

The Kingdom of God on Earth

Lesson #7

The view of planet earth, seen from outer space, is very beautiful indeed. Confirmation of this has come from the astronauts who have gazed upon it. The earth is the fairest jewel in God's creation and it is the chosen place in the whole universe where He has promised to reveal His Kingdom in all its glory. That is why it is so beautiful.

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 can explain why this should be. The reason is that the Creator

*"formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord, and there is none else."
(Isaiah 45:18)*

We think it is logical to assert that if there is a Great Designer, 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 shall 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

Because 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. God has already delegated "all power in heaven and in earth" to His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. What is more, we learn that the date has been set in the divine calendar:

"God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." (Acts 17:31)

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! This coming Millennium will be the most exciting thing 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 on Earth

The kingdom of God will provide a superb environment on this lovely 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 a man can live a long and prosperous life; a world in which famine and pestilence no longer kill one quarter of the population and where the full resources of the land and the seas are harvested. 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 retribution. 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 evidence for the common belief in an after life in heaven. The Kingdom has to do with a real, tangible world empire which will be set up when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth from heaven in the near future.

"Thy kingdom come"

The disciples of Jesus found prayer to God a difficult matter. What to pray for? What are the priorities? The Lord 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.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven . . . For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." (Matthew 6:9-13)

Christendom still repeats the prayer. "Thy kingdom come" should always be on the lips of the faithful

Christian.

For the most part, human beings act as though there is no Creator and no purpose in the world around them. But they are without excuse, for just look at the wonders of the human body and the miracles of plant life! Did they 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 "that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world 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 spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things." (Hebrews 1:1,2) That is why the Gospel was the centre of Christ's ministry. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the

The Kingdom of God on Earth

gospel of the kingdom." (Matthew 4:23) He left no doubt when that kingdom would happen:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations . . ." (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 Jews thought that God's kingdom on earth would be confined to Palestine. The discerning Jew knew that God had promised Canaan (an earlier name for Palestine) to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:18; 17:8). God looked on this part of the earth with special favour. Palestine 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 floweth with milk and honey," well-watered and suitable for good crops and fruits. The Jews knew that they were the "chosen race," due to the extraordinary faith of their father Abraham that generated God's choice!

After the exodus from Egypt the special relationship built up between God and the Israelites caused Him to name them as His kingdom. God was their leader and they were His people:

"If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people . . . a kingdom of priests and an holy nation." (Exodus 19:5-6)

Israel could not keep their side of the bargain 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 experienced what it was like to be the Kingdom of God. They prospered and expanded and had peace in the land. It was summed up by king David when he said: "He (God) hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." (1 Chronicles 28:5)

The Failure of the Jewish Kingdom

Sadly, this profitable phase of Israel's history was short-lived. Human failure, arrogance and disregard for divine standards pulled it down. It soon ceased to look anything like a dominion in which God was King; so much so, that a few hundred years later God had to bring 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)

That statement was a tremendous 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 Israel's land. After he had been raised from the dead they asked: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again 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 of the grave and once more 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 not only to the Jews. Jesus quietly told them:

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part

of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Jerusalem-Crossroads of the World

We have seen that the kingdom of God will be focused on a Jewish State with a Jewish king. Now, every king must have a residence, a capital, a central seat of authority. Jerusalem will be that centre; and what place more fitting? One thousand years before Christ the Jewish poets 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)

It will make a superb capital more central than New York, Moscow or Strasbourg 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:

"And in the days of these kings shall

the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44)

Here is another prophetic statement:

"The kingdoms of this world are 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 take-over of the nations will not be accomplished without much 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 shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives." (Zechariah 14:4)
- 3) Some governments will challenge Christ and will "set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed," (Psalm 2:2) but there will be judgements on those who oppose Christ (Isaiah 34; Revelation 18).
- 4) There will be a resurrection and judgement. Loud will be the

cries of those who are rejected, who had the opportunity, but rejected it! On the other hand, what joy for those to whom the King will say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34)

Readers will find more details on these traumatic happenings in the companion booklets Christ is Coming!, Your Share in God's Promises, and Raised to Judgement.

The Kingdom Begins

With these events over and the King having led his triumphal 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 their respective 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 shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba (Arabs) shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him." (Psalm 72:10-11) Even the survivors of those enemies which invaded the holy city will come to worship, for "everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the

The Kingdom of God on Earth

Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." (Zechariah 14:16)

Nations will be rallying their peoples: "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." They will do this because:

"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." (Isaiah 2:3)

The effect of this education will be remarkable. Nations will "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks" 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 kindred, and tongue, and people and . . . nation and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth . . . They lived and reigned with Christ 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.

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; women, too: Sarah, Rahab and Ruth, Mary and Elisabeth.

Rulers with Christ

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

"Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon 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:

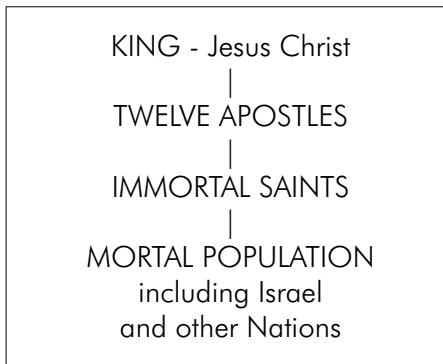
"The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever." (7:18)

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,

The Kingdom of God on Earth

men of truth, hating covetousness." But with 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 immortal saints will be wonderfully equipped to rule over the mortal population who will live on earth during the kingdom age.)

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



Government in the Kingdom Age

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 hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat . . . and God shall wipe away all tears 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 trouble-makers 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 one 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 the mortal population 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 (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 co-existence 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 under-privileged will get fair treatment. Jesus will see to that:

"He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." (Isaiah 11:3-4)

When "princes shall rule in judgement" (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 Washington, Moscow or Peking, 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 shall 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 shall he slay the wicked," and, "The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." (Isaiah 11:4; 65:20)

Good Health

Isaiah also tells us that:

"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." (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 only attains what the Psalmist described as "threescore years and ten." Childhood will be a joy, and old age no disgrace, for, "there shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." (Zechariah 8:4,5)

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. When the people of the world are moved to turn to divine standards and to seek help in the right quarter, then scourges like cancer and heart disease will disappear. When families again have a reverence for the sanctity of marriage and for correct sexual behaviour then pestilences like AIDS will no more afflict the nations. The good news is that:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, 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 among the starving millions when he is God's King on earth. The heart-rending scenes we have seen reported from Ethiopia or Mozambique or Bangladesh will be a thing of the past. No food mountains will rot in European storehouses; no American crops will be burned because the sale price is too low.

The Bible foresees the curse on the ground being removed, and plentiful crops for all who will labour for them. "There shall be an handful of corn . . . upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon," said king David (Psalm 72:16). "The mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters," 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 her fruit, and 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 spend the huge sums of money necessary to bring up the water that often lies just below the surface! Then 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

There will be less concentration of population in large cities: city-dwellers moving 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 what we call 'job-satisfaction:'

"They shall build houses, and inhabit them (a contrast with former times!);

and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." (Isaiah 65:21-22)

Arabs Working with Jews

One of the most joyful prospects will be the harmony that will exist between ancient enemies. The prophet's vision of the wolf and the lamb feeding together 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 "shew forth 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 vinedressers. 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

The Kingdom of God on Earth

ever-living rulers, will still have a predominantly mortal populace. 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 must 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 a thousand years must be raised from their graves, to meet again their King and Judge:

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

Alongside those raised will stand the millions who are living. 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 cometh the end, when he

(Jesus) shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death . . . And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that 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 will be here soon. Please, read your Bible, and pray with all your heart:

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

STANLEY OWEN

Reprinted by kind permission of the Christadelphian Magazine and Publishing Association, Birmingham, England.