

THE PROMISE OF THE KINGDOM

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
 of Latter Day Saints
 Independence, Missouri

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SCRIPTURE: Inspired Version, Genesis 9:13-23

And God made a covenant with Noah, and said, This shall be the token of the covenant I make between me and you, and for every living creature with you, for perpetual generations; I will set my bow in the cloud; and it shall be for a token for a covenant between me and the earth ... And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant, which I made unto thy father Enoch; that when men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself. And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall tremble with joy; And the general assembly of the church of the firstborn shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come. And this is mine everlasting covenant which I made with thy father Enoch.

Before the great day of the Lord shall come, ... Zion shall flourish upon the hills, and rejoice upon the mountains, and shall be assembled together unto the place which I have appointed.

During this year we have been talking about the kingdom of God -- looking forward to the day when Christ should rule as King over all the earth, and when God's will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. How do we know that this kingdom shall some day be a reality? Are we just indulging in an orgy of wishful thinking? What is the promise of the kingdom?

If you take the kingdom idea out of Christianity, there would be very little left. Christ was born "King of the Jews," and destined to be King over all the earth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is frequently called the "gospel of the kingdom," because it is designed to lead people towards that kingdom and fit them for it. The church exists that the kingdom might be, for it is a school of instruction, a place of preparation, a testing or proving ground for the training for citizens of the kingdom. The priesthood of Christ's church, with their authority to administer the various saving ordinances of the church, hold the keys to the kingdom. The gospel, the church, and the priesthood all exist that the kingdom might be. Without that hope, there would be no point in a belief in Christ, in his gospel, in his priesthood, or in his church. A belief in and hope of the kingdom give all these things meaning and purpose.

There is a promise of the kingdom in nearly every book of the Old Testament. Old Testament prophets looked forward to and prophesied of a King who should reign in righteousness -- a King who should be a righteous branch of David's line -- who should be a rod out of the stem of Jesse -- who should reign in Zion from which the righteousness of God would shine forth and to which all nations of the earth would go to learn God's laws and ways. The promised Messiah has come, but the Messianic prophecies concerning the fullness of his kingdom and his triumphal reign are as yet unfulfilled. The New Testament, which mentions the second coming of Christ 330 times in its 260 chapters, also holds forth the promise that this Messiah will some day return to earth and reign over his kingdom. Jesus promised that he would come again and reign. Only in such a future, universal, Messianic reign can some of the Old Testament prophecies be completely fulfilled.

Faith gives a promise of the kingdom. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The eleventh chapter of Paul's letter to the

Hebrews recounts in brief the story of many who exercised faith, who had hope of a kingdom, but who never found it or realized it in full in this life. But Paul says that God provided better things for them -- things which their faith and the actions based on that faith should some day make real for them. By faith we hope for and expect the kingdom; and if we base our lives on that faith, obedience to God's laws brings the promise and the assurance of the kingdom.

There is one promise of the kingdom which is peculiar to Latter Day Saints. It is found only in the Inspired Version of the Scriptures, as corrected and augmented by Joseph Smith. It is the promise contained in the "everlasting covenant," given first to Enoch and renewed to his grandson, Noah -- the promise and covenant that God will never again destroy all flesh from the earth as in the flood -- the promise that when men should learn to keep all of God's commandments, Enoch's city of Zion which was taken to heaven shall again come on earth -- that when the men of earth shall embrace the truth and look upward in expectation of that kingdom, then the Zion from above shall look downward, and shall come down and possess the earth under Christ, the King, until the end of time.

The "earnest" of the Spirit is a promise of the kingdom. When we enter into the perfected kingdom with Christ, we shall have his living presence with us through eternity. Until that time, those who have pledged allegiance to him, who have rendered obedience to him, who are trying to live on earth by kingdom laws so that God's will is done on earth as it is done in heaven, have the right to the abiding presence of his Spirit -- the Comforter. This Spirit is a lesser indication of what the greater reality of the kingdom will eventually be. It shows us in smaller measure what the full presence of Christ in his kingdom will ultimately be. Paul says that it is the "earnest" of our inheritance; that is, it is the advance or token payment, the down payment, which indicates much more to come when the contract is fully completed. The Comforter with its "earnest" of our inheritance in the kingdom, is a promise of the kingdom. With it for our companion and our guide, we know that the promises of the kingdom are true.

Still another promise of the coming kingdom is to be found in the many promises made to Israel, that all Israel shall some day be gathered together again under one king, the Messiah. The coming kingdom is to be the kingdom of Israel, with Christ at its head, ruling not only over those who are of Israel by lineage, but over those of the Gentiles who are Israel by adoption. It is well to remember that Israel is now scattered abroad among all nations, and intermingled with the Gentiles. The gathering of this scattered Israel from the four corners of the earth is to be an event which surpasses in its miraculous implications the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The eleventh chapter of Isaiah depicts the millennial reign of the Messiah over his earthly kingdom, and sums up the promise of Israel in the words: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people ... And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." There are dozens of promises of the gathering of Israel in the scriptures, either explicit or implied, -- and every such promise is an added promise of the kingdom over which Messiah, the King of Israel, shall reign in righteousness.

When shall the promises of the kingdom be fulfilled? When there is a people prepared to receive Jesus as King and Messiah. When the church has gathered out a nucleus of righteous, obedient, dedicated people, who by keeping kingdom law do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven as subjects of the Prince of Peace, then Messiah will come to reign over them, to gather out his elect, and to judge the wicked and rebellious. Judgment will come upon the wicked when they are ripened in iniquity -- when the consequences of their own wicked ways bring about the downfall of worldly kings and kingdoms, and the destruction of the wicked by the wicked.

We believe that these promises of the kingdom are true, and that the fulfillment of them is even now beginning to take place. Our concern and yours should be a concern as to whether we are worthy to be heirs of these promises -- worthy to dwell with Christ in his perfected kingdom.