested through Christ and his people. At the end of the thousand years there will be a "little season" when Satan is loosed, and will "go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth," and to gather them together to battle (Revelation 20:8).

At the close of the thousand years will also come the second resurrection, the resurrection of judgment or damnation, in which all who wickedly and knowingly rebelled against God during their lives will come forth for judgment. They will have endured the reforming and refining punishments of hell, or the prison house, and many will have repented of their sins. Nevertheless, they will be judged according to the works done *in the flesh*, and although their repentance after death may save them from the second death, they will inherit only a minor glory, a glory of the stars, and will be forever barred by their own lack of righteousness from coming into the presence of God or Christ. "Where God and Christ dwell they can not come, worlds without end" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:7).

Time will close with the last great battle between the forces of evil under Satan's leadership, and the forces of righteousness under the leadership of Christ and of Michael, the archangel. Christ will triumph in this battle. Then the earth, having served her purpose, will be cleansed by fire and transfigured; and there will emerge a new heaven and a new

earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The tabernacle of God will be with men.

"And he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."—Revelation 21:3-5.