

GOD'S
Grand
PLAN
OF THE
AGES



God's Grand Plan of the Ages

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PREFACE

Millions of copies of the Christian classic book, *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, have been printed and circulated throughout the world in over thirty languages. It has brought joy and peace to the hearts of millions as they came to understand that our great Creator is truly a God of Love who has designed a Plan that will ultimately bless every man, woman and child that has ever lived!

This booklet "*God's Grand Plan of the Ages*" endeavors to capture the highlights of the more comprehensive book *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. Though brief in nature, this booklet leads to a satisfying explanation of age-old questions: Why does a God of Love permit the evil we see in the world? Why are there tsunamis and earthquakes that kill thousands—and wars that kill millions? Why must we experience pain, heartache and finally death? When will God's Kingdom come and His will be "done on earth as it is in heaven"?

"*God's Grand Plan*" also covers the signs of the "Time of the End" prophecies in the book of Daniel (Daniel 12:1-4). "Knowledge" is being increased at an unprecedented rate in human history, ushering in the Brain Age of Computers, Cell Phones, Space exploration, etc. However, though technology has been a blessing in many ways — we see man's selfishness and greed in this Atomic era leading to an ever increasing "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." What a comfort to know, however, that this trouble will usher in the "Golden Age" that mankind has longed for since the dawn of history! God's Kingdom will be more wonderful, more glorious, more all-encompassing, than all the dreams of philosophers, poets and sages.

- There will be a world of peace (Psalm 46:9)
- The healing of all the defects of humanity (Isaiah 35:5,6)
- Moral integrity will be planted in every heart (Jeremiah 31:33)
- All the dead of past ages will be raised to life again (1 Corinthians 15:22)
- Sorrow, pain, tears and death itself will cease (Revelation 21:4)

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). We hope you will receive a blessing from reading this booklet. We also highly recommend reading [The Divine Plan of the Ages, available in paperback](#) offered in the back of this booklet. It is but the first book in a series of six that covers every major doctrine of the Bible as a topical study with a harmony that is unprecedented in Christian literature. [This six-volume set is also available at cost, in a hard bound edition.](#)

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STUDY ONE: A NIGHTTIME OF SIN ... TO END IN A JOYFUL MORNING

God has a just and loving Plan for all mankind which has been unfolding throughout the history of man. Understanding this progress of events through the Ages helps us appreciate the beautiful harmony of the Bible. The dark night of sin now engulfing man will never be forgotten! But soon in the dawning Age, Messiah as the “Sun of Righteousness” shall arise with healing and blessing. The dreadful night of pain, sickness and death will end. The joy of morning will more than offset the tears of our groaning creation. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Waiting for Something Better

The whole creation is groaning and waiting for some thing better, but they grope along blindly not realizing the magnitude of God’s gracious purposes. (Romans 8:19, 22). Soon our great Creator’s Plan for man will far exceed man’s highest hopes (1 Corinthians 2:9). The love of God will go far beyond all man’s greatest expectations. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts ... saith the LORD; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9). **“God’s Grand Plan of the Ages,”** suggests that there is an orderly explanation of man’s past and present as well as what God has planned for man’s future. Its reasonableness, based on the Scriptures, should appeal to the searching reader. The light from the dawning “Sun of Righteousness” now makes such understanding possible as “present truth” (2 Peter 1:12). Many now question the Bible as the foundation of true religion. Here, believing the Scriptures to be consistent and harmonious, we will explain God’s Plan from the Bible. It is a Plan that will appeal to man’s sense of reason and justice. God’s Plan is consistent with God’s just and loving character. The earnest truth-seeker may expect this kind of understanding because the “spirit of truth” was promised to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Two Ways to Search for Truth

One approach is to search the various sects of Christianity for truth. But that is often confusing because they have conflicting teachings, many of which seem unreasonable. Not all are based on the Scriptures of the Bible. Many are based only on the creeds of past centuries.

The other method is to let go of all prejudice and with a meek heart go to the Word of God with the help of its Author who has promised us various helps in understanding His Plan (See Ephesians 4:11-16). It is important not to believe something just because we have confidence in some one. Our faith must be based on the Word of God, not that of modern theologians or even of the Early Church Fathers. Saul of Tarsus was an example of many good people who have taught error in good conscience (Acts 26:9). Truth-seekers must be emptied of the muddy waters of tradition and be filled at the fountain of God’s Word. Everything should be proved by the Scriptures.

Basis for Proper Bible Study

With Scriptural evidences, we have endeavored to present God’s Plan in an orderly, logical way. But it must be understood that the Scriptures are often in symbolic language and context. A failure to understand this makes many popular subjects talked about today on prophecy and the coming of our Lord confusing and frightening. Prophecy must be understood in its historic as well as its future fulfillments. We are students of prophecy—not prophets! Unfortunately, some Christians neglect the study of God’s Word and say, There is enough in just the Beatitudes to save anyone! But even the “angels desire to look into” the Gospel and work of Christ (1 Peter 1:11,12). The study of God’s Plan helps the Christian to understand God’s purposes and to look to the future from God’s standpoint—not as a servant, but as a child and heir (Hebrews 3:5,6). Careful study of God’s Word is strengthening to our faith and stimulating to holiness.

Purpose of the Present Age

In ignorance of God’s Plan for mankind, many Christian churches suppose the present Age is the only time for converting the world. But after nearly twenty centuries, their goal has not been accomplished. Below is a table showing the percentage of religions based on total world population comparing the year 1900 with 2008. Notice that the percentage of Christians has actually decreased. Is this discouraging? Is Christianity failing? Has God been trying to convert the world, unsuccessfully? The answer must be no! God’s power and wisdom assure us He does not fail. Jesus sent his followers as a “witness unto all nations” and to find a “little flock” of devoted overcomers (Matthew 24:14; Luke 12:32). That is the purpose of the present Gospel Age. When this work is complete, then God will indeed convert the world. That is the purpose of the next age—Christ’s Kingdom, for which we pray, “Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Religions	1900 World Population 1,619,625,000	2008 World Population 6,706,993,152
Christians	34.46%	33.32%
Muslims	12.34%	21.01%
Hindus	12.53%	13.26%
Buddhists	7.84%	5.84%
Jews	.75%	.23%
Nonreligious	8.42%	14.09%
Other	23.66%	12.25%

Source: Global Christian Resources; *The World Fact Book*

This chart truly does present a sad picture! Even the 33 percent counted as “Christian” surely are not all “sanctified in Christ Jesus” who “walk not after the flesh” (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 8:1). Are infants and children automatically counted as saved Christians? What about the centuries upon centuries before Christ? Acts 4:12 (NAS) says, “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Are all those millions who lived before Christ lost eternally?

The creeds of most churches today teach that if you are not saved, you are damned eternally. Some still believe in a literal “burning hell,” and that the unsaved will have an eternity of torture! Many who sincerely believe that now is the only day of salvation are driven to missionary work around

the world. But are billions of humanity still lost forever?

God's Great Plan of Salvation Is Not a Failure!

Yes, the world today is very dark! And storm clouds are gathering. But in God's Plan of the Ages morning is dawning. "For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:2-3, NAS).

Unfortunately, many have stopped looking for God's Kingdom when His will shall be "done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Many are discouraged by the clashing creeds of the churches which create more confusion. Some people conclude, I am not good enough for heaven—but I'm too good for hell! Therefore many give up on God's Plan as not working—or dismiss it as an incomprehensible mystery!

The Righteous of the Past Did Not Have Much Light

Even some of the righteous of the past did not have as much "light" as we now have at the end of the Age. Abraham did not understand fully what the promise meant: "In your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14, NAS). Neither the angels nor even the Prophets understood the future in God's Plan. The Jewish Law and ceremonies of Israel pointed to Christ, the great deliverer, who would save Israel and make them his agency for the blessing of all the families of the earth. But God's chosen people in Jesus' day expected a King that would deliver them from the Romans. They overlooked the Scriptures that revealed that Messiah would first have to suffer and die.

Jesus told his disciples, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12,13, NAS). But after Pentecost, the Gospel message which Jesus taught began to be better understood. The Apostle Paul explained many mysteries to the Church (1 Corinthians 15:51; Ephesians 3:3,4; 2 Thessalonians 2:7). "The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints [is] ... Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27). This is still a "mystery" to most. Jesus' Church is part of "Christ," the anointed, which will bless the world after the Gospel Age!

After the Apostles fell asleep (Matthew 13:25), the enemy Satan sowed seeds that produced fake Christians—"tares." Men in the church rose to power. The Word of God was put aside. Instead, the teachings of men replaced the teachings of the Bible.

The Protestant Reformation was a bold attempt to return to the authority of the Scriptures. God used men like Wycliffe, Luther and others as brave champions of the truth of His Word. But Protestants generally have made little progress walking in the light. Each Protestant church stopped on the path of truth, not progressing with the truth as the light shone on, but going only so far as its favorite leader. Today, many have even backtracked!

Path of Truth Getting Brighter

It is true that "darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people" (Isaiah 60:2). But it will not always be so! Many now "sit in darkness" in the "prison house" of sin and death (Isaiah 42:7). But we are assured that as the End of the Age nears, it will mean only the beginning of the next Age. In the Millennial Day the "Sun of Righteousness" will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness" (1 Corinthians 4:5). It will dispel the deadly darkness of evil and bring life, health, peace and joy. Those who do not just "sit in darkness," but desire to walk in God's unfolding light, will find their path getting brighter and brighter.

So God invites us, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18). Truth as "Light is sown for the righteous" (Psalm 97:11). The Bible is like a lamp for the path of the righteous. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Holy Scriptures are opened up as never before to guide the Church into truth. Not only is the past explained, but also there is increasing light on the future.

The Morning Is Dawning!

Even with so many now confused and unbelieving—we do not need to "sit in darkness." We can go forward on our path of understanding with the light of the Scriptures. They will show us the way. Therefore, everything explained as "truth" to us must be based on the Scriptures! Prophecies of the Bible are being fulfilled today as never before. They prove the Bible itself is true!

"So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19, NAS).

The Apostle Paul actually was caught up into a vision to see the future. But he was not "permitted to speak" about it (2 Corinthians 12:4, NAS). It was not time or "meat in due season" even for the early Church (Matthew 24:45). Then, of course, the Apostle John saw and heard the Revelation of Jesus Christ of things "which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1). In symbolic language, the Apostle viewed the whole Christian Age from its beginning to its dramatic end. From the Beast with seven heads to the Bride of Christ—from Babylon to the New Jerusalem—Revelation is interpreted with the help of the other Scriptures.

The joy of the morning comes first to Christ Jesus' faithful watchers. More light is revealed now than at any time before in the Church's history. In God's Kingdom the light of truth will spread to all mankind. Jesus and the Church will offer life to the rest of mankind ending the nighttime of sin.

"And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Revelation 22:17, NAS).

STUDY TWO: AN INTELLIGENT, LOVING CREATOR

How do we know there is a God? Could the universe and the people on Earth have just happened? What might be good evidence that we have an intelligent Creator? Let us see what reason suggests

All we need to do is look at our universe with a telescope—or a plant leaf under a microscope. Looking upward on a clear, starry night, who is not awed by the beauty, order, variety and immensity of the heavens? A leaf under a microscope reveals cells which are a whole factory of specialized structures. And even beyond that there lies a whole universe of molecules composed of atoms which in turn are composed of protons, neutrons and electrons with even smaller subatomic particles. Every plant, flower and star speaks to the wisdom and power of an intelligent Creator. The wonderful laws in the harmony of nature cannot come from mere chance. All nature plainly testifies to an intelligent Lawgiver.

Fixing of the Genesis “Kind”

It is claimed that all varieties of plants and animals were formed without intelligence—that they developed by a law of “natural selection,” “survival of the fittest”—evolution. But it is self-evident that effects must be produced by competent causes. Would it be scientific to say that a watch found in a field just happened to exist by itself without intelligence? That it gradually evolved? Yes, there are frogs that can sing and apes that resemble men. But frogs do not become birds, and apes do not become humans.

Climate and food supplies may affect adaptations. Different variations of moths or frogs can be produced—but they are still moths and frogs! But as Genesis describes creation, descent is always “after their kind” (Genesis 1:25 NAS). God probably created only the dog “kind,” rather than every poodle and boxer. There are over 10,500 identified species of moths in North America alone. Though variations can emerge within a species, each created “kind” is fixed.

True Science Is Based on Observable Facts

A century and a half after Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, science still has not demonstrated the theory by its own rules of observation! In fact, since the 1980s, the concept of Intelligent Design has been growing among scientists. There is such incredible design in man and nature that there must be an intelligent Designer behind it.

For example, half a century ago man’s biological coding was discovered. It is called DNA. This complex chemical “blueprint,” which uniquely defines an individual, is replicated in each of the approximately 100 trillion cells in a human body. Each cell has a “blueprint,” or language, in a chemical “alphabet” defining its particular function in the workings of the body. As Psalms 139:14 declares, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Evolution: The Fossils Say No!

The earliest fossil evidence is found in Precambrian rock strata. The fossil evidence consists of single-celled algae. Then in the next stratum above, suddenly 455 different complex invertebrate species appear with no intermediate forms whatsoever. Similarly, fossil evidence apparently shows that dinosaurs were exterminated by a worldwide cataclysm. But the very next stratum of rock shows a completely new form of mammalian animal life, such as we have today. No intermediate organisms have ever been found— not a single fossil that could demonstrate a gradual evolution. There are billions of missing links.

Skeletons of supposed prehistoric men, such as Java Man and Piltdown Man, were actually reconstructed from only a few bone fragments. Later, upon closer scrutiny, it was found that some of the fragments of each were taken from different ages. One celebrated example, “Nebraska Man,” was reconstructed on the basis of just one tooth. After much study and investigation, it was admitted to be a wild pig’s tooth! Scientists often date the fossil by the rock layer in which it is found—then date the rock layer by the fossils found in it.

Dating methods of fossils (such as Carbon-14 or Potassium-Argon) cannot be positively relied upon. Both are based upon several assumptions, and there is no proof that these could not have been significantly altered by catastrophic events such as a universal flood.

Our Planet Earth Is Uniquely Privileged

Scientists tell us our distance from the sun is critical for life. The balance of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide in the air is unique to our planet. Abundant water also is apparently unique and essential for our complex life on Earth. The moon stabilizes the angle of the Earth’s axis, which gives us temperate seasons. All of this speaks of intent, design, planning, and thought. From our solar system to the intricate human eye—the wisdom and power of our Creator is clear! “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (Romans 1:20, NAS).

Our Creator Has Implanted a Yearning to Know

Life could not have just spontaneously emerged out of a “primordial soup.” The fact that thousands of critical connections would have had to happen at precisely the same time to form even the simplest cell is irrefutable proof that the wonderful varieties of life could not have come out of nothing. We are forced to conclude that there is an intelligent Designer, a Creator! God’s wisdom is vastly superior to man’s. “It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands” (Isaiah 45:12, NAS). From the beauty of the heavens to the beauty of a rose—or in the compelling love of a mother for her child—we see our Creator’s love. Surely His love must be vastly superior to ours—as well as His wisdom, justice and power.

God also implanted in us a yearning to understand the universe. We want to understand where we have come from, where we are going, what is our destiny. Having implanted in us this desire to know, would not a loving and just Creator reveal for us an answer to these longings?

Let us then search the Bible for a Plan consistent with God’s just and loving character. As observed in nature—within ourselves and without—we should confidently expect to find a Plan of God satisfying to reason.

STUDY THREE: GOD'S REVELATION—THE BIBLE

The Bible has been the torch of civilization and liberty. The Judeo-Christian Bible has shaped not only religious thought, but also politics, law, education, literature and culture. Even though we have looked at the Bible through the glasses of conflicting creeds, the Bible has impacted mankind as no other book in history. The Bible is the foundation of ideas and principles upon which Western civilization rests. The moral influence of the Bible has been consistently good. Other writings about God may have brought some benefit, but the Bible has brought hope and peace as no other book.

The message of the Bible has often been grossly misrepresented, even by its friends. People sometimes mistakenly take its symbolic language as literal. Because the Bible is its own interpreter, the Bible has to be understood as a whole. Many of its gems of wisdom and truth lie on the surface, but its richest treasures lie below its surface. Those who dig into the Bible deeply find God's character and Plan revealed in glorious beauty.

The purpose of the Scriptures is wonderful, harmonious and just—presenting the opportunity for everlasting life for every person who has ever lived. The Bible's claim to be a revelation from our Creator God is well worth our thoughtful, honest investigation.

Best Preserved Book in Existence

The Bible is among the very oldest books in existence. It has outlived the storms of over thirty centuries. Men have tried by every means possible to banish it. At times they have even made its possession a crime punishable by death. When the Bible was wrested from the hands of priests during the Reformation, it was put into the outstretched arms of common people. This move had a fundamental impact on the world. Today, while so many of its enemies slumber in death, the Bible has found its way into every nation. It has been translated into 438 languages—and portions of it into over 2,000 languages. The Bible's Author has also been its Preserver.

While archeology cannot "prove" that the Bible is God's Word, no archeological find has yet contradicted the Bible. Instead today archeology continues to verify the history in the Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain portions of the Hebrew Bible that are two thousand years old and confirm even the integrity of the text. A stone inscription dug from the northern area of Dan expressly mentions "the House of David." The Bible's reference to the Hittites as an ancient power was long ridiculed, but today we have abundant evidence for the existence of such a people. There are 3,300 numbered manuscripts of the Greek New Testaments known today, a comparable number for the Hebrew Old Testament (plus 227 more Dead Sea Scrolls), and over 10,000 more in Latin and other ancient versions. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers.

The Motives of the Writers

The sixty six books of the Bible were written on at least three continents covering over four thousand years of history. The Bible was written by forty authors from every walk of life: kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, and scholars. Moses was a political leader, trained in Egyptian universities; Peter, a fisherman; Amos, a herdsman; Joshua, a military general; Luke, a doctor; Daniel, a prime minister; Solomon, a king; Matthew, a tax collector; and Paul, a Jewish Pharisee and lawyer.

What were the motives of these inspired writers? They must have been pure and their object grandly sublime. Their honesty is attested by their disclosing even their own faults. King David confessed his sins in abject humility (Psalm 51). Elijah, dejected and discouraged, cried, "I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). Jeremiah admitted not wanting to speak God's word any more—but then he could not quench his burning zeal (Jeremiah 20:9). Paul openly lamented he was once a persecutor of the Church (1 Corinthians 15:9).

What motives inspired the disciples to promote the cause of Jesus? His own people condemned him. He died accused of blasphemy and treason. The writers of the New Testament braved contempt and bitter persecution and risked life itself—most of them died as martyrs. Only integrity and honest conviction explains such dedication.

Theme of the Bible—Jesus of Nazareth

The writings of the Old Testament—from the Garden of Eden, through the histories, the Law, and the Prophets—all point forward to the Messiah of the New Testament. The genealogies trace the promised "seed" of Abraham (Genesis 22:17,18) destined to bless "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 28:14). This "seed" can be traced in the Bible to Isaac, Jacob, Judah, through the kingly line of David, right down to Mary (Luke 3:23-38). The recording of these histories, in testimony of our Lord Jesus, was certainly guided by God, the Author of the Bible.

The Scriptures detail the role and work of Jesus from his temptations in the wilderness, to his crucifixion as a criminal, culminating in his resurrection from the tomb. They explain that Messiah had first to suffer and then enter into glory (Isaiah 53:12, Luke 24:26). The Bible says Christ will establish the Kingdom of God "on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). It speaks of the "times of restitution" that Christ will bring at his return, "spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). The Bible even records the signs of Jesus' return to establish that Kingdom (Matthew 24:1-3).

First the Law Covenant—Then a New Covenant

The Law Covenant, which God made with Israel, was as a monument in time for its laws of equality in the treatment of man. The Ten Commandments, which summarize that Law, still remains a remarkable code of worship and morals. Jesus summarized the Law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... [and] thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:30-31). The moral excellence of this Law is a testimony to its source, the Father of all creation.

Even the often misunderstood command to the Israelites to destroy the people of the Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1,2) can be well explained. On page 259 in *The Emphasized Bible*, Rotherham says:

"In reviewing the destruction of the nations of Canaan, it is most important to bear in mind the terrible nature of the crimes. ... Their very worship was grossly sensual and revoltingly cruel. ... Their sacred places were brothels. ... Lustful gods are cruel and demand to be worshipped with human blood. ... [they] sacrificed their sons and daughters."

God Himself had earlier destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, "as I saw good" (Genesis 19:20-28, Ezekiel 16:49,50). In doing so, God interrupted their downward spiral of iniquity, as He did for the world at the time of the Flood (Genesis 6:11-13). The same applied to the Canaanites (see Joshua 3:9, 10; 10:40-43, Genesis 15:16). By arresting their descent into sin, those people will be less debased when they return in the resurrection, more able to progress upward out of the mire, back to righteousness.

All of them—Sodom, Canaan, even apostate Samaria and wicked Judah—will be raised, will repent, and will be forgiven (Ezekiel 16:53).

"Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting [New] Covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters [Sodom and Samaria] ... and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your [Old Law] covenant ... I will establish My covenant with you" (Ezekiel 16:53, 60-62, NAS).

The Law Covenant of the Old Testament pointed forward to a "New Covenant" which God would establish with "better sacrifices," and a better mediator—and which would bring redemption for all! (Hebrews 9:23; 12:24, Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Government of Mosaic Law

The Law of Moses gave remarkable laws for government and society, unique and advanced for its time. Because of human imperfection, however, that Law was not kept. Nevertheless, the standards it expressed had an ennobling influence.

The government instituted by Moses differed from all others, ancient and modern, in that it claimed to be from the Creator Himself. The people were held accountable to God. Though Israel had a priesthood for their Tabernacle and Temple, the priests were given no civil power. Surely this would not have been the case if the Law was merely the invention of plotting priests.

In a sense, Israel's government was founded as a democracy and a republic—under God's laws. God told Moses to bring the Elders, who represented the tribes, to help him administer the affairs of the nation (Numbers 11:16, 17; Deuteronomy 1:15-17). This form of government was calculated to encourage the spirit of liberty.

This republican form of government continued for over four hundred years. Then the Elders wanted to be like surrounding nations. They pressed the Prophet Samuel for a king. Samuel told the people how their rights and liberties would be disregarded, but the people persisted. So God told Samuel, "Hearken unto the voice of the people. ... They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:5-10). As warned, most of the kings of Israel and Judah were wicked—and the people did suffer. But God did not abandon them.

Just Laws for Protection

Under the Law Covenant, there were laws for the protection of the poor. This accountability for rich and poor on a common level before civil law is unique even in our twenty-first century. The law provided for a restoration of forfeited land every fiftieth year—their Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:9, 13-23, 27-30). This prevented the permanent loss of property to families because of debt.

Other remarkable provisions under the Law Covenant were as follows:

- Protection against excessive interest on loans (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36, 37).
- Widows and orphans were not to be oppressed (Exodus 22:22).
- Hired help was not to be oppressed (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14).
- Foreigner's rights were guaranteed (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 19:33, 34).
- Animals are guaranteed food and rest (Deuteronomy 25:4; Exodus 23:12).

All these laws were designed by God—not by ambitious priests for selfish purposes. Indeed, the priestly tribe of Levi did not even receive a share in the Land as the other tribes did. They only had certain cities or villages for residence scattered among the various tribes (Numbers 35:1-8). Even the tithes the priests were to receive from the people were voluntary (Numbers 18:22-28).

Bible Prophecies of the Future

The term "Prophet" signifies a public expounder. The Prophets' messages from God to the people were often a reproof for sin and coming punishments. Also woven into their messages were promises of blessings if they would repent and reform. Usually the Prophets of God were not popular and often their lives were in peril, as with Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yet they faithfully gave God's unpopular messages, and by inspiration they were recorded in the Scriptures.

Many Prophets of the Bible were not only public teachers, but they also forecasted the future. The Bible is unique in its prophecies as no other book claiming to be holy. The Mohammedans with their Koran, the Buddhists with their Tripitaka and the Hindus with their Vedas and Upanishads—all lack significant evidences of any fulfilled prophecy.

Prophecies of Jesus and of the End of the Age

Linking the Old and New Testaments, there are literally hundreds of prophecies about the coming of Messiah that Jesus fulfilled during his first advent. Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-2). As a "lamb" he would be without blemish and without a bone broken (Exodus 12:5, 46; John 19:31-36; 1 Peter 1:19). He would be betrayed by a familiar friend (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18). He would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38). By contrast, Islam cannot point to any prophecies about Mohammed from centuries before his birth.

Other prophecies of the Bible about Jesus' return and the end of the age are being fulfilled visibly before our very eyes. The ending of the old order,

and the beginning of Christ's Kingdom, were to come in a time of unprecedented world trouble (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21,22). This we have seen in two world wars and the development of atomic weapons which could wipe out all life on the earth. Prophetically, a final cataclysm, Armageddon, is yet impending.

But the end of the Age would also be the time for the regathering of Daniel's "people," Israel, in preparation for the Kingdom (Daniel 12:1). Israel would be like a "fig tree" putting forth "leaves" (Jeremiah 24:5, 6; Matthew 24:32). Thus we see after eighteen centuries Jews returning to their land beginning in 1878, the Zionist movement since 1897, the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. However, together with the regathering, prophecy indicates it will be accompanied with "travail" (Jeremiah 30:3-7).

One Common Theme of the Bible

One common line of thought is interwoven throughout the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the New Testament (Luke 24:44). One plan, aim, and purpose pervades the entire Bible. The harmony in contrasting the first three and the last three chapters of the Bible is especially striking.

Genesis	Revelation
First creation (2:7)	Restored creation (21:3, 4, 24)
Satan and evil enter (3:1-4)	Satan destroyed (20:10)
Curse on Adam and Eve (3:16,17)	No more curse (22:3)
Death penalty (2:17)	Life for all (22:17)

Only the Bible gives a reasonable and harmonious statement of the cause of the present evil world, its only remedy, and the final wonderful destiny of mankind. However, because of sin, reconciliation to God could only come from the sacrifice of life. The necessity of the death of a redeemer for man was demonstrated from God's acceptance of the lamb offered by Abel, the offering of Isaac, and all the sacrifices of the Tabernacle and Temple. Since Adam was tried in a state of perfection, God's justice required a perfect sacrifice for sin and so He gave His only begotten son to be a "ransom for all to be testified in due time" (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:5,6).

Based on that sacrifice, God will bless the entire world. The Bible unfolds God's Plan from the early statement that the "seed" of the woman would crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Paul identifies that "seed" as Christ Jesus and his Church (Galatians 3:16, 29).

Later God promised Abraham that the blessing would come through him: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). He was told his seed would be as the "stars of heaven" as well as the "sand which is upon the seashore" (Genesis 22:17). The "stars of heaven" aptly represent a Heavenly Class that will reign with Christ in his Kingdom. They will be "kings and priests" blessing the entire world represented as the "sand which is upon the seashore" (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Succeeding studies in this book will reveal the astonishing details of when and how the Plan of God will bless all the families of the earth. It will be the time when the prayer uttered so often will be fulfilled—"Thy Kingdom come. They will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

God, the Author of the Bible

Having seen that there is a supreme intelligent Creator, reason would expect that He would reveal His plans and purposes to His intelligent creation. The Bible claims to be that revelation. As we consider its testimony, we find its scope, depth and harmony convincing that Almighty God—not man—is the Author of the Holy Scriptures. As the length, breadth, height and logic of God's Plan unfolds, we will see God is truly a loving Creator who will give an opportunity for life, health and happiness to every man, woman and child who has ever lived.

STUDY FOUR: EPOCHS OF TIME IN GOD'S PLAN

Imagine walking down the street of a big city and seeing a fenced-off section with noisy blasting, dust flying and piles of debris. If we peeked through a hole in the fence, we might cry out, "What a mess! Whoever planned this project did not know what they were doing!" But wait! Is it fair to judge an architect by his unfinished work? Surely not!

Many misjudge the work of the greatest Architect of all. When we look at the chaos in the world today, what we see is the dust and debris of a well designed Plan as yet unfinished. The present permission of evil is designed as a learning experience that will never be forgotten. God's finished Plan will bless every man, woman and child who has ever lived. "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10, NAS). No matter how mysterious or haphazard God's dealings with mankind might seem—His unchangeable Plan is progressing steadily forward!

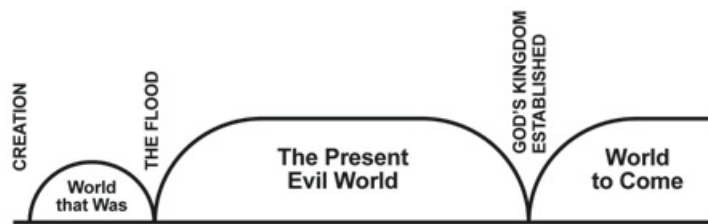
Three Great Periods of Time

While most of the world is groping in darkness and despair for the future, God's people have the "lamp" of the Bible brightening their path ahead (Psalm 119:105). By the light of the Scriptures, we can see the Great Architect's purpose moving from the past, through the present, and into man's wonderful future. The Apostles Peter and Paul identify three great epochs of time—each called a "world."

In the Bible, the first epoch from Creation to the Flood is called, "The World That Then Was." It was under the administration of angels (2 Peter 3:6; Hebrews 2:5).

The second epoch, from the Flood to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, is under the limited control of Satan, "the prince of this world." It is called "This Present Evil World" (2 Peter 3:7; Galatians 1:4).

The third epoch is to be a "world without end" under divine administration, the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 45:17). It is called "The World to Come"—"in which righteousness dwells" (Hebrews 2:5; 2 Peter 3:13).



The second and third worlds are in strong contrast to each other. The second epoch of time is called the "Present Evil World," not because there is no good in it, but because evil predominates. Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). "Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered" (Malachi 3:15). In the "World to Come Wherein Dwells Righteousness," Jesus will be the ruler and the reverse will be true. Then "the righteous [shall] flourish" (Psalm 72:7), and "evildoers shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:9). However, the blotting out of evil will be gradual, requiring all of the first thousand years.

Satan, the Ruler of the Present Evil World

Because Satan is the "god of this world," he has blinded the minds of most men (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus clearly said, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In fact, he taught his disciples to pray for a future time: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Why is God's Kingdom seemingly postponed? One reason is to permit time to develop and test Jesus' followers (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12,13), who will be joint-heirs with Christ as kings and priests in God's Kingdom (Revelation 5:10). When this elect class is complete, Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1-3). The transition from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of our Lord will be a general time of trouble before peace (Revelation 11:15-18; Mark 3:23-27).

Three Worlds—Same Earth

Though the Scriptures speak of three "worlds," or dispensations, these all take place on our one literal earth. "The earth abideth forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4) Why, then, does Peter talk about both the "heavens and the earth" being destroyed in "fire" and "heat" (2 Peter 3:7,10).

Peter is not talking about a literal fire burning a physical sky and earth. He is referring to the spiritual ruling powers, human governments and social arrangements being destroyed. When the first "world" perished with the Flood, the earth still remained (2 Peter 3:6). It was the evil society that was destroyed. The present "heavens" of Satan's rule will give way to a "new heavens," Christ's spiritual rule. After Satan's kingdom is destroyed in the "Day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:1,5), the old order of society will be replaced by God's just, loving and peaceable Kingdom on earth.

The Apostle Paul was given a vision—mentally or physically, he couldn't tell because things were so real to him. He was "caught up to the third heaven" in which he saw Christ's wonderful Kingdom rule (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Similarly, the Apostle John saw in symbolic vision the Kingdom of Christ as "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1,2). The new ruling authority is represented as the "New Jerusalem." The renovation of society will be wonderful! "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Ages within Worlds

Though the first world was not subdivided, the second and third epoch worlds are divided.

From Adam's fall to the Flood, God allowed man to follow his own downward evil course so that he might fully experience the consequences of sin and disobedience. Man's thoughts were only "evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). However, God graciously intervened with the Flood to prevent further degradation. God has a recovery plan that will ultimately "save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and turn man's heart to righteousness. After the Flood, another step in God's Plan unfolded.

The Present Evil World—Three Ages

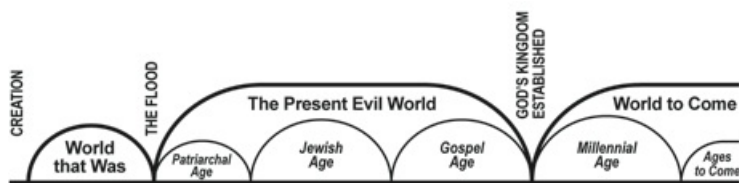
The Present Evil World (the "World that Now Is") has three ages, each progressing forward to the overthrow of evil.

The Patriarchal Age is the first of these three ages. During that period, God dealt only with the Fathers of Faith—such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Hebrews 11).

The Jewish Age is the second period within the "World that Now Is." That age started when Jacob died, leaving his descendants as the "twelve tribes of Israel," which God separated from the other nations for a particular purpose (Genesis 49:28). After their Exodus from Egypt, God made a covenant with Israel, giving them His law and His special blessings. He gave them the Tabernacle and later the Temple, in which sacrifices were offered that fore-shadowed Christ's sacrifice.

At the end of this Jewish Age, God sent His Son Jesus to Israel. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). However, only a small remnant accepted Jesus. As a nation, Israel rejected him. Five days before his crucifixion, Israel's national favor ended when Jesus said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38).

The Gospel Age, or the Christian Age, is the third age. It began at Jesus' death, which opened the way of salvation for all nations, by Christ's "ransom" sacrifice (1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Timothy 1:10). The Gospel message has now gone out for nearly twenty centuries—published in just about every language on earth. The purpose in this Age, however, has not been to convert the world, but to gather from it a "little flock" to be joint-heirs with Christ in his Kingdom (Luke 12:32). From heaven, they will reign with Christ as "kings and priests" over earth, to bless all the remainder of the world during the next Age (Rev. 5:10; 20:6).



Jesus, the Ruler of the World to Come

In the "World to Come" only the first thousand years (the Millennial Age) is defined in the Bible. The Scriptures refer to this Age as "Times of Restitution" (that is, a time of restoration to that which was lost). It is inaugurated in a time of transition beginning with the second advent of Christ (Acts 3:21).

At the dawning of this Millennial Age, Satan is to be bound (Revelation 20:1-3). Evil will recede, and righteousness will dominate. During this time ALL mankind will be gradually awakened from the sleep of death. Every help will be given them by the heavenly "little flock" to transform their characters into loving, obedient sons of God. They will be instructed, guided, and disciplined with a loving hand as necessary for their rehabilitation. Those who change their characters and pass the final test will receive everlasting life on Earth (Revelation 20:7-9). It will be a life of happiness and unending blessings (Isaiah 25:6-8). What a grand prospect!

In the "Ages to Come" all tears will have been wiped away. Then, and for- ever after, "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" (Revelation 21:1-4). God's Kingdom on earth will finally be fully established! The prayer of our Lord Jesus for the Father's will to "be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10) will then be fully answered!

"Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth"

Not one of these great periods of time is too long or too short! They are like links in a chain, each with its part to accomplish, and necessary to the complete development of God's Plan. If we focus on only a portion of the Great Architect's Plan, it may seem like confusion and failure. But God's plan is progressive, gradually unfolding from age to age. God's wisdom and power are infinitely able to accomplish His will.

To rightly comprehend God's Plan, we have to be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) as we study the Bible. What is true of one age may not be true of another. For instance, at present we cannot say that the earth is "full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Nor can we now say that everyone knows God (Jeremiah 31:34). These promises belong to the Millennial Age—and beyond.

A common mistake through the centuries has been the belief that now is the Age of God's Kingdom on earth. That idea is far from the truth! The governments of this world are supported by oppression, injustice and deceit. Satan is still the "prince of this world." God's people are still watching and praying for God's Kingdom when His will shall be "done on earth, as it is in heaven."

STUDY FIVE: A LONG HIDDEN “MYSTERY” NOW REVEALED!

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints” (Colossians 1:26).

Though evil has ruled over mankind as a result of sin, God has also promised a Deliverer to restore mankind to life and happiness. But, though God supplied many clues to His Plan, they remained obscure and mysterious for thousands of years.

When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, God promised that the seed of the woman would (fatally) “bruise” the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). Nearly two thousand years rolled by with no evidence of any fulfillment. Then God called Abraham and promised him, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:17, 18). But Abraham’s heir Isaac died—and then Isaac’s son Jacob died. However, after Jacob’s death, his descendants, the “twelve tribes of Israel,” were called to be a “holy” and “chosen” people, “above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Genesis 49:28; Deuteronomy 14:2; 1 Chronicles 16:16, 17).

Clues to the Mystery

After serving as slaves in Egypt, Israel was finally delivered by their great leader and lawgiver, Moses. Then another clue about the mystery was given—that God would raise up from Israel a special “Prophet,” like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22). But Moses, the servant, of the LORD died. Then Joshua—whose name means “Savior”—conquered the Land promised by covenant (Deuteronomy 34:4,5). But Joshua died and the nation came to no prominence until the reigns of King David and King Solomon. Sadly, the nation then split in two, followed by various invasions from foreign powers demanding tribute. Finally, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. These were later rebuilt, but the land remained subject to Persia, Greece—and lastly Rome.

About the time of Jesus, all men were in “expectation” (Luke 3:15) of the Messiah King who would bless them. Israel would finally be a “light to the Gentiles” and their walls would be called “Salvation” (Isaiah 42:6; 60:18). Alas, they overlooked other prophecies and features of the Law that “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1:11). Deliverance and blessing would come only after the “Lamb of God” was slain and the Day of Atonement sacrifices were fulfilled (John 1:29). When Jesus died, even his followers were bewildered. “We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21). Their hopes were correct, but the “times [and] seasons” were not yet due to be understood (Acts 1:6, 7).

Understanding After Pentecost

Jesus had taught his disciples in parables, uttering “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). The Truth was veiled in part by these parables because his Disciples could not yet bear the full Truth. But Jesus promised them that the holy Spirit would “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 16:26; 16:12, 13). This great enlightenment came at Pentecost.

In the years following Pentecost part of the mystery became more apparent—that not only Jews, but also Gentiles would be called to be part of the Bride of Christ. The Apostle James spoke about this calling from among the Gentiles:

“ ‘Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name [a bride]. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this [after this people from the Gentiles has been taken out] I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David [the earthly dominion], which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up’ ” (Acts 15:14- 16).

After the remnant was chosen from Israel, God would first select a special “people” from the Gentiles to complete his heavenly Bride—after which He would restore Israel and establish His promised Kingdom in the Earth.

The Hidden Mystery Explained

But it was the Apostle Paul who clearly identified the “mystery”: “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26-27).

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” That is the mystery—that Christ would first gather an elect class to rule with him, before establishing his Kingdom. The word “Christ” means “anointed.” Jesus was anointed with the holy Spirit at his baptism, and devoted Christians receive the same anointing. “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you” (1 John 2:27; 2 Corinthians 1:21).

Anointing in the Old Testament was used to install kings and priests (Leviticus 6:20; 2 Samuel 5:3). The true Church are to be “kings and priests” also. They will rule with Christ, and bring the world back to God (Revelation 1:6, 5:10). Thus the Church is “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). The anointing they receive to prepare them for this service is not with literal oil, as in the Old Testament, but with the Spirit of God, as with our Lord Jesus.

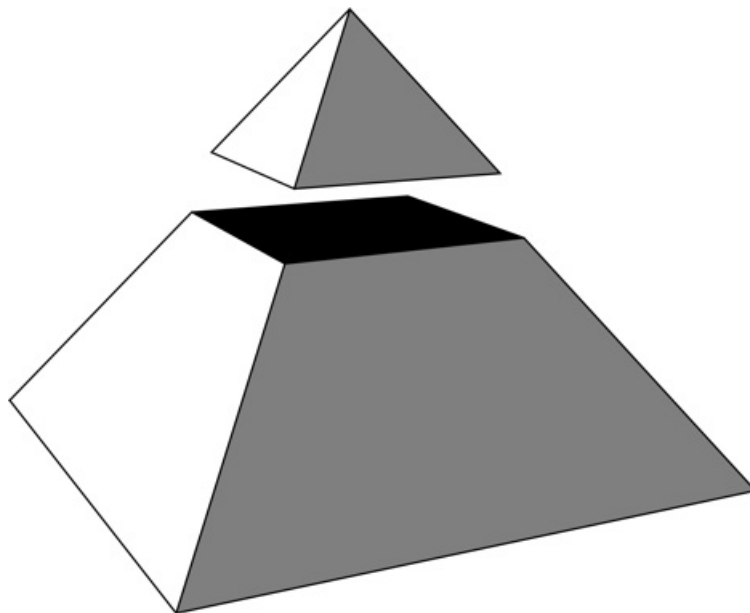
The Anointed Includes Many Members

The Apostle Paul further explains the “Mystery”—that the anointed, Christ, includes many members. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12:27). “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. ... This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:30-32).

Jesus has “preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). He is the Head of the Body. He is the promised “seed” which will bless all the families of the earth (Galatians 3:16). But we are included, if we come into Christ. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Another picture of Jesus as Head of the Church is a pyramid, for it has one “chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus is called a “living stone,” and we as “living stones” are “built up” as a “holy priesthood” under him (1 Peter 2:4-6, NAS). Our great Master-BUILDER uses many humbling blows

and much polishing work to shape our characters to be in line with Jesus.



The Mystery—that God would not only raise up a Deliverer for the world, but a Deliverer composed of many members—was hidden in types, parables and dark sayings. Even many Christians do not fully comprehend this Mystery. The purpose of our “high calling” is more than being blessed ourselves—it is to “bless all the families of the earth” as part of Abraham’s Seed.

The Apostle Paul explained that Abraham was a type of Jehovah, Sarah a type of the covenant of promise and Isaac a type of Christ (head and body). Then he added: “We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise” (Galatians 4:22-28). But only the “new creatures”—and none of the “princes of this world”—can understand this Mystery!

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7,8).

Actually, it was necessary to keep the mystery hidden. Otherwise Jesus—our price for redemption—would never have been crucified. Also, the trial and suffering of Jesus’ followers would not be possible if the world knew who they really were (1 John 3:1). It was a mystery to the world why Jesus let himself be killed instead of accepting kingship. It was a mystery why the Apostles and their companions left their businesses and worldly comforts to preach the Gospel. In fact, that is why all who follow the Master’s footsteps are called “fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Corinthians 4:10).

God’s Plan will not Always Be a Mystery!

The dawn of the Millennial Age brings fuller light. The “Sun of Righteousness,” which rises with “healing in [its] wings,” will dispel the darkness (Malachi 4:2). The whole creation is hoping, waiting for something—but they do not know what. They are actually waiting for the completion of the Mystery. “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19, NAS; Colossians 3:4).

When God finishes pouring His spirit on His dear “servants and hand- maids,” He will then pour it out on “all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Then, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:5-6). At the end of the Christian Age, during the sounding of the (symbolic) trumpet, the secret features of God’s Plan will be made known and “the mystery of God”—the Christian Church—the essence of that Plan—will be “finished” (Revelation 10:7). Then all of God’s glorious purposes will be clearly seen by all.

Eventually, the world will no longer see the “little flock” of Christians as mad or fools. They will rejoice in the glory of the “Bride” and the blessings of life that will flow to the world when the “Spirit and the bride say, Come” (Revelation 22:17).

STUDY SIX: OBJECT OF OUR LORD'S RETURN IS TO RESTORE

"And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20-21).

The Scriptures clearly teach the purpose of Jesus' return, as well as the manner and time of his return. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even till the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NAS). Yet he also said, "If I go ... I will come again" (John 14:3). Certainly Jesus has been with the Church throughout the Age, directing, comforting and cheering his saints by his spirit and by his Word. But he also promised a personal return.

Some think that Jesus' return referred to the descent of the holy Spirit at Pentecost. Others think he was speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem. But sixty years after Pentecost and twenty-six years after Jerusalem's destruction, Jesus promised the event as still future. "Behold, I come quickly," to which the Apostle John responded, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:12,20).

Conversion of the World in Millennium

Some expect an actual return of the Lord—but a long way off—supposing the Church must first convert the world. Others believe that each time a sinner converts, that is part of Christ's coming. Then, when the world is all converted, Jesus will have fully come. However, many Scriptures indicate that at the time of our Lord's second coming the world will be far from being converted to God. In Luke 21:27-35

Jesus, speaking of his return and coming Kingdom, says "take heed to yourselves lest ... that day come upon you unawares, for as a snare shall it come on all them (not taking heed) that dwell on the face of the whole earth." In 2 Timothy 3:1-4 the Apostle Paul tells us, "In the last days ... men shall be ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Revelation 1:7 states that at Christ's return, "All kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."

Clearly the world is not converted when Christ returns. On the contrary, the Scriptures teach that Christ comes before the conversion of the world, for the purpose of converting the world! The Church is tested now in order to share with Jesus in blessing the world later in His promised Kingdom. "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4; 3:21).

Gospel Sent as a Witness to Nations

Those who expect the world to be converted first, cite Matthew 24:14, "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." But a "witness" to the world does not guarantee a conversion of the world. The Bible reached "all nations" of the earth during the 1800s, but the world has not been converted. The Apostle James tells us (Acts 15:14) that the work of the present Age is the calling of a Church class, "a people for his name." Afterward will come the conversion of the world in the next Age.

Another objection cites Psalm 110:1, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" as though Jesus is sitting on some material throne in the heavens waiting until all enemies are subdued for him. Yet verses 2 through 7 clearly show our Lord Jesus active in subduing his enemies. His place at the right hand of God symbolizes the authority God has given him to "subdue all things unto himself" (Phil 3:21). As a president or prime minister may have a "right-hand man" to act for him, so Jesus is at the "right hand" of God. He is "sitting on the right hand of power" at his coming (Matthew 26:64), and remains there during the Millennial Age—and forever.

Purpose of First and Second Advents

The first and second advents of Jesus are parts of one Plan. The purpose of the first advent was to provide a "ransom" to redeem the world (1 Timothy 2:6). The purpose of the second advent is to raise and restore the race redeemed by that ransom. The long interim between the two advents, in which Satan has been permitted to continue his rule, has been used to test and prove the elect "Bride" class. When this work is complete, Satan's influence will be removed, and Jesus, with his bride, will offer life to all the families of the earth.

Once the ransom price had been paid, the restoring of the world could have commenced at once, as the Apostles at first expected (Acts 1:6). However, the reign of Christ has been separated from his sufferings by these twenty centuries in order to prepare his Church to reign with him in his Kingdom.

If God had not planned this special calling for His saints, then Jesus' first advent would not have taken place when it did, but would have come at the time decreed for the second advent. God planned 6,000 years for the permission of evil, and the seventh millennium for cleansing and restitution. The period between the ransom for all and the blessing of all has been just long enough for selecting "joint heirs" to reign with Christ in blessing the world.

Thus, when Jesus ascended to heaven, he left earth "until the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). Far from being converted when Jesus returns, the nations are "angry" (Revelation 11:18). This does not mean that God has failed at converting the world; it means God has not yet attempted to convert the world. When He does, during the Millennium, the world will indeed be converted. "My Word ... shall not return unto me void ... it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isaiah 55:11).

Some churches suppose that God will do nothing more than choose His Church, but calling the Church is only the first step in reclaiming the world. The Scriptures tell us that the Church will reign with Christ to bless all nations (Revelation 3:21; Daniel 7:27; Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8,29).

Election and Free Grace

For centuries Christians were divided on the subjects of Election and Free Grace. In fact, both are taught in the Scriptures, therefore, they both must be true, but in no way can they be reconciled except by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). With a proper understanding of God's Plan of the Ages and its operation through time, we can reconcile these two doctrines. Election applies to the past and present Ages. Free Grace applies to the Millennium.

Election is not arbitrary or fatalistic. God's election, or selection, is based on fitness and adaptability for His purposes. Abraham was elected, or

chosen, because he was a man of faith. God determined through his line, "all the families of the earth" will be blessed (Genesis 12:2,3). This favor passed on to Isaac and to Jacob and then to the nation of Israel. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). This election had many privileges, but it also had responsibilities. Israel was delivered from Egypt, they were protected from their enemies, miracles were done on their behalf, and they were given a Law from heaven. They were also punished with droughts and famines and captivity by their enemies when they were disobedient. When Jesus came, the blessing of the Gospel was exclusively theirs at first (Matthew 15:24). Because of their rejection of the blessings offered them, they were cast off from God's favor and the Gospel went out to the Gentiles. Still, the message has not gone out equally to all the nations of the earth. Though the Gospel is free to all who hear, some parts of the world seem to have been more favored than others. Now during the ending of this Age, the Gospel is reaching truth hungry people everywhere.

In the next age it will be different. God's Grace will be offered freely to everyone. Every man, woman and child on earth will be given an opportunity for everlasting life. Even the dead of past ages will be raised to hear that call. "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (John 5:28, 29; Isaiah 35:10). The promise God made in Eden, that the seed of the woman would "bruise" (crush) the head of the serpent, will be fulfilled by Christ and his Church. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20, Genesis 3:15). Now people groan, waiting for a better day, but they do not realize what they seek. Paul explains, "The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:22,19, NAS).

When the Church, the chaste bride class, has been fully developed and completed, she will be exalted with Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7; 21:9). Then, as the second Adam and Eve, Jesus and his Bride, through the holy Spirit will offer life worldwide. "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Revelation 22:17

Justification by Faith in Jesus

The Population Reference Bureau estimates well over 100 billion human beings have lived on this earth. Only about a third of today's population even claims to be Christian—and even fewer in past centuries. This means that the vast majority have died without faith in Jesus. Are they forever lost? Every thinking Christian yearns for a reasonable answer to this question consistent with God's just and loving character. There are various opinions:

PREDESTINATION: Most are not elected to be saved; they go to a hell of torture forever.

IGNORANCE: Without believing in Jesus, a good person may go to heaven forever.

ATHEISM: There is no afterlife; no one will ever live again.

Many kind-hearted Christians seem to believe that even those who die in ignorance will somehow be saved. For if God is loving, how could so many be lost? Yet the Scriptures clearly link salvation to belief:

•"By grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8).

•"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

•"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

•"There is none other name ... whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

•"How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14).

So knowledge and acceptance of Christ are necessary to achieve everlasting salvation, and this is what God's Plan offers. Because Jesus died for Adam and all his race, the world will be raised to life during the Millennium, and then come to a knowledge of Christ (1 Timothy 2:4). Then by reformation and obedience to God, they can achieve everlasting life.

Conscience Not Sufficient to Save

Some may argue that the light of conscience may save those ignorant of Christ. This idea is based on Paul's comment that the Gentiles "are a law unto themselves" (Romans 2:14). Paul's point, however, is that the Gentiles are condemned by conscience, not justified by it. People often transgress even the light of their own consciences (Romans 3:19; 7:18,19).

Even Israel, which had a written Law, was condemned by it rather than justified by it. "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in his [God's] sight" (Romans 3:20). If an Israelite kept "the whole law and yet offended in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Paul shows us that the only release possible from sin and death is by the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Experience had "proved both Jews and Gentiles ... are all under sin. As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one ... they are all gone out of the way" (Romans 3:9-12). Thus the Scriptures close every door of hope save one, showing that none may secure eternal life by meritorious work and ignorance is equally useless. If ignorance were a ground for salvation, then why spend money and labor on missionary work? Surely it would be more charitable to leave the people in ignorance if that is an acceptable path to salvation! No, ignorance does not bring salvation. Those who seek salvation now must come to Christ.

As for the vast majority of the world both living and dead, their time will be in the Millennium. Then all will learn of God and the sacrifice Jesus made for them. By accepting their Redeemer, and walking up the "way of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8), they can then gain everlasting life.

Individuals Not Predestined

Calvinism teaches that each person is already predestined—either to salvation or to be lost. Can this possibly be true? The Scriptures tell us that the Gospel is “good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10). Certainly this is not a message of bad news and unavoidable condemnation for billions of people. Did the Apostles preach the Gospel in vain, unaware that their efforts could change nothing? Are those who died as infants and everyone else not predestined to life lost forever? No, God has a better way.

The Bible does not teach there are now several ways of salvation—one by faith in Jesus, one by ignorance, one by predestination. There is only one way of salvation: Faith in the death of Jesus for our sins. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me” (John 14:6, NAS).

The Gospel really is good news. It really is for “ALL people” (Luke 2:10). Christ died for all (1 Timothy 2:5,6; Hebrews 2:9; Romans 5:18). The benefits of his death come to the world in two Ages of redemption—the present Gospel Age for the calling of a Church, the elect “Bride of Christ,” then the Millennial Age for the restoration of all the remainder of mankind. During that Age, the entire world will learn of God and of His Son Jesus who died for them. Those who become obedient will live forever.

A Ransom For All

Anyone with a spark of love or pity in his heart would be concerned for the eternal destiny of the billions of their fellow men. God is the very essence of love (1 John 4:8). Would not He be even more deeply concerned? Would He not plan for their welfare? He would—and He has.

God loved the world enough to give His own Son for them (John 3:16). This argues forcefully that He would make sure everyone learned of this in a convincing way; so they would be able to believe and accept what He has done for them. This will be accomplished in the Kingdom of Christ. Satan will be bound, the dead will be raised, and the Truth will become worldwide (Habakkuk 2:14).

John 1:9 says, Jesus “was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” Was that an exaggeration? Paul said Jesus gave himself “a ransom for ALL” (1 Timothy 2:5,6). Did he overstate himself? The angel told the shepherds he had “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL people” (Luke 2:10). Was this an exaggeration?

No, these glorious promises are all “yea, and ... Amen,” in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). He died “for every man,” and every woman, and every child (Hebrews 2:9). When this age closes, the world will see how wonderful God’s morning of joy will be (Psalm 30:5).

The “ransom” (“corresponding price,” Young’s Concordance) is the price Jesus gave—his own human life. Jesus accepted the penalty of death imposed upon Adam (Romans 5:18,19). As a result, Adam and all Adam’s children can be freed from the penalty. God’s Plan for applying that release for the world is during the Millennium. Then through Jesus Christ, God will establish a just government, remove the deceptive influence of Satan (Revelation 20:3), and train the world in righteousness.

Then “all” will have the opportunity—and responsibility—to appreciate the “ransom for all.” Everyone may receive everlasting life as God offered it to Adam and Eve in the beginning. Obedience will again be the test which all who attain life at the close of the Millennium must pass (Revelation 20:7-9).

First Real Opportunity

When a person dies, “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Ecclesiastes 11:3 also says, “The place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” In the resurrection, a person will come back as he was when he died. Then God through Jesus will lead him to knowledge and understanding in righteousness. God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

The anointed Church is the “first fruits” of redemption. When all the members of the Church class have been raised to glory, then the Kingdom of Christ will be established. The rest of the world will then be raised. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ [Head and body] the first fruits; after that those who are Christ’s [by right of purchase by his own precious blood] at His coming [presence]” (1 Corinthians 15:22,23, NAS).

Through his disobedience, father Adam lost for himself and for all his children yet unborn, life, blessing, and fellowship with God. Since Eden, none have been able to escape the experience of evil and its consequences. When Adam’s children arise from their graves they will, for the first time, experience the goodness of God. In the Kingdom, Satan will be bound and no hindrance will be there to impede their growth in righteousness. Every step of progress will be rewarded. The characters they have sown in this life will make it easier for some, harder for others, but ALL will have their first full opportunity to obey perfectly and live forever!

All Saved, But Two Salvations

God’s salvation for ALL does not conflict with freedom of the will and liberty of choice. All will be saved from Adamic condemnation either now or during the next Age. “God ... is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Timothy 4:10).

Those saved now from Adamic condemnation through faith justification are called to a heavenly salvation. They need to overcome the world, the flesh and Satan, and “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). “If we suffer [with Christ], we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

Salvation will be offered to the rest of the world during Christ’s Kingdom. Their success will depend upon complying with the laws of Christ’s Kingdom. The speed of their progress will depend on two things: (1) The handicaps of character from one’s previous life, and (2) Their degree of love for the King, his laws and righteousness. Many who were previously noble unbelievers will make rapid progress.

In both the Christian Age and the Millennial Age, any enlightened who “draw back” will be in danger of “destruction” (Hebrews 10:38,39, NAS). With all the benefits of the Kingdom, those who refuse to reform “shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is

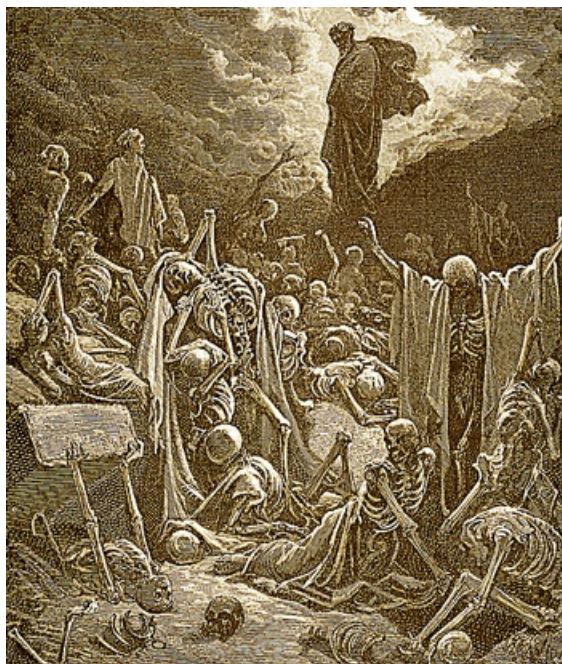
[represents] the second death" (Revelation 21:8). "Fire" is a symbol of destruction.

Thus the "ransom for all" applies to every human being. All are condemned in the first Adam, (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47) but all who accept the second Adam, Jesus, receive life. "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation ... by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

The prophet Jeremiah said, "In those days, they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge, but every one [who dies] shall die for his own iniquity" (Jeremiah 31:29,30). Adam ate the "sour grape" of sin and brought misery upon all his children. In the Restitution Kingdom Day, Adam's children will no longer die for Adam's sin. Each person will be responsible for his own eternal destiny.

The "Resurrection" of Israel

"The times of restitution" were "spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets" (Acts 3:19-21). The restoration of Israel is part of that testimony (Acts 1:6). Ezekiel 37 contains the famous vision of "a valley of dry bones," representing the hopes of Israel. First, the bones were gathered out of their "graves," secondly, tendons and flesh were added, and finally the breath of life came into them. This vision represents the restoration of Israel as a nation which we see being fulfilled in our day—never to be "pulled up" again (Amos 9:15).



The Apostle Paul said Israel would be cast away until the elect Bride is complete. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:25, 26). When the Bride class is complete, God "will give [Israel] an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:5-7; 31:28; 32:40-42; 33:6-16).

Many of the prophecies and promises of future blessing apply to Israel alone, but Israel was also a type [symbolical]. Israel's priesthood was typical of the body of Christ, the "Royal Priesthood," with its "better sacrifices" and real atonement (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 9:23; Leviticus 16:6,24; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 5:11). Israel itself was sometimes symbolic of the world.

The Restoration of the Sodomites

Surely, if we find the restitution of the Sodomites clearly taught in the Bible (Ezekiel 16:48-63), we may feel satisfied that "restitution" will apply to everyone (Acts 3:19-21). They were not a righteous people, but neither was Israel, nor were we before being justified by faith (Romans 3:10; 5:1). The sin of Sodom was so great that God rained down fire from heaven and destroyed them because of their gross wickedness (Genesis 19:24; Luke 17:29).

Still, Jesus said Sodom was not as responsible as the Jews of Capernaum (Matthew 11:23). "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee [Capernaum]" (Matthew 11:24). Neither had full knowledge, yet Capernaum sinned against more light than Sodom. Nevertheless, both will come back during the thousand-year Millennial Kingdom, the "day of judgment" (2 Peter 3:7,8).

Sodom—A Daughter To Israel

The Prophet Ezekiel spoke of the Kingdom as an opportunity for both Israel and Sodom. Ezekiel lamented the abominations of Samaria (capital of northern Israel), and compared her abominations with those of "Sodom your sister" (Ezekiel 16:48-63, NAS). Sisters in sin! But the prophecy ends with hope for both of them. They have been prisoners in their graves, but God will release them. He will "restore their captivity ... [and] return [them] to their former state" (verses 53,55, NAS). Amazingly, Ezekiel concludes by saying "I will establish an everlasting covenant with you [Judah] ... and I will give them [Sodom and Samaria] to you as daughters" (verses 60,61, NAS).

That "everlasting covenant" is God's "new covenant" with a better mediator than Moses! "The days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). This promise is guaranteed by Great Jehovah—"I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 16:62, NAS).

“The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob,” and “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26-29, NAS). Through Israel the blessings will flow out to the world (Zechariah 8:23). Then the “ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6) will extend to everyone. It will bring “Liberty to [all] the captives” (Isaiah 61:1). Everyone—Sodom, Samaria, Judah, and all the Gentiles—will have an opportunity for everlasting life.

Inhabitants of Earth to Learn Righteousness

Thus, our privilege as Christians is to announce that Christ will open the graves and set at “liberty the captives.” The peoples of earth will be restored to “their former estate”—a restitution! Then will be the time “when judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9). Just as we as Christians have experienced the mercy of God forgiving our sins—we rejoice in the prospect of the whole world benefiting by the New Covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Yes, Israel is “beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:28, 29, NAS). Yes, Jews, Sodomites and all mankind will be amazed when they find out how much “God so loved the WORLD ” (John 3:16)!

Many will be amazed that God’s plan is so broad. Throughout history the Jews supposed the promises of God were reserved for them. Today, some Christians think the promises of God are reserved only for them. In fact, God has blessings for the entire world through the Church and Israel. As we approach the time for ALL to be blessed, let us rejoice at the prospect.

Election of a Few—to Bless The Many With Grace!

How glorious is God’s Plan! The Election of a few—the Church—will bring God’s infinite Grace to the many. Calvinism teaches predestination using as a basis “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Thus they wrongly conclude God has doomed the vast majority to an eternity of torture. God does have omniscience, but two essential qualities of His greatness are overlooked—His love and justice. The God we love is just and merciful. “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face” (Psalm 89:14).

Free Grace (Arminianism), presents God as a being full of loving and benevolent designs for his creatures, but one lacking in ability and foreknowledge. Was God surprised when Satan used the serpent to tempt Eve to sin with Adam? Is God disappointed that so few have heard the Gospel, and even fewer faithfully follow His Son? Is Satan the winner? No, God was not surprised, and God is not disappointed. What God planned will certainly succeed. God provided the solution to man’s fall before it even happened. Jesus was “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

All who died because of Adam’s sin will live again! “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The doctrines of Election and Free Grace can be harmonized beautifully only by understanding the timing of God’s Plan of the Ages. Jesus provided the “Ransom” at his first advent. The Church is now being completed. The next step will accomplish the purpose of his second advent—the restoration of all things (Acts 3:19-21).

The world is waiting for the completion of Jesus’ Church. “The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19, NAS). As Christians, we hail every evidence of Jesus’ return because it shall truly bring “great joy ... to all people” (Luke 2:10).

STUDY SEVEN: WHY GOD PERMITS EVIL IN HIS PLAN

Evil is anything bad or morally wrong which causes unhappiness, injury, suffering, pain, ruin, or death. Perhaps there is nothing more challenging and confusing to man's faith in a loving and just God than the dominance of evil in our world. All of man's sorrows trace back to one cause—sin. Why did not God prevent man's fall into sin? Adam and Eve were created perfect. Why did God allow Satan, in the form of a serpent, to tempt them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree?

The Enduring Practical Lesson of Evil

There are some things God cannot do! It is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). Also, "He cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Therefore, God can only choose the wisest and best plan for preparing His creatures for a life in eternity. Certainly, God could have prevented Satan's temptation, but God allowed it for an enduring practical lesson for men and angels. God wanted man to experience and see the natural consequences of sin for a wise purpose. Jehovah is "not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" (Psalm 5:4). God is permitting evil for a time, but what He has planned for man will more than compensate for all the pain and suffering this object lesson has caused.

Every right principle has an opposite wrong principle: truth and falsity, love and hatred, etc. A principle that is right ultimately produces harmony, happiness and good. A principle that is wrong produces harm, unhappiness and evil. Humans were created with an ability to choose between right and wrong—a conscience. However, man's moral sense has been affected by the fall; some more and some less.

A dog has some intelligence and can make choices based on training gained by certain rewards or punishments from his master. A dog, however, is ignorant of the moral quality of its actions. When a dog rescues or harms somebody, the action cannot be considered either virtuous or sinning; it is merely the result of instinct, not ethics. On the contrary, people do have more or less of a moral sense. When they do good, it is virtuous. When they do evil, it is sinful.

God Did Not Make Man A Robot

God could have made man a robot to always do what is right, but then he would not have been in God's "image" (Genesis 1:26, 27). God could have shielded man from Satan's temptation, but then man would still have been subject to ambitions from within. As a result, his future would always have been uncertain.

In God's wisdom, He foreknew that what is good can best be appreciated by its contrast. When God expelled disobedient Adam and Eve from His fellowship in the Garden of Eden, they began to learn the exceedingly sinfulness of sin. They began to "know good and evil" (Genesis 3:22)—and to appreciate the difference. During all the centuries thereafter, their posterity has been learning the lesson of evil. Later, during God's Kingdom, mankind will fully experience the contrasting benefits of good.

The moral sense of Adam was an important feature of his likeness to God, but after 6,000 years of degradation, man's natural moral sense has been largely reduced. Now sin is often more agreeable to people than good.

If the opportunity to sin were not permitted, man could not have resisted it, and there would be neither virtue nor merit in his right-doing. But God wishes intelligent and willing obedience, not mechanical service. God already had many animate and inanimate creations to His glory. In creating man, His design was to make an intelligent creature in His own likeness; a master for earth, whose conduct would be based on the value of right over wrong, good over evil.

The principles of right and wrong have always existed, but only the principle of right will continue to be active forever. The activity of wrong will continue only long enough to accomplish God's purpose. Then evil will forever cease (1 Corinthians 15:25,26).

Learning By Experience

Could the knowledge of sin have come in some other way? Could the dreadful evils the human race has experienced been avoided? Not in so effective and lasting a way. There are four methods of learning: Intuition, Observation, Experience, and Information.

Only God has intuitive knowledge. He knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). Therefore, man's knowledge of good and evil could not be intuitive. Adam had a knowledge of evil by information, but that proved insufficient to keep him from trying the experiment. Man might have learned by observation, but in order to observe the results of sin, there had to be a demonstration of it somewhere in the universe. Why shouldn't man be the illustration? The Scriptures tell us that man's experience with sin and evil is, in fact, being observed by the angels (1 Corinthians 4:9). However, the deepest learning is gained by practical experience, and that is primarily how mankind is learning—by personal experience with evil.

Adam did experience good in the garden, but his knowledge of evil was only from information: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). He had no experience of sin with which to predict the pain and suffering that would come. Consequently, he yielded to temptation when it arose.

Adam's offense may seem small compared to the penalty, but at stake was the fundamental principle of obedience. Obedience is essential to the everlasting blessing of God's creation. God above knows what is best for His creation's welfare and everlasting happiness.

Adam was induced into sin through his wife, whose communication with God was more limited than Adam's. Eve transgressed what she knew was right. But she was deceived by the serpent as to the consequences (2 Corinthians 11:3). Adam, however, was not deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam willfully shared in Eve's disobedience, evidently choosing not to live without her.

Thus both Adam and Eve were "in the transgression," and both were cursed. Eve shared in the sentence which she helped bring upon Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Created With Freedom of Choice

God created man with freedom of choice, even though He foresaw that man's moral nature would stray. God is permitting man's present experience with evil to teach him the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The result will develop in mankind more love and appreciation for the Creator and demonstrate the brilliance of virtue in contrast.

However, though God permitted sin, God did not cause sin. God did not force our first parents into sin. Adam and Eve had the power of choice and could have chosen obedience; just as children can choose to obey or disobey their parents. Man, designed to be lord of the earth, certainly had this power, and God allowed him to exercise choice and learn from the experience. Meanwhile, because of His great love for man, God planned to redeem His human creation from the consequences of Adam's choice. In God's Kingdom, under better circumstances, another opportunity for a better choice will be offered to people.

“Evil” Can Mean “Calamity”

God is not responsible for evil in a moral sense. There are two Scriptures which might seem to imply that He is, but the explanation is in the meaning of the word “evil.” Sin is always an evil, but an evil is not always a sin. Calamities are often referred to as evils. In this second sense, God may bring evils—calamities—as punishments.

In the books of Isaiah and Amos, God said He would protect Israel from disasters if they were faithful, but if they forsook Him, He would bring calamities (“evils,” KJV) upon them. In the two Scriptures below this is the case. Note how the New American Standard translation clarifies the meaning of each text:

Isaiah 45:7

KJV—“I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

NAS—“... creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.” Amos 3:6

KJV—“Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?”

NAS—“If a calamity occurs in a city, has not the LORD done it?”

The same Hebrew word translated “calamity” is sometimes translated “affliction,” “trouble” and “adversity.” God is not the author of sin or immorality, but because of some of Israel's poor choices, they were chastised with a “calamity” or trouble sent by God.

The Just Penalty For Sin

God has the power to force man to worship Him, but this is not His desire. God seeks the worship of man from a free heart, willingly, “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), and this is in the best interests of His creatures. During the Millennium, the world will worship God of their own choice, appreciating God for His goodness.

In the meantime, God allows man to learn by practical experience. He allows man to taste sin and its consequences. He has also planned for man's recovery by providing a Savior at great cost. In due time, the “ransom for all” will be appreciated by the world as a remarkable gift from God (1 Timothy 2:3-6). Thus man's misuse of free will was foreknown and overruled for their good.

Some might agree that imposing the penalty upon Adam was just, but think it unjust that all of his descendants suffer the results. The question is, “Would we have done better if tried individually? Would not at least the majority have been tempted to disobey eventually?”

By allowing Adam to pass his condemned life on to us all, God allows experience with death and dying to educate us all. Then, because we were all condemned in one man, we could all be redeemed by one man—Jesus. God's standard of justice is “a life for a life” (Exodus 21:22-24). Thus, God's arrangement actually proves to be a very great blessing. If we had been individually tested and individually condemned, it would have required a Redeemer for each one who sinned.

Death is a reasonable consequence for sin. Those who, after having a full experience and knowledge of sin and its suffering, do not choose to follow the wise counsels of God would be a source of unhappiness to themselves and others. There is no reason to continue their existence for the ages of eternity. The present dying process that mankind experiences is a somber lesson to impress the gravity of disobedience.

Meanwhile, life even as we have it now is a favor and is so esteemed by the vast majority. From cradle to grave, life has blessings sufficient so that nearly everyone wants to keep living. It is a small foretaste of the everlasting, wonderful and glorious life God plans for all who will accept His reasonable terms for life.

Penalty of Death—Not Torture

Sadly, many have misrepresented God's character and intention by saying that God plans to punish unbelievers with eternal torture. This is very wrong! God's penalty for sin is clearly stated: “You shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17, NAS). “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “The soul [person, being] that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Only a few texts in the symbolic book of Revelation, or in the parables of Jesus, suggest a torment of fire. In each of these cases it can be demonstrated that fire represents destruction. The penalty for sin is death—not life in torture.†

† The “lake of fire” in Revelation is merely a symbol of destruction, “second death” (Revelation 20:14). The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is acknowledged by thoughtful commentaries to be a parable. The Rich Man represents Judah and Benjamin and his “five brethren” represent the other 10 tribes of Israel, who “have Moses and the prophets.” The fiery tribulation represents the fiery trials Israel experienced after rejecting their Messiah (compare Deuteronomy 32:22-26). Lazarus, received into the bosom of Abraham, represents the outcasts of Israel and the Gentiles who embraced the spiritual features of the Abrahamic Covenant by accepting Jesus, the “seed of Abraham.”

Condemnation to death passed upon the whole human race by one man's disobedience. One man sinned with an unborn race in him. Thus he and all his posterity were condemned. That condemnation could only be removed by the death of one perfect man who would take the condemnation we deserve upon himself. That one unblemished man, a perfect race unborn within him, was “the man Christ Jesus” who died a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5) to satisfy the demands of justice against Adam and his race.

Church to Bless Mankind

The first to be blessed by this redemption is the Church. They are lifted up out of condemnation by the merit of Christ's sacrifice for their justification. After the Church is completed in glory, Christ will resurrect the remainder of mankind and offer them everlasting life on earth. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed ... and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus will adopt Adam's children as his own—with the Church as his Bride.

Jesus promised, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth" (John 5:28, 29). Paul affirms, "In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Those who did not have "part in the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6) will then have an opportunity to come alive again in the "world to come." Then "whosoever will" may "take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

Mankind's First Real Opportunity

This opportunity for reformation during the Kingdom seems to some as though it is "a second chance" for life. Certainly for Adam and Eve, it will be, but for all others, it will be their first full opportunity. When Adam disobeyed, "judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Romans 5:18). Adam lacked the experience which would have developed in him full confidence in God's laws and character. After experience with the consequences of sin—with Satan bound so he cannot deceive and under a New Covenant with a better mediator—the world will have a full, blessed opportunity for everlasting life (Hebrews 12:24).

Though Satan will be bound, perfect obedience will not be immediately expected (Revelation 20:3), but progress must be made! Man will come out of the grave with the same mind that went into it. Physical and mental perfection will be achieved gradually. Moral perfection will be required by the close of the Millennial Kingdom. Then at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be loosed for a "little season" to test the true heart condition of those who might be only outwardly obedient (Revelation 20:7-9). An individual's trial for life in the future at the close of the Millennium will be more favorable than Adam's trial in Eden. By then mankind will have had a full experience with evil, suffering, heartache, death, and also with righteousness and its blessings of life, joy, peace. They will know the distinction firsthand and make a better choice than Adam did. However, even with all the advantages of the Kingdom, a few will rebel. Some, like Satan their leader, will refuse all of God's goodness and mercy. They will be destroyed in "second death" (Revelation 21:8), never more to trouble anyone else or themselves.

Would Another Plan Work?

Could this misery which the world has experienced for 6,000 years have been avoided? If God had arranged a favorable Edenic condition for all, with individual trials for all, so that only the disobedient would suffer, would the result have been better?

Suppose that one-fourth, or even one-half, might have gained life in such a trial. They might still forever feel a curiosity about things forbidden. Their service and worship of God would never be as whole hearted—not having tasted both "good and evil" (Genesis 2:17).

What would be the fate of the half who did sin and die? Might that great number of sinners be redeemed in some way? Justice might allow this, but a separate ransomer willing to sacrifice his life would be required for each one individually condemned. Then 50 billion of perfect obedient ones would have to die to redeem 50 billion sinners. Such a plan would involve no less suffering than is at present experienced.

First, God's Plan is the most logical and efficient one for man's glorious eternal destiny. All are allowed to learn by experience the fruits of sin. Because all are condemned in one man, all can be redeemed by one man. Thus, Jesus was a "ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). As the reward for Jesus' service, God "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named" (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

Secondly, God planned the selection of a "little flock" to follow in Jesus' footsteps. These members, now on trial for life, are invited to develop a character of perfect love under the present reign of evil. This true Church will be "joint heirs" with Christ and reign with him in his kingdom (Romans 8:17; Revelation 19:7; 3:21; 20:6).

Then, during the Millennium, Christ and the Church will raise all the dead from their graves, teach the Truth universally, and reclaim all the willing and obedient of the entire human race. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

The Great Plan of Restoration

Because of God's permission of evil, His great Plan of redemption will be gloriously successful! All the misery, pain and tragedy caused by evil will be more than offset by the wonderful blessings of the Kingdom.

Mankind will benefit eternally from the experience with evil. This experience will also be a monumental demonstration of God's glorious character to the angelic hosts. All will see God's Justice in condemning disobedience. All will see God's immeasurable Love in sending His own Son to satisfy justice in order to redeem us. All will see God's Power in the perfect uniting in Christ of all His intelligent creation "both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). All will see God's far-seeing Wisdom in using even unwilling agents to accomplish the glorious destiny planned for His creation.

God's law of the universe for all intelligent beings is summed up in one word: LOVE. Because "God is love" (1 John 4:8), He has chosen the very best plan for us all.

Ultimately, when God's purpose in the temporary permission of evil is complete, everyone will appreciate what He has done. Until then, with the eye of faith we look forward to the time when all mankind will be restored, as planned since the world began (Acts 3:19-21).

STUDY EIGHT: GOD'S JUDGMENT DAY

"GOD hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained"—"Jesus Christ, the righteous."
"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (Acts 17:31; 1 John 2:1; John 5:22).

Most Christians have a frightening concept of "the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9). They expect Jesus to return and sit on a Great White Throne amidst great calamities of nature such as falling mountains, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. They think sinners will be called up from hell to hear their sins reviewed and then returned to their eternal doom. They think saints will be called down from heaven to witness all the despair of the condemned, and then return to glory. The general concept of the Judgment Day—a literal 24-hour day—is actually supposed to be a repetition of what had been already decided at death!

But this is not the Scriptural view. It is drawn from a literal interpretation of the Parable of Jesus' dividing "his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-46), and a literal view of the Great White Throne scene of Revelation 20. But Revelation is a book of symbols, and parables are stories with illustrations not to be taken literally. Why would goats go into everlasting fire and sheep to heaven?

What do the Scriptures actually teach about the great Judgment Day? What harmonious picture are all the symbols and parables meant to show?

The Thousand-Year Day of Judgment

The term "judgment" (krisis, Greek) means more than a verdict. Its meaning includes a trial with a decision that can go either way—as in a crisis (English). Although "day" can signify twenty-four hours, it often has a wider meaning—such as Noah's Day, Washington's day, or "the day of temptation in the wilderness," which was forty years (Hebrews 3:8,9).

The Apostle Peter identifies the "day of judgment" as "a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:7, 8). It is the Millennial "day of Christ" in which Christ will reign, and "judge the world in righteousness." During that age of judgment, the world will be granted a trial for life as well as a verdict (Philippians 2:16; Acts 17:31). "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). When we consider all the work to be accomplished for earth's billions, this wider meaning of "day" is most logical.

Other Judgments in God's Plan

Although mankind as a whole will yet have a Thousand-Year Judgment Day for trial and sentencing, there have been other judgment days in the past. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, the whole human race was sentenced to death as a result. "Dying thou shalt die" (Genesis 2:17, margin).

"As in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Every ache, pain or funeral is evidence of that universal sentence, but because mankind will be recovered from Adam's penalty, death is really like a temporary "sleep" (John 11:11-14).

Only the Church of consecrated believers in Christ have now by faith "escaped" from this original penalty (2 Peter 2:20). After being given "exceeding great and precious promises," if they "abound" in godliness and love, they will receive an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:4-11). They alone are on trial for life or death now before the world's time for judgment. The Church, as the "first-fruits" of redemption, will inherit immortality—divine nature (James 1:18; Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53). The rest of humanity will have an opportunity for life everlasting as earthly sons in the future.

Has God changed His mind because the first sentence was too severe? No, not at all. "I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). God provided the redemption and recovery plan from the beginning! Before Adam sinned, God planned for our Redeemer to "taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 13:8).

The Appointed Judge

God has "committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). With Jesus as Judge, there is nothing to dread. He is the one who so loved us, that he even died for us (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). In fact, the Judgment Day is something to look forward to, for it will be a time of recovery for the world. Though Jesus himself was always perfect, he was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15). He was sympathetic, and "moved with compassion" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus will have sympathy for the infirmities and weaknesses of mankind and bring all the willing back to the original perfection lost in Eden.

A judge in ancient times was one who executed justice and relieved the oppressed. For instance, when Israel was under oppression, they cried to God and He raised up judges to deliver them (Judges 3:9-11). Today the world is still crying for help. In God's due time, Jesus, as judge, will give that help to all. Jesus provided redemption for the world. Surely he will bless the world. "With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity" (Psalm. 98:9).

Tests of the Day of Judgment

This second trial will be more favorable than the first trial. Everything will be done to help the world out of sin. Satan will be bound to "deceive the nations no more" (Revelation 20:1-3). If one falls short of perfection then, it will be because he willfully resists the blessings then open. The trial for life will take the entire Day of Judgment, reaching its climax at the end.

Those who refuse to obey will die. However, it will not be because of Adam's sin but their own. "The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge; but [then] ... every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Jeremiah 31:29,30; Ezekiel 18:2-4, 20).

The penalty for willful sin, against full light and knowledge, will be "second death" (Revelation 20:14,15; 21:8). Everyone will have been given ample time and the fullest opportunity for progress, before such a judgment is imposed. "As a lad shall one die a hundred years old; and as a sinner shall be accursed he who dieth at a hundred years old" (Isaiah. 65:20, Leeser).

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats tells us the world will come divided into two classes—those who reform, and do good, and those who will not (Matthew 25:31-46). The judgment of individuals will be based on whether they develop perfect love for God, as demonstrated in expressing love and care for one's neighbor. At the end of the Day of Judgment, Satan will be loosed for a "little season" (Revelation 20:3). Those without perfect love in their hearts will manifest themselves by rebelling against the government of the Kingdom (Revelation 20:8,9). They will then be destroyed in Second Death—from which there is no recovery.

Present Accountability

Thus there is a wonderful opportunity for the world in the future Day of Judgment to gain everlasting life! So does it matter what people do now, whether good or bad? Yes, it matters much. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3; Ecclesiastes 12:14). The good and evil deeds of the present time will receive a reward either now or later. "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some they follow after" (1 Timothy 5:24).

Everything a person does now affects the character they come back with in the resurrection (Galatians 6:7). Thus, some will have it easier on the "highway of holiness" (Isaiah 35:1-10, NAS). Some will have it difficult—and a few will not make it.

Earthly and Heavenly Judges

During the six thousand years between the first judgment in Eden and the Day of Judgment in the Kingdom, God has been disciplining and training judges to assist Christ Jesus.

Even before Jesus opened up "a new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20), faithful servants of God—such as Abraham, Moses, David, and Jeremiah—were being selected by God. Because of their faith, these "ancient worthies" will receive a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:1-40) and become "judges," or leaders, on earth (Isaiah 1:26). They will have a reward on earth as leaders of the world during the Millennium.

Those called during the present "Gospel Age" have a higher calling. They will rule with Christ from heaven (Revelation 20:6). "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2).

The faithful of the Old Testament were servants and friends of God, but the Church has the higher privilege of being sons of God. "Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant ... But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrew 3:5-6). Both "houses" will be agents of God in the blessing of the world. The trial and testing of both these classes has been much more severe than it will be for the world in the Day of Judgment. They have had to withstand the snares of Satan (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11), as the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). They will have thus proven themselves abundantly able to give mankind the instruction and training necessary for their final testing and judgment. Satan will be "bound" during the Thousand Years (Revelation 20:1-3) so that he cannot trouble the world while they learn righteousness.

During the Day of Judgment, righteousness will be rewarded, while during the preceding ages, righteousness often met with suffering or persecution. Therefore, though the trial of these two special companies has been much more severe than the future trial of the world, their rewards and privileges also will be greater.

Rejoice! He Comes to Judge!

Satan, through his deceptions, has robbed both the world and many in the churches of the blessed assurances of the righteousness of the coming "Day of Judgment." As a result, many are fearful and have pushed it far away in time. Others use its dread as a tool for inspiring people to "accept Jesus and be saved." How differently did the prophets and apostles regard that promised Day of Judgment by Jehovah through His chosen representative!

"Let the heavens be glad, And let the earth rejoice; And let men say among the nations, Jehovah reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; Let the fields rejoice, and all that are therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing aloud at the presence of Jehovah, BECAUSE HE COMETH TO JUDGE THE EARTH. O give thanks unto Jehovah, for He is good; For His mercy endureth forever."—1 Chronicles 16:31-34

Meanwhile, the whole creation "groans," anxiously waiting for "the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19-22, NAS). Though they do not yet know it, they are waiting for the great Judge to deliver and to bless the world and exalt and glorify the Church! All will then come forth from their graves for a favorable trial by education and discipline for the reward of eternal life.

STUDY NINE: RANSOM, RESTITUTION AND RESURRECTION

“And He [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:20,21

The theme of “restitution of all things” when Jesus Christ returns at his second advent is woven throughout the Bible. This opportunity for “restitution” is guaranteed to all because Jesus gave himself as “a ransom for all” at his first advent (1 Timothy 2:6). Jesus died for everyone, so everyone will benefit. All creation, now under the “bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:21), will be delivered from the original death penalty on Adam. At his first advent, Jesus secured redemption. At his second advent, Jesus brings deliverance to all the willing.

An Individual Trial For Life

The Apostle Paul is most clear and emphatic on this subject. He says, “For to this end Christ died and lived again that he might be Lord [ruler, controller] both of the dead and living” (Romans 14:9). That is, the object of Jesus’ death was not merely to bless and rule over a few living followers in the Earth, but over all mankind—both the “quick [living] and the dead” (2 Timothy 4:1)—including even the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

As yet, comparatively few of the billions of mankind have entered into the blessings in Christ gained by acceptance of the “ransom for all” which Jesus died to provide. Why? Is God unwilling or unable to rescue the world from Adam’s condemnation? Not at all! God’s love and power and His purposes are unchangeable (Malachi 3:6). The “due time” in His Plan to release mankind from condemnation is during the “Times of Restitution” of Christ’s second advent.

The Bible has been translated into languages all over the world. This does not mean all have had a full opportunity for salvation. The fall suffered by disobedience in Eden has not injured all of Adam’s children alike. Some come into the world more depraved than others. Some have an environment more negative than others. Thus, some are more subject than others to Satan, the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). During the Millennium, everyone will have a full and complete opportunity for recovery.

Jesus’ ransom sacrifice does not give everlasting life or blessing to any man, nor does it excuse sin and automatically make sinners into saints for heaven! The ransom provides a release from the first condemnation and allows the opportunity for a second trial for life—an individual trial for every person. The first trial for life for mankind was in Eden. The second trial for life will be during the Kingdom established by Jesus Christ during his second advent. By then demonstrating obedience or disobedience, righteousness or sin, everlasting life will either be granted or lost. Every person who has ever lived may gain everlasting life if they use that opportunity properly.

This second trial will be complete and comprehensive. It will determine who would be “righteous” in a thousand trials—or who would be “filthy” under a thousand trials (Revelation 22:11). For 6,000 years, the world has been gaining a knowledge of evil and its bitter consequences through experience. This will prove a great advantage for them when their opportunity for life comes during the Millennium. Then they will be able to readily appreciate the surpassing blessings of righteousness.

When Christ is in control, individuals will be rewarded for every step of obedience, and by this means they will grow towards perfection. No more favorable trial or conditions could be imagined! During that time, there will be every assistance given to learn righteousness and walk up “the highway of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8,9). All who are willing will gradually improve until they are clean, perfect, and obedient children of God.

Those who willfully persist in sin, who deliberately prefer sin and evil, will be removed and experience a “second death” (Revelation 21:8). “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20)—and there will be no recovery from the second death.

The Church Now On Trial

Only a small number in this present Gospel Age choose to deny self, take up their cross and sacrifice with Jesus (Matthew 16:24; Romans 12:1). These are justified by faith through the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:1). God reckons to them all the blessings of restitution which will be provided for the world during the coming Age. Their imperfections and unavoidable weaknesses are covered by Christ’s “robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 3:5). These constitute members of Christ’s Church class, and they are tried in advance of the world for a special purpose. They are to become co-workers with Christ in blessing the world during the Millennial Kingdom.

There is a vast difference between the “first resurrection” of the Church (Revelation 20:6) and the later resurrection of humanity. The Church’s resurrection will be instantaneous to “glory, and honor and immortality” (Romans 2:7). The trial of the Church class has been under the difficult conditions of “this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4) in which they have had to suffer for “righteousness sake” (Matthew 5:10). For the world in the second resurrection, rather than suffering for righteousness sake, they will prosper for every step toward righteousness. The willing and obedient will gradually have their mental and physical weaknesses removed as they grow toward perfection during the Kingdom. Everlasting life on earth will be their reward.

The Glimmer of Hope

The original penalty imposed on mankind was death. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Consequently, all Adam’s posterity experience more or less suffering—and all eventually die. The penalty of sin was to die without any privilege of returning to life. But just as soon as Adam and Eve both sinned and the penalty was pronounced, a hint was given of God’s free grace.

This glimmer of hope came from what God said to the serpent that was used by Satan to tempt Eve. God told the serpent that although his agencies would injure the posterity of mother Eve, her “seed” would fatally injure Satan. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

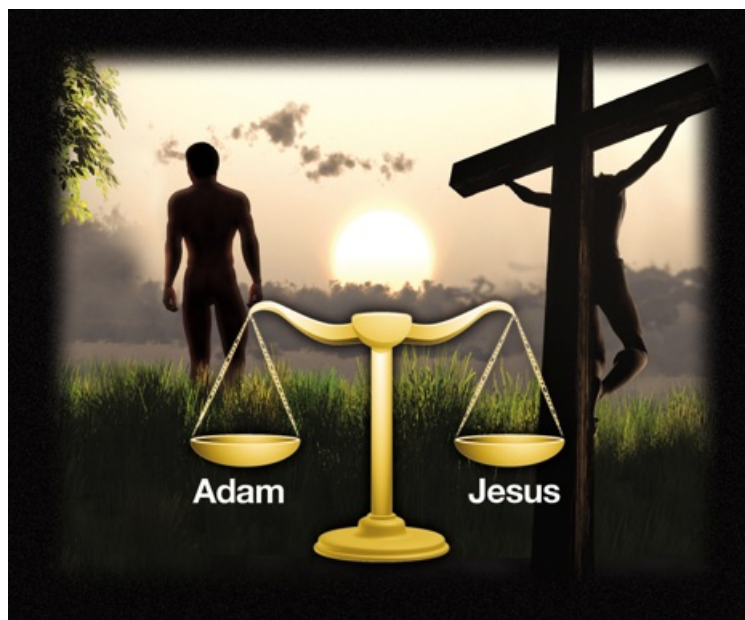
The glimmer of hope continued when much later God promised Abraham that in his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). This promise implied a resurrection—a restitution—for millions had already died, and for them to be blessed, they would have to be raised.

But how could such blessings come? Would God change His mind, and relent on the curse? Or would God arrange for the debt to be paid for mankind? Of course it is the latter, and Jesus is the one who paid the debt.

God actually demonstrated to Abraham, in a very realistic lesson, how the payment for sin would be made—with a life. Abraham was asked to sacrifice the heir of promise, his dear son Isaac, “whom thou lovest.” It was a sore test upon the faith of Abraham, but he was obedient. At the last moment, as he was about to slay Isaac, an Angel of the LORD intervened and provided instead a ram for the sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-18). In this way, because of his faith, Abraham received his son back from the dead “in a figure” (Hebrews 11:19). Thus God assured Abraham and all of us of His unrelenting justice, but also of His unsurpassed love. God “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up [to death] for us all” (Romans 8:32).

Adam's Substitute

Adam's entire posterity was condemned when he sinned. Jesus, who had the potential for generating his own perfect race, instead died in Adam's place as a corresponding price. Jesus was “cut off” in death before producing any descendants of his own (Isaiah 53:8). Thus, Jesus bought our whole human race with full authority to restore it.



The balancing of Justice is evident: Jesus died, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Nevertheless, each person must individually accept God's divine favor—whether now, during the Gospel Age, or later, during the Kingdom. None are automatically “made righteous” because of Jesus' sacrifice. All must ultimately turn their hearts to God and choose obedience. In the Kingdom, the vast majority of mankind will take the opportunity to be made righteous.

“As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:18,19).

The same unswerving justice that once condemned man to death now stands pledged for the rescue of all. In the present age, we can confess our sins and accept the gift of redemption now. “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:33,34). During this Gospel Age, only a few have accepted the Redeemer. During the Millennial Age, under the “New Covenant,” the remainder will have their eyes opened and be given the opportunity to accept Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The fact that no recovery from the Adamic loss is yet accomplished, though nearly 2,000 years have passed since Jesus died, is no argument against the restitution of mankind during the Millennial Kingdom. Before Adam sinned, God had planned for the “lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), although Jesus did not die until some four thousand years later, as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

As John the Apostle said of Jesus, “He is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins [the Church's]: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2). Soon the whole world will have its opportunity.

The followers of Christ, justified by faith, must step by step develop fruits of the spirit. Only then will they have an abundant “entrance” into the “everlasting Kingdom” (2 Peter 1:4-11). Christians must be “faithful unto death” to be given “a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Others, still more or less blinded by the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), will have a full chance to prove their worthiness or unworthiness for everlasting life, during the Kingdom—and all the dead of past ages, likewise.

Death—the Penalty for Sin

Sadly, some Christians seem to cherish a belief in eternal torture. What purpose would be served by our loving and just God to perpetuate a life in torment? Death—annihilation, the opposite of life—not torment, was the penalty for sin. The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Those who have died do not—as some think—live in torment after death. The dead do not experience anything—they simply wait in the peaceful sleep of death, until the resurrection. The Scriptures tell us “the dead know not anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Jesus paid the penalty for sin, “a life for a life” (Deuteronomy 19:21), by dying—not by suffering “torment” in some fiery pit after his death. Christ “died for our sins” because death was the penalty. Jesus’ death as the ransom price for mankind is the very foundation of God’s Plan.

The serpent in the garden lied to Eve when he said “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Unfortunately, Satan’s lie has prospered through the centuries, finding itself embedded in most world religions, even permeating Christianity. When a person dies, he or she is dead—they do not feel, breathe, think, eat, speak, see—they are dead (Psalm 146:4). To be “alive” to experience eternal torture or anything else would nullify God’s word, “Ye shall surely die.” Not until the resurrection of the dead do people experience anything after death.

Jesus is our redeemer from Adamic death. The ultimate punishment for willful sin will be “second death”—and as there will be no second redeemer, there will be no release from second death (Hebrews 10:26). But second death can apply only to those who have been released from Adamic death—either the saints of this age who have been redeemed, or the world redeemed during the Millennium.

Is Restitution Practical?

Fair question! When the billions of dead are raised to life again will Earth have room for them all? Is Earth a vast graveyard incapable of sustaining everyone in the resurrection? No, there is no problem here. God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth”—and God is wise enough to plan accordingly (Genesis 1:28, NAS).

The Population Reference Bureau estimates the total world population of human beings as about 107 billion, which it says goes back 10,000 years. The chronology of the Hebrew Old Testament added to the time since Christ’s first advent actually covers about 6,000 years of human history. The Scriptures also record a universal Flood which reduced the population to eight persons. But let us be extra liberal and more than double the pro-posed 107 billion to about 250 billion.

In the United States, in the state of Texas alone, 250 billion people would each have standing room of about 30 square feet! In South Africa, each would have an area 52.6 square feet, and in France, each resurrected person would have about 23.7 square feet. The entire rest of the world would then be available for expansion. No, room will not be a problem!

Could Earth support such a population? Yes. Even today farming technology would be able to feed this number. In addition, during the Millennium the “curse” on the Earth (Genesis 3:17,19) will be lifted. “The earth shall yield her increase” (Ezekiel 34:27; Revelation 22:2). “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose ... in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isaiah 35:1,6). While heaven will always be God’s throne, He said, “earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1)—and “I will make the place of my feet glorious” (Isaiah 60:13).

Restitution Versus Evolution

Some may ask, what good would restitution be to man’s former original status if man is evolving into a better and better state by a process of evolution? The brilliant achievements of modern technology seem to indicate that man is increasing in intelligence. Would not a time of restitution be the reverse of a blessing to mankind?

By no means! Evolution, although it has gained wide acceptance, is only a theory that has never been proven. There is a growing movement within the scientific community itself that is challenging the theory of evolution and advancing instead “Intelligent Design” as an alternative. Evolution cannot be demonstrated by scientific means, nor can it be harmonized with the Bible’s explanation of man’s origin, fall and destiny. The Scriptures clearly state that man was created in God’s image, fell into sin and death, and will be recovered to his original perfection through the Ransom (Genesis 1:27; Romans 5:10-21; Revelation 21:3,4).

Present day technology is not the result of evolution or increased intelligence, but the natural outcome of an accumulation of knowledge. The invention of printing made possible the spread of information. The rise of free public education extended literacy to the masses, and now, the rapid exchange of knowledge through computers, the internet and other electronic media, have fed the rapid pace of technological growth.

Knowledge Increased—Trouble

Through the accumulation of knowledge, science has made great strides. Communication, healthcare, farming, transportation, and exploration have all improved remarkably; but these advances have been accompanied by problems as well. Pollution, nuclear waste, chemical toxins, weapons of mass destruction, two World Wars, the Holocaust, terrorism, and genocide have also been the fruits of the increase of knowledge. All efforts to solve these worldwide problems have met with little success.

Bible prophecy indicates that in the last days of this Age, knowledge would be increased, but the effect would be trouble. “And at that time shall Michael stand up ... and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time ... even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:1, 4). “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

Wars—Then Peace

A statue in the United Nations Garden showing a man bending a sword into a plowshare aptly exemplifies the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-4, of the end of wars and the establishment peace on earth.



*Swords into Plowshares Sculpture, United Nations, New York.
Photograph: David Paul Ohmer. Used by permission.*

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 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. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Only God can bring lasting peace. When His son Jesus, the “Prince of Peace,” establishes his kingdom, he will make “wars to cease unto the end of the earth ... Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:9,10).

Man First Needs A “New Heart”

The conflicts which close this age are based on selfishness. God permits man to experiment with technological innovations and, by this means, shows the world that the selfish human heart cannot handle the increased power obtained from knowledge. Technology will be useful in the Kingdom, but the first issue is cleansing and reconstructing the human heart. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NAS). Love will replace the selfishness in man’s heart.

The increase of knowledge also does not suggest that man is evolving into something better. God created man perfect, in His image, but man went his own way. “God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes” (Ecclesiastes 7:29, NIV). Man has been learning by experience during the present permission of evil, and the last experiment seems to be with increased knowledge. The brilliant flashes of enlightenment are accompanied by thunderous calamities.

“His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory” (Psalm 97:4-6).

The final effect will be for man’s blessing. The people will be restored to original perfection, and live peacefully, cooperatively, each adding to the common wealth and pleasure of the whole. “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 wonderful blessings God intends are secure to everyone who has ever lived, because Jesus died for every person. The Resurrection during the “Times of Restitution” will bring to man the original perfection and every blessing he possessed in Eden. God’s mercy and love will then amaze and delight an appreciative world.

STUDY TEN: DISTINCTION BETWEEN HEAVENLY AND HUMAN NATURES

God's wonderful Plan for humanity is to restore mankind to the original human perfection that Adam lost by disobedience. An exception to this will be the Christian Church, whom God will change from human nature to spiritual nature. Some suppose that all the "saved" go to heaven, but this is far from the truth. Those saved during the Millennium—which is most of the world—will be blessed with a perfect home here on Earth. Only the Church is offered a spiritual nature.

God will save both the world and the Church from Adamic condemnation through Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:4-6), but only the Church, having responded to the "high calling" of this Gospel Age, will become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

God's Image in Perfect Man

There is much misunderstanding about what a perfect man is. Man was created perfect, in the image of God, possessing justice, love, and reasoning. God can say to even fallen man, "Come, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). Of course the scope of these qualities in man is vastly inferior as compared to God. Nevertheless, Adam was created perfect. Jesus also was a perfect human being (1 Timothy 2:5). There has never been another perfect man other than Adam and Jesus (Romans 3:10,23).

As Jehovah is ruler over all, so man also was given a dominion over all animals and over the earth (Genesis 1:26). Man's dominion is described in Psalm 8:5-8, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands ... all sheep and oxen, yea, the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea" (see also Hebrews 2:7). God pronounced His completed creation of man as "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

In saying man is "a little lower than the angels," the Scripture means that humanity was created on a lower plane of existence than the angels. (Some translations of Hebrews 2:7 say "a little while lower than the angels," but this is an incorrect translation.)

In Hebrews 2:7-9, when the Apostle Paul refers to Psalm 8, he shows that God has not forgotten man, who was originally created with glory and dominion, but intends to restore the world to that glory. God's purpose was to make mankind king of Earth. Although man's dominion was lost through sin and he has not yet been restored to it, God's program for that restoration has begun. Jesus, by his death, provided the price of redemption for the world. Jesus was made "a little lower than the angels" in order to "taste death for every man" as man's ransom substitute (Hebrews 2:9).

Distinct Categories in Nature

Lower in rank or degree does not mean less perfect. A creature may be on a lower plane of existence and also perfect. Note the following chart which illustrates different ranks of creation.

Heavenly Spiritual Beings	Earthly Beings	Plant Domain	Mineral Domain
Divine	Human	Trees	Gold
---	Brute	Shrubs	Silver
---	Fowl	Grasses	Copper
Angelic	Fish	Mosses	Iron

The purest copper would still be lower in rank than pure gold, and beautiful, perfect grass still lower in complexity than trees. Even the highest grade of mineral is lower than a plant, for a plant has life. Further, the grandest tree is lower than any animal, for animals have some level of intelligence, but the most advanced animal is lower than human. Perfect human nature is "a little lower than the angels"—distinct from, and lower than, the spiritual nature. Similarly, the divine nature is the highest and the superior of all other spiritual natures, such as seraphim, cherubim, etc.

Restored to What Was "Lost"

Originally man was created perfect in God's image. After he sinned, man's character and bodily strength deteriorated. Before the Flood man's average life expectancy was several hundred years. After the Flood and through the centuries that followed, it declined drastically. At the beginning of the twentieth century high levels of infant mortality brought the average down to about 30 years. Today, even with medical advances, the average life expectancy worldwide is only about 66 years of age.

However, degraded humanity will be restored to perfection of mind and body again during the Millennial Reign of Christ. Because Jesus died to "save that which [man] lost" (Luke 19:10), mankind will regain perfection. They will not become spirit beings in a heavenly home, for they never lost such a thing. What they lost through Adam was earthly perfection. What they will regain through Christ is what they lost in Adam—perfect human life and a perfect paradise home on earth.

Because our Lord was a spirit being, in order to become a substitute, a ransom price for the sinner, he had to be "made flesh" (John 1:14). He "made himself of no reputation ... and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7, 8). Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was not to rescue the angels, but to rescue the world of mankind. Thus he laid aside the spirit nature, and became human, like the "seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). Because of his obedience in becoming man's willing ransom, "God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him a name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9, NAS). Christ, at his resurrection, was seated "on the right hand of the Majesty on high" having been made by God "so much better than the angels" (Hebrews 1:3-5).

Jesus' Perfection as a Man

Thus, divine, angelic and human natures are separate and distinct. Jesus took not the nature of angels, but the nature of man; not fallen and imperfect, but with the full vigor of human perfection. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Only as a perfect man could Jesus be a corresponding price (a ransom) for the forfeited life of the perfect man Adam (1 Timothy 2:6). The Law God gave to Moses was the measure of a perfect man's ability. By keeping the Law perfectly, Jesus demonstrated that he was not under condemnation and had the

right to life.

In no way was Jesus a blend of two natures—human and spiritual. Jesus left his spiritual life to be “made flesh” in Mary’s womb. At the age of thirty, he offered his human life in consecration at his baptism when he was considered a man. “The heavens were opened” (Matthew 3:16), and Jesus was given a pledge of divine nature—in the form of a dove descending on him—if he carried out the sacrifice of his human life faithfully. After sacrificing his human nature, Jesus “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Then, at his resurrection, Jesus was exalted to the divine nature and given “a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:8,9). Jesus twice experienced a change of nature, but at no time did he have a mixture of natures.

Perfect Man in Eternity

Jesus sacrificed the equivalent of “that which was lost”—perfect human nature (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ Ransom sacrifice bought the human race out of the condemnation that was against it, thus man will receive again a glorious, perfect human nature. In the Kingdom, the perfect faculties and powers of a human being will be exercised brilliantly upon new and varied objects of interest. Man’s knowledge and skill will be vastly increased, but this increase of knowledge and power will not bring a change of nature. It will fulfill the potential of perfect human ability and will be man’s blessed privilege to all eternity, yet he will still be a man.

When Jesus was a man, he was a model of the perfect human nature of restored humanity, but since his resurrection, Jesus has been an example of the glorious divine nature that the overcoming Church will share with him in its resurrection.

Since the main work of this age is the development of the Church, the epistles of the Apostles are devoted to the preparation of the “little flock.” However, it should not be concluded that God’s Plan ends with the Church. Nor should we assume that all the special “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4) to the overcoming Church are intended for all good people. “Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), we see there is a distinct difference between the offer of divine nature to the Church and the offer of perfect human nature to the world during the Kingdom.

Glories of the Heavenly and Earthly Separate and Distinct

Some believe that because they do not understand what a spirit being is like, it must be a superstitious myth. But Paul says the natural man cannot understand spiritual things because they are “foolishness” to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Apostle goes on to explain, “There is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts ... There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another” (1 Corinthians 15:39,40).

The perfection of a human being might possibly be imagined, but the glory of the heavenly is only understood by the eye of faith. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:6-8). A spirit being is like the wind—invisible. As John said, we cannot describe “what we shall be” except that “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

The nature of the Son of God was changed twice, but this was an exception that served a very specific purpose in God’s Plan. Angels were created as spirit beings and doubtless will always remain spirit beings. So with the world; they were born human beings, and they will remain human beings when they gain everlasting life during the Millennium. The calling of the Church to the divine nature is, like Jesus’ experiences—an exception.

God’s present earthly creation has almost endless beauty and variety. When restored to perfection, it will be even more glorious. However, the glory of the Heavenly Nature will be indescribable and will far surpass anything man can imagine.

Angels Invisibly Present

Angels can be and frequently are present, yet invisible. “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him” (Psalm 34:7). “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14) Angels also protected God’s people of old. When Elisha was surrounded by a host of Assyrians, his servant was fearful. Elisha prayed to God, and the young man’s eyes were opened, and he saw the mountains around them full of horsemen in chariots of fire! (2 Kings 6:11-17).

Angels are spirit, and not human, yet they have the ability to materialize human bodies and appear as men. An angel appeared to Gideon as a man, but afterward made himself known. An angel also appeared to the parents of Samson: they thought him a man until he ascended to heaven in a flame (Judges 6:11-22; 13:20).

Occasions of Manifestations

On certain occasions, angels were manifested in a glorious and bright condition. The angel who rolled away the stone from the door of Jesus’ sepulcher was “like lightning” (Matthew 28:2,3). Daniel caught a glimpse of one angel with eyes “as lamps of fire ... and his arms and his feet like in color to polished brass” (Daniel 10:6). Saul caught a glimpse of the resurrected Jesus shining “above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13).

The men traveling with Saul actually did not see the resurrected Jesus, but only heard his voice (Acts 9:7). The men with Daniel did not communicate with the glorious being Daniel describes, but with great fear ran and hid themselves (Daniel 10:7-19). During the forty days before Jesus’ ascension, he was seen on only a few occasions manifested in flesh, often not recognizable at first to his disciples. Spirit beings are truly glorious in their nature and invisible to men, except as they may appear in special instances, or humans have their eyes specially opened to see them.

Thus we see that the spirit and human natures are distinctly separate. The Scriptures offer no evidence that humans naturally develop into spirit beings. The exceptions are Jesus and his “little flock” of faithful followers. They are glorified for the purpose of blessing the world during the Millennium (Philippians 2:8-11; Romans 2:7).

Mortality and Immortality

“Mortality” signifies a state or condition in which death is possible. “Immortality” signifies a state or condition in which death is not possible. These meanings are consistent with the difference in hope for human beings and spiritual beings, earthly promises and heavenly promises.

When Adam was created, he had been created perfect. If he had not have said to him, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Adam was created perfect, but he was in a condition in which death was possible. Adam's life was sustained by "every tree in the garden" (Genesis 1:29,30), and it was conditional upon obedience to his maker.

Angels also are mortal. Their life is dependent upon faithfulness to God. Those who rebelled against God and have not reformed will ultimately be destroyed. The proof that angels are mortal is found in the Scriptural declaration that, in due time, the Devil, one of the chief angels, will be destroyed (Hebrews 2:14). The security of both humans and angels will always be dependent on obedience to our all-wise and loving God. Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that angels or restored mankind are immortal.

Immortality is the possession of the divine nature alone. Originally only Jehovah was immortal. Subsequently our Lord Jesus received it when exalted to the divine nature. Finally, the Church of Christ, when glorified with him, will all be given immortality (John 5:26; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:53,54).

Incorrigible sinners—human or spiritual—will be blotted out. All others, whether mortal or immortal, will live on forever in happiness and love. The immortal, the saints in glory, will have life in themselves (John 5:26). The mortal, having experienced the knowledge of evil and come to perfection, will be supplied everlasting life with "a right to the tree of life" (Revelation 22:14).

Understanding the Scriptural meaning of mortal and immortal destroys the very foundation of the doctrine of eternal torment. God did not create man immortal, so that he could not be destroyed. That was Satan's lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Willful sinners will not be kept alive forever in some place of misery. They will simply die, never to awaken again. They would not be happy in a righteous society anyway, and they are mercifully destroyed in "second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Justice and God's Favors

Justice does not require that God give out His favors equally to all His creation. God had the right to exalt His Son to the divine nature—as well as Jesus' faithful followers—yet withhold that invitation from others, such as the angels in heaven.

Justice does not require exalting all levels of life equally else God would need to grant immortality to brute beasts and insects, which would be absurd. God is sovereign, and can extend His favors when and where His wisdom suggests. "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?" (Romans 9:20,21, NAS).

All nature, both animate and inanimate, exhibits the glory and diversity of divine power and wisdom. "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1) in wonderful variety and beauty.

A favor should never be esteemed as a justly merited reward. God has exhibited His great love to His creatures in an endless flood of undeserved favors. Every day of life is a gift! It is God's favor that we are human and not animal so we can intelligently worship Him. How much greater then is the favor of the restoration of everlasting life, once forfeited because of sin. Our gratitude overflows when we consider the invitation to become part of the Bride of Christ and share the divine nature with Jesus, our Lord and King (Revelation 21:9; Psalm 45:10-17).

As a man has no right to aspire to be an angel, an angel has no right to aspire to the divine nature. It was never offered. Lucifer actually aspired to be like God. "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! ... you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God" (Isaiah 14:12-15, NAS). Yet, Satan will be destroyed in God's due time. Though God will determine the kind of debasement and degree of exaltation, the principle holds true: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

Election—Unconditional or Conditional?

The subject of "election" as taught in the Scriptures has been the cause of much dispute and misunderstanding. Some claim election is unconditional, arbitrary, and others that it is conditional. There is a measure of truth in both views. God's elections express His choice for certain purposes—whether His creature would be an angel, a human, a bird or an insect. Life on any plane is purely God's favor.

God elected to have a Church chosen from mankind, and He set the conditions to be met by anyone attaining divine nature. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy"—kindness or favor (Romans 9:16). He is the "Potter" and we are the "clay" (Romans 9:20,21). He can make one vessel to more honor—such as divine nature—and some to less honor or to a lower nature.

"Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded ... For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that 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 45:11,12,18).

Would it not be presumptuous for anyone to dictate to God—who formed the earth to be inhabited—to say it is unjust for Him not to change man's nature to divine? Rather, we should humbly look into God's Word, understand His plan, and appreciate His undeserved favors.

The Human Race—the Work of God's Hands

The human race is the work of God's hands. David explains that man was created crowned with "glory and honor" and given "dominion over the works of thy hands" (Psalm 8:4-8). The Apostle Paul further explains that man will experience an earthly resurrection—to the "glory of the terrestrial." By contrast, the Church members will receive "a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:38-44). The Apostle Peter summarized the testimony of all the prophets that during the "times of restitution" (Acts 3:19-21) the human race will be restored to the glorious perfection Adam possessed originally.

Not only will society be so harmoniously beautiful, but the earth itself will be an Edenic Paradise. No longer will man work "by the sweat of thy face"

(Genesis 3:19), but the earth naturally “yield her increase” (Ezekiel 34:27). After reaching perfection, people will develop and grow to their full potential. They will not grasp for and crave some other nature or home. They will be wonderfully pleased and content.

Christian Church—Predestined

The Christian Church—the Body of Christ—is an exception to God’s general Plan for mankind. Even before the “foundation of the world,” God “predestinated” the justification, sanctification and glorification of the Church (Ephesians 1:4,5.). God determined that the Church would be “conformed to the image of His Son,” and be fellow heirs with Jesus in the Millennial Kingdom to establish universal righteousness and peace (Romans 8:28-31).

God predestined the election of the Church, but He did not predestinate the election of the individual members of the Church. God ordained the Gospel Age as the specific time for the preparation of the Church. He also predestined that, in order to qualify for the blessings promised, this class must develop character by attaining “fruits of righteousness” (Philippians 1:11). The preparation of those that overcome the world (1 John 5:4,5) would have to be achieved through trials of faith and the sacrifice of earthly privileges—even “unto death” (Revelation 2:10,11,17).

“Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified [honored]” (Romans 8:30). Here Paul gives the process in reverse order. God first honors us by letting us hear the Gospel message, then justifies us, and invites us to the high calling to be with Christ. (The word “glorified” is from the Greek *doxazo*, “honored,” as in Hebrews 5:5).

Many Called, Few Chosen

In selecting followers for the Church during Jesus’ ministry, the call went out to Israel first, then to the Gentiles. Israel’s rejection of the call and the call of the Gentiles is depicted in the parable in Luke 14:16-24. It tells of many who were too preoccupied to come to the “great supper” which pictures the opportunity of coming into Christ. Finally, the servants were told to urge or “compel” (verse 23) those out on the “highways” [the Gentiles] to come and fill the house. In the Parable of the Wedding Garment (Matthew 22:2-14), among those who came in was one who put on the “garment” of the imputed righteousness of Jesus, but later took it off. The lesson is that those once justified who reject their righteousness in Christ are “cast into outer darkness.” “For many are called, but few are chosen.” The overcomers with the Lamb and King of kings are “called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14).

God’s predestined purpose to select and exalt the Church is certainly unchangeable, but those chosen for this honor must fulfill the conditions of the call. “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1). God’s predestined purpose for this Church—and this is true of all His favors—will be for the general good of all.

Change of One Nature to Another

From the Scriptures, it is clear that human and spiritual natures are separate and distinct—never blended—and the change from one nature to another is the exception rather than the rule. Only Christ and his Church are changed from human to divine.



The conditions on which the Church may be exalted to the divine nature are by following in Jesus’ footsteps of sacrifice (1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 16:24). The invitation is to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1)—even as Jesus sacrificed himself till death. Our Lord sacrificed all his human interests and hopes. His followers do that too. If we suffer with him, “we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17,18) and with him become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Begotten, then “Born of the Spirit”

The beginning and development of a divine “new creature” is compared to the beginning and development of a human life. The first impulse in the divine life comes through begetting by God through His Word. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3). Then a new spiritual life begins to grow as our minds become “transformed” (Romans 12:1,2). Yet we are not actually spirit beings, but merely reckoned as such by God. However, one begins to think and act spiritually as a “new creature,” all the while crucifying human desires and interests.

These two processes progress together from the time of our complete consecration to do God’s will until the death of the human and the birth of the spiritual result. Human desires, plans, etc., fade in importance. Nourished by the Word of God the new creature grows in strength. As God’s children, His Spirit “shall also quicken your mortal bodies” (Romans 8:11)—make our mortal bodies the servants of the “new creature” until our

resurrection when we become actual spirit beings in the “first [choicest] resurrection” (Revelation 20:6). “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we [the Church] shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:49), unless we fall away, and our embryo New Creature is aborted (Hebrews 6:6).

“Brethren”—Not the World—Called to Glory

The invitation to consecrate our lives is not addressed to the unbelieving world. The offer is addressed to those who already are drawing close to God as friends, believing in Jesus as the way of justification. “I beseech you therefore, brethren ... that ye present your bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1,2).

These have already turned away from sin. Now they are invited to sacrifice their human wills and become sons of God, developing a new life, a new creature. The divine will becomes their will and they begin to think, reason, and judge from the divine standpoint. God’s plan becomes their plan, and God’s ways become their ways. They seek to subdue sin in themselves and sacrifice the present good things of life in order to devote their energies to the service of God. They begin to transform their minds.

This transforming of the mind is a gradual work—a gradual bending heavenward of that which naturally bends earthward. “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed [to the heavenly nature] by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). We no longer anticipate living on earth, but we are reckoned as “new creatures” with a heavenly hope. As Jesus is now in the “express image” of his Father (Hebrews 1:1-3), so the consecrated faithful overcomers will “be like him for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The overcomers will not only inherit the divine nature like Jesus, but will sit with him on his throne! “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21).

Though this transforming of the mind from human to spiritual is a gradual work, the change from a human to a spiritual body will be instantaneous—“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52). While human nature is a likeness of the spiritual in terms of reasoning and memory, the spirit nature has powers which are grandly superior to the human.

Human thinking is confined to the earthly sphere. Human abilities and dispositions are suited for man’s benefit and happiness on earth. However, even the glory of perfect humanity is hard to comprehend now. Only by the holy Spirit, are we able to catch glimpses of the glory of both mankind’s destiny and the divine nature for the Church.

Before we will be changed from human to spiritual nature our mental attitude must be transformed to suit our hoped-for glorious spiritual body. This is not a change of the human brain, but an elevating of the will and focus of our mind to spiritual things. When begotten we receive the holy Spirit as an “earnest,” or pledge, of the finished work (Ephesians 1:13, 14). As “strangers and pilgrims” on earth, we abstain from fleshly longings (1 Peter 2:11). By faith, we “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5,6).

Our Identity after Resurrection

Some have asked, How will we know ourselves when we are “changed” in the heavenly resurrection? Will we be the same conscious beings? Assuredly, yes! As a matter of fact, our human bodies are even now changing continuously, casting off old cells and replacing them with new. Science tells us that every seven to ten years the atoms of our bodies are renewed and changed, but our identity remains unchanged. Although we may not always be able to recall all the details of our past, our memories are still recorded, and may be called up at any moment. With a change to divine nature, we will be able to remember all our past experiences from our early days, and appreciate, by contrast, the glorious reward of our sacrifice.

Spirit nature and human nature are distinctly different, but one is a likeness of the other. Mental faculties, reason, and memory are common to both, even though of different scope and capacity. Thus Jesus as a man was aware of his former glory with God, and prayed, “Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). That prayer was abundantly answered when he was exalted to the highest form of spirit nature—the divine.

In Romans 12:2, Paul said “Be not conformed ... but be ye transformed.” We do not conform or transform ourselves, but we do either submit ourselves to worldly influences, or submit ourselves to the will of God. To which influences are we submitting? If we are sacrificing with Christ, if we are “planted together in the likeness of his death,” then we will share the likeness of his glorious resurrection (Romans 6:5).

The Word of God has both earthly and heavenly promises. The heavenly promises are given to those who have covenanted to a life of sacrifice serving the Lord. Our treasure is in heaven—let our hearts be there as well. Our hopes are wonderful. Our calling is not only to the spiritual nature, but to the highest order of the spiritual—“so much better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:4).

God’s heavenly calling is limited to this Gospel Age. The offer was never made before, and it will cease when this age closes. Both the human and spiritual natures will be glorious in their perfection, yet distinct and separate. The glory of God’s finished work will be the beautiful variety, yet wonderful harmony of all things animate and inanimate—harmony with each other and harmony with God.

STUDY ELEVEN: THE BROAD WAY AND NARROW WAY NOW—THE HIGHWAY IN THE KINGDOM

The Scriptures teach three Ways! One is Broad that leads to destruction, contrasted with a Narrow Way that leads to life now. In the future during the Millennial Age, a Highway of Holiness will open, on which it will be easier to walk.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” Matthew 7:13,14, NIV

“And a Highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there” (Isaiah 35:8,9).

The Broad Way Leads To Destruction

The Broad Road that leads to destruction came into existence as a result of Adam's sin. Adam and all his race began down this road when he disobeyed God and was removed from the life sustaining trees of Eden (Genesis 3:23,24). Most of mankind are on this road. A baby is born on it with inherited sin (Psalm 51:5). After thousands of years of human history, this downward Broad Way has grown increasingly slippery with sin, and mankind has steadily lost its power of resistance.

In spite of recent medical advances, few survive to their hundredth year. The problem is that we belong to a dying race which is “blinded” by Satan, “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Many have tried to live their lives for the benefit of mankind. Their efforts have been commendable, but the lasting fruit of their efforts has been limited and temporary. Sometimes the best efforts of men in science and technology have even been harmful. The pesticide DDT helped control malaria and typhus, but added contaminating poisons to the environment. Automobile transportation is a blessing to so many, but it is also the most common cause of accidental death in America, averaging more than 43,000 fatalities a year. Atomic energy has been useful in medicine and power production, but the same science produced atomic bombs. The twentieth century brought remarkable advances, but also produced nearly 200 million deaths through war and genocide.

Few on the Narrow Way to Life Immortal

The Gospel Age brought to light a way of escape from the Broad Way that leads to destruction. Our Saviour Jesus, through his death, opened up a “new and living way” (Hebrews 10:20), and brought “life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

As a result of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, all those on the present “Broad Way” will be raised to human “life” again in God's Kingdom. “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men” (Psalm 90:3).

The “living way” to immortal spiritual life however, is a Narrow Way and few follow it. The narrowness of this “Way” causes many to prefer to remain on the Broad Way. “Straight [difficult] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14).

The life to which the present Narrow Way leads is the highest form of life— immortal spiritual life of the Divine nature. Immortality is life unlimited and not dependent upon any external sustenance for its existence. It signifies that death is an impossibility throughout all eternity.

Thus, more than repenting of sins and living righteously is required to attain this life. Walking on the Narrow Way requires more than believing Jesus died for our sins and being justified by his blood (Romans 5:9). Once we have accepted “salvation” from condemnation in Adam, we are invited to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1). Jesus asks us to “deny” self, “take up our cross” and follow him (Matthew 16:24).

We are invited to surrender earthly possessions and hopes and follow our Lord in self-sacrifice. All our worldly goods then become the Lord's who makes of them a test of “stewardship” to demonstrate our “faithfulness” (Luke 16:1-13). All those who seek to travel the Narrow Way successfully must “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15).

This Narrow Way that leads to life, furthermore, is difficult because we have enemies along the way: the world (1 John 2:15; James 1:27), the flesh (Galatians 2:20; Romans 7:18) and the devil (1 Peter 5:8). By the difficulties of this way, however, God is separating and refining a “peculiar people” to be “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (1 Peter 2:9; Romans 8:17). Therefore Jesus, knowing our frailties, left the encouragement, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The Path to Glory

What a hope! Dare we aspire to such a height of glory? Surely, we could not hope for divine nature without a definite, clear invitation.

Originally only God had immortality. Then, at Jesus' resurrection, the Father exalted His Son to immortality, the divine nature, the “express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:2-4). “For as the Father hath life in himself: so hath He given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). The little flock of overcomers are the only others promised to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Although we do not know what a divine being is like, we know that “we shall be like him [Jesus]; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Jesus, in his prayer to his Father, expressed his desire that the “glory” he would receive (John 17:22-24) would also be shared by his faithful followers. This “hope of glory” is a “mystery” to the people of the world (Colossians 1:27), but believers are called to share “his eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:10), that is, the “glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). All present affliction will seem light compared to the “eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17) to be experienced by the faithful.

This “hope of glory” is actually the only offer of life during this Gospel Age, but this Narrow Way to life might be called a way of death, since its prize is only gained through the sacrifice of the human nature. Since this present life is under condemnation in Adam, it cannot be sacrificed. What is sacrificed is the perfect human life they would have received with mankind in the Kingdom. Although Jesus' sacrifice is all-sufficient for mankind, these are invited to become joint-sacrificers with him that they might also be “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

So although the world dies with Adam, the “little flock” dies with Christ and inherits divine nature. “For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:11,12). “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Then the whole purpose of the death and suffering of the “little flock” with Jesus will be accomplished. Clothed with glory and power, the Church will be prepared to assist in restoring and blessing the rest of the world during the Millennial Age.

On the Throne—Or “Before the Throne”

Will all Christians make it to this throne of glory? The path to glory begins only in the transformed mind as the germ of the new creature. It is a struggle. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Romans 8:13, 14). Indulging in human pursuits and pleasures at the expense of the new spiritual nature is like taking back our sacrifice which is reckoned as dead.

Some try to walk a middle road. They try to keep the favor of God while allowing themselves to be partially overcome by “friendship with the world” (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15) and by the allurements of their own flesh and the Devil. Our Father turns these over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5). If they respond properly to these fiery trials and decide positively to follow Christ, they will be “saved” to a spirit life like the angels. However, instead of sitting on the throne with Jesus, they will have palms of victory “before the throne” (Revelation 3:21; 7:9-17).

Yes, the Narrow Way is rugged and steep, but we are promised: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). So let us come “boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) to gain help and strength. The trials of this Way, if rightly used, will sanctify, refine and prepare us to receive divine nature with the “crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

The Highway of Holiness

While the Narrow Way of this age is difficult it offers a glorious reward to overcomers, the Way opened in the Kingdom will be relatively easy. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness” (Isaiah 35:8). The Narrow Way requires sacrificing lawful and proper human hopes, but mankind on this Highway will be required to obey and put away sin. The goal of the Highway of Holiness will be the restoration of mankind to human perfection—to the image of God as originally enjoyed by Adam.

This Highway back from sin and imperfection will be for all who are willing to progress to holiness. This is nicely described in the Hebrew TANACH (Stone Edition) of Isaiah 35:8.

“There will be a path and a road there; it will be called ‘the Road of Holiness’ and no impure person will traverse it. It will be for them; the wayfarer, even ignorant ones, will not go astray there.”

By the end of the road, the impure will have become pure. Both the people and the earth will be healed. “Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah [desert]” (Isaiah 35:6, NAS), “All shall know the Lord from the least unto the greatest” (Jeremiah 31:34) because “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The full benefits of a “ransom for all” will be open to everyone on this Highway. There will also be a nurturing, sympathetic “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) to guide the world. Some Christians confuse this Highway of the Kingdom with the Narrow Way of the Gospel Age, but they are separate and distinct. Those faithful on the Narrow Way will later assist all nations on the Highway of righteousness opened during the Kingdom.

In symbolic language, Isaiah describes the Highway. “No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there” (Isaiah 35:9). Now the Devil, as a “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8) seeks to entrap and devour the faithful. In the Kingdom he will no longer be influencing public opinion, the media, entertainment, business arrangements, etc. Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1-3).

UNICEF acts on behalf of children around the world. Habitat for Humanity makes houses for families in need. Greenpeace works for our environment. The World Health Organization responds to health crises in the world. These are noble efforts, but they have limited success now. During the Millennium, all the world’s ills will be resolved. Noble people who now try to help their fellow men by supporting worthy causes will finally see their hopes fulfilled and every wrong righted. Such will themselves make fast progress up the Highway of Holiness in the Kingdom and will be delighted with the results.

“Nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon” (Isaiah 35: 9). Neither beastly governments nor giant corporations organized to advance selfish, individual interests at the expense of the general good, will be tolerated. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom]” (Isaiah 11:9). Though evil habits and bad characters will have to be reversed, on the Highway of Holiness stumbling blocks will be removed and every step of progress will be rewarded. “Prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people” (Isaiah 62:10).

To the Glory of God

As the Narrow Way draws to a close, we pray all the more fervently for the opening of the Highway of Holiness and God’s “will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

“The ransomed of the Lord shall return [from destruction] ... with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 35:10).

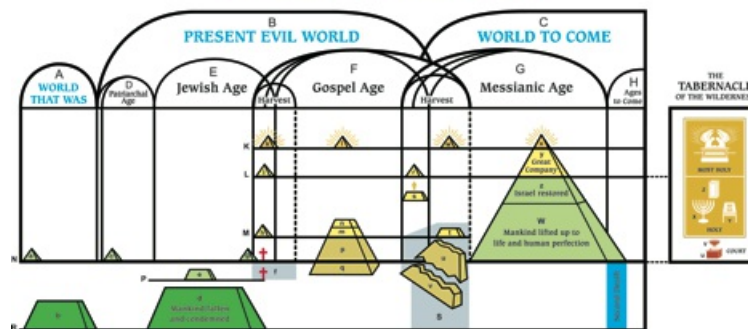
How wonderful that Jesus’ sacrifice has provided the “ransom for all.” Though the present Narrow Way can be difficult, it tests and prepares the “little flock” for restoring the whole world to perfection. Those of us who have this hope—not only hope for ourselves, but also hope for the entire world—may count all other hopes but loss and dross by comparison (Philippians 3:8-15).

STUDY TWELVE: THE CHART OF GOD'S PLAN OF THE AGES

This Chart illustrates the various ages of time from Adam to the end of the Millennium followed by the “Ages to Come.” It shows the unfolding of God’s Plan and the steps taken from mankind’s condemnation to its restoration—as well as those leading to the exaltation of the elect Church.

CHART OF THE AGES

From Paradise Lost to Paradise Restored



“Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables” Habakkuk 2:2

[A larger Print Quality Chart is included at the end of this book.](#)

The three main time divisions are “Dispensations” (A, B, C). Each is identified as a separate “world” in the Scriptures and is administered by a different rulership:

A	From Creation to the Flood: “The World that Was” (2 Peter 3:6)
B	From the Flood to the beginning of Christ’s reign at the second advent: “Present Evil World” (Galatians 1:4) “This World” John 12:31; 18:36
C	From beginning of Christ’s Reign through the “Ages to Come” (Ephesians 1:10; 2:7): “The World to come wherein Dwelleth Righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13)

First World Under Administration of Angels

“The World that Was” which passed away in the Flood was put under the administration of angels. However, these angels “kept not their first estate” (Jude 6; Hebrews 2:5). Seeing the daughters of men were beautiful, they materialized as men and inbred with humanity with disastrous results (Genesis 6:1-5). That world then descended into wickedness so great that God in righteous wrath destroyed it with the Flood—saving only Noah and seven others of his family (Genesis 7:13).

Three Ages of the Present World Under Satan

This “Present Evil World” has been under the power of Satan, “the prince of this world” (John 12:31). During this time mankind has been permitted to try governing himself. Man’s futile attempt with self-government under the pervading influence of Satan will finally prove useless. This “Present Evil World” will ultimately end in the greatest time of trouble the world has ever known.

The second great Dispensation is composed of three distinct ages, each progressing onward in God’s Plan. The first, Age **D**, the “Patriarchal Age,” is the time when God dealt with the fathers of faith—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Next was the “Jewish Age,” **E**, which began at the death of Jacob. God then recognized the posterity of Jacob’s twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel, as “My people.” They became God’s people in a unique way, receiving both special favors and responsibilities (Psalm 14:7). “You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2, NAS).

As a nation, Israel was also a picture of the Christian Church, “a holy nation” with promises to them typical of the “better promises” made to the Church (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Israel’s journey through the wilderness pictures the Christian’s journey through the wilderness of sin to the heavenly Canaan. Though Israel’s sacrifices of “the blood of bulls and goats” could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), they pointed forward to the “better sacrifices” of the “royal priesthood” of the Gospel Age (Hebrews 9:23). Through Jesus, the “High Priest of our profession,” we are invited to offer our “bodies a living sacrifice” (Hebrews 3:1; Romans 12:1). The services and ordinances of the Jewish Age thus were a “shadow” of the greater realities to come (Hebrews 10:1).

During the “Gospel Age,” **F**, the Body of Christ is called out of the world to a narrow way of sacrifice. If “faithful unto death,” they become “partakers of divine nature” and receive a “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). While evil still reigns, they are tested by God to see if they will sacrifice their human nature with its privileges and blessings. If faithful in following Jesus, they will be “satisfied” when resurrected in “thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15). During the three Ages of the “Present Evil World,” evil rules and the righteous suffer (Malachi 3:15). But in the “World to Come” righteousness will rule and evil will be destroyed.

Third World Dispensation—Ages to Come

The third great Dispensation is composed of the Messianic (Millennial) Age followed by the “Ages to Come.” The “Messianic Age,” **G**, is described in the Scriptures as the time for the blessing of “all the families of the earth” during the “times of restitution ... spoken by the mouth of all [God’s] holy

prophets" (Acts 3:19-21). During that time of restoration, the overcomer Church will sit on the "throne" with Jesus (Revelation 3:21) blessing the world of mankind. The "last enemy" then to be destroyed will be Adamic "death" (1 Corinthians 15:25,26).

The Scriptures mention the "Ages to Come," H, but are silent about the details. For now it is enough to know they will be ages of blessing when God will "show the exceeding riches of His grace."

The Harvests of the Jewish and Gospel Ages

The Jewish Age and the Gospel Age each had a distinct beginning, and each had a lengthy time for the development of its work. Each ends with a harvest time during which the fruits of the purpose of the age are gathered in. The Harvests are also a time when the work of two ages overlap. For example, before the Jewish Age ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the work of the Gospel Age had already begun with our Lord's anointing at Jordan, in A.D. 29 (Acts 10:37,38). This overlapping work is also represented on the Chart. Notice the various beginning and ending lines in the Jewish Age Harvest, and in the Gospel Age Harvest.

Daniel prophesied about 70 "weeks" (of years) of God's favor to Israel that would end in stages (Daniel 9:24-27). During the last week of years, Jesus came to introduce the work of the Gospel Age. In the "midst" of the last week of seven years, just before Jesus was "cut off" in death, he said to the people, "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). Once his sacrifice was completed, the typical animal sacrifices were no longer acceptable, and, within a generation, the temple where those offerings were given was destroyed.

After the end of those seventy "weeks" the Gospel was opened to the Gentiles. This change was marked by the pouring out of the holy Spirit on the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:45). Later, the national existence of the Jewish people ended when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple.

Thus, during the Harvest of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age opened for the trial and development of the anointed Christ—Head and Body (Colossians 1:18). Similar to the close of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age closes by stages because the Millennial Age of Restitution begins during its Harvest. Although we now see some blessings of freedom and technology, there is also trouble! After all the harvesting work of the "wheat" of true Christians is done at the end of the Age, the world will go through the "fire" of trouble "such as never was" (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-42; 24:21,22; Daniel 12:1). This preparation of trouble will, thankfully, introduce Christ's reign of righteousness and restoration.

Lines and Pyramids of the Chart

The vertical lines of the Chart mark the progress of time. The horizontal lines show the planes of life and status during the Ages—**K, L, M, N, P** and **R**. The complete pyramid shape well illustrates perfection, while an incomplete pyramid illustrates imperfection.

The human race began with Adam being created perfect (complete Pyramid **a**) on Plane **N**, representing perfect human nature. When he sinned, he fell to the plane of sin and death (Plane **R**) on which all his posterity has been born, represented now by an incomplete Pyramid **b**.

Complete Pyramid **c** on Plane **N** represents the Ancient Worthies of old, who like Abraham, were considered "friend[s] of God" (Hebrews 11; James 2:23). The term Ancient Worthies refers to all the men and women of faith, devoted to God, who lived up to the time of Jesus.

Israel is represented by incomplete Pyramid **e**, on Plane **P**—the plane of typical justification. Their sacrifices under the Law did not actually remove sin, but were representative of the sacrifice of Christ which actually removes sin (Hebrews 10:1; 9:14). But Israel was a favored people distinct from the world and elevated somewhat above it.

The Gospel Age Path to Glory

The Gospel Age path to glory actually began within the Harvest of the Jewish Age. Jesus, represented as Pyramid **g**, on Plane **N**, presented himself at the Jordan River as a perfect man to redeem the world (John 1:14). Thereafter he began his public ministry, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus' ministry sifted the nation, separating the "wheat"—"Israelites indeed"—from the chaff—the refuse of the old system. By accepting Jesus, and turning away from the leadership who rejected him, the "wheat" was separated from the "chaff."

The "chaff" was later burned (figuratively), when the fire of God's judgment caused the Roman armies to sweep across Israel and destroy Jerusalem (Luke 3:17; 21:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:15,16). That time of trouble, closing the Jewish age, is the Shaded Portion **f** on the chart.

After Jesus symbolized his consecration by water baptism, the holy Spirit came upon him showing God's acceptance and anointing. This filling with the Spirit was the begetting to a new nature—the divine—shown by Pyramid **h** on Plane **M**, the plane of spirit begetting. During Jesus' ministry—though "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"—he took on the sorrows and pains of the people (Isaiah 53:4) and gave them his vitality and health. "Virtue [life, strength, energy] went out of him and [he] healed them all" (Matthew 8:16,17; Luke 6:19). After 3 1/2 years during which he "poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12), Jesus' human life ended on the cross.

When Jesus was resurrected on the third day, he was raised as a glorious spirit being of the highest order (Pyramid **i** on Plane **L**), the "firstborn from the dead." (Colossians 1:18). Although no longer human, after his resurrection Jesus had the ability to appear in various human forms. His purpose was to convince his followers that he had truly been resurrected, but not as the man they once knew. Therefore, he appeared as a gardener at the tomb; as a helpful stranger on the shore; as a fellow-traveler on the road to Emmaus. Although he was seen as a man, he could go "as the wind" even when the "doors were shut" because he was "born of the spirit" (John 20:19,26).

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus "ascended" to his Father—to the plane of divine glory represented as Pyramid **k** on Plane **K** (John 20:17). Then he was "set down with my Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21; Hebrews 10:12). Jesus, as the Head of the Church during the Gospel Age (Pyramid **l** on Plane **K**) directs her discipline and guides her development. If we have fellowship in his sufferings, then as, "joint-heirs with Christ," we have assurance that we will also share in his glory (Romans 8:17).

Church Follows in Jesus' Footsteps

Thus, the steps of the Church to glory are the same as those of her Lord and Bridegroom—except the Church starts from the lower Plane **R**. In the Gospel Age all those who have an appreciation for Jesus who died for their sins—and are drawing close to God as friends—are considered in the way of justification on Plane **N**. Some of these believers are then moved to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

The answer comes through the Apostle Paul, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,

acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). "A living sacrifice" means consecrating to God's service every power and talent we possess and living not for self, but for our Heavenly Father. Our sacrifice is counted "holy, acceptable to God" because by faith we are then fully "justified by his [Jesus'] blood" (Romans 3:25; 5:9).

The next step on the path to the "glory that shall be revealed in us" is Plane **M**. This plane represents being begotten to a new spiritual life. God has "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3, NAS). As humans our will is dead, but we have a new hidden life growing. "For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). God's Word works in our hearts transforming our minds as embryo "new creatures" preparing for a spirit birth (2 Corinthians 5:17). "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

Those who faithfully sacrifice their lives unto death receive a heavenly resurrection pictured by Plane **L**. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12, NAS). Each one on Plane **L** that is "born of the Spirit is spirit" like the "wind," powerful and invisible to natural sight (John 3:6-9).

Plane **K** represents the exaltation beyond the personal glory of the saints in the resurrection—the glory of office of Jesus with his Bride. "His wife hath made herself ready" and the "marriage of the Lamb is come" (Revelation 19:7). As a body, the saints will be exalted with Christ and reign over earth as "kings and priests" (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 1 Peter 5:10).

Mixed Condition in the Christian Church

During the whole Gospel Age many have claimed to be Christians, represented in the stacked incomplete pyramid in four distinct classes—**n**, **m**, **p** and **q**. Both **n** and **m** on Plane **M** are spirit begotten "new creatures." Those represented by section **n** are being faithful in their covenant to sacrifice all—while those represented by **m** are shrinking back from fulfilling their consecration. The faithful have built their character on the one "sure foundation" of Christ with truth and righteousness represented by "gold, silver, precious stones" (Isaiah 28:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Others, represented by **m**, have built with "wood, hay, stubble"—a mixture of earthly values resulting in unstable character. But God still loves them! Their work is burned, but they are "saved; yet so as by [the] fire" of special adversity. They miss the grand prize of the Bride Class. They miss reigning with Christ on his throne with the glory of Plane **K**, but they will receive heavenly life, Plane **L**. The Scriptures speak of them as a "great multitude," as "companions" of the Bride serving "before the throne" (Revelation 7:9,14,15; 19:6,7; Psalm 45:10-14).

The majority of those claiming to be Christian are represented in section **p**. They generally appreciate that Jesus died for their sins, but they do not progress to make a full consecration and become begotten to a new spirit life (2 Corinthians 6:1). They are not members of the "body" of Christ—though called "brethren" by the Apostle (Romans 12:1). They have started in the right direction and will have an advantage in the Times of Restitution in becoming part of God's family on the earthly plane.

Another class connected with Christianity is represented as section **q** below Plane **N**. These never did believe in Jesus as a sacrifice for their sins, but attached themselves to the church for worldly reasons. These are "wolves" disguised "in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). They really belong to the world, Plane **R**, having done much injury to the Lord's people throughout the Age.

Harvest—A Time Of Separation

Christianity has existed in this mixed condition throughout the Gospel Age. The Lord pictured this in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43). In the parable an "enemy" sows "tares" amongst the "wheat." The reapers are told, "Let both grow together until the harvest." But then, "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers [the angels]—messengers, Gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." In this parable, the "good seed" are the "children of heaven," **n** and **m**. The "tares" or counterfeits (all of **q** and many of **p**), are "burned" in the sense that they recognize that their Christianity is merely nominal, not true, when Babylon's institutions fall during the time of trouble.

The Harvest of the Gospel Age parallels the Harvest at the end of the Jewish Age. Both at first have a time of trial and sifting and then a time of God's judgment and wrath. In the Jewish Harvest, the truth of the Gospel message separated the "wheat from the chaff," the "Israelite indeed" (John 1:47) from the nominal Jewish House.

In the Harvest of the Gospel Age, the truth "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" separates the "wheat" from the "tares" (Proverbs 4:18; Revelation 14:14). God calls His people to "Come out of" Babylon, the confused mixture of some truth with much error (Revelation 18:1-4) which is Christendom today. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

During the Harvest, some from among the spirit begotten Christians (Figure **t**), because lacking in zeal, are slow to separate from Babylon. These are called a "great multitude" in Revelation 7:9. They are influenced by a worldly spirit or overcharged with the cares of this life. It is only through special chastisements that they "wash their robes" in the "blood of the Lamb" and cleanse themselves. Their reward is to serve before "the throne of God" (Revelation 7:14, 15). Even though having lost the highest reward, when "called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb," they will shout, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6,7,9).

True Christians who are "faithful unto death" are promised a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). Small Pyramid **s** represents the faithful saints, taken to glory during the Harvest period. Pyramid **r** represents our returned Lord, whom they meet in the resurrection. During the Harvest "the dead in Christ ... rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, NAS). That is, the faithful saints of the past slept in death waiting for our Lord's return before their resurrection change. Afterwards those who die during the Harvest need not sleep, but are changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). They are gathered together—not all at the same time—but to the same place—as they gradually one by one complete their course in death. (See "together" used in context in 1 Thessalonians 5:10,11.)

Figures **t**, **u** and **v** represent Babylon—the nominal Church—being judged during "the time of trouble" closing this Age. For centuries Babylon has misrepresented God's character by many of its doctrines and practices. At both of Jesus' advents, he is "a stone of stumbling" to "both the houses of Israel"—natural and spiritual (Isaiah 8:14). Natural Israel as a nation failed to recognize Jesus' presence and purpose as Messiah. Nominal spiritual Israel (Christianity) also misapprehends both the manner and purpose of Jesus' second advent.

The nominal church, as a system, comes to its end by the “seven last plagues” (Revelation 16:1-21). The destruction of the false church system takes place in the end of the Gospel Age Harvest, shown by Shaded area S.

The Messianic Millennium of Blessing

Restoring the human race will be a gradual work—requiring all of the Millennial Age for its full accomplishment. The results of Adamic death will be “swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:25,26,54). Under the wonderful reign of the Christ, the effects of sickness, pain, death will all yield obedience to the Great Restorer’s power.

Christ, with his faithful Church, will be the head of all things (Pyramid, part **x**) in the big Pyramid. Next in rank will be the Great Company (and all obedient angels) on the spirit plane (Pyramid, part **y**). The next levels (**z** and **w**) will be the restored Earthly Kingdom with Israel (Pyramid, part **z**)—led by the Ancient Worthies—blessing and instructing the rest of the world of mankind. (Zechariah 8:13, 23; Isaiah 60:18; 27:6; Jeremiah 3:17, etc.).

During these “times of restitution,” the world of mankind (Pyramid, Part **W**) will be lifted up and restored to what Adam lost for himself and his posterity. Each person will be given all the time necessary to make progress towards righteousness and perfection (Isaiah 65:20). Only relatively few of earth’s billions will practice “feigned obedience” (Psalm 66:3, NAS), but they will be openly exposed during the “little season” following the Millennium. Then Satan will be loosed (Revelation 20:9) and these will join in his rebellion. They will die the “second death” from which there is no resurrection. Christ “dieth no more” (Romans 6:9).

Our Father’s Great Plan for blessing “all the families of the earth” is certainly “good tidings of great joy ... to all people” (Luke 2:10). At last, all will see that God has overruled evil for good.

Oneness Of Creation Under Christ

The figure of a pyramid well illustrates the oneness of all God’s creation under the headship of Christ. “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:10).

Christ Jesus, “the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14), is beautifully represented by the top-stone of a pyramid, perfect and complete in itself. The entire building beneath must conform to the lines of its perfection. “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6).

One peculiarity of our corner top-stone, is that Jesus is a “foundation” that is laid first! The Church under Christ is then “built up in him” (Colossians 2:7) as “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5, NAS). The work will progress during the Millennial Age until every creature is individually conformed to Jesus’ perfect character. Those few who will not align their hearts in obedience with Christ’s principles of righteousness “shall be destroyed from among the people” in second death (Acts 3:22,23). “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth ... heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13).

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

As illustrated on the Chart, the Tabernacle of the Israelites contains a picture corresponding to the steps to glory in the Gospel Age. After one leaves the Camp, representing the world in sin (Plane **R**), one enters by a Gate into the Court (Plane **N**). Here we see the sacrifice on the Brazen Altar, representing appreciation for the sacrifice of Christ—and the laver, representing our opportunity for cleansing.

If we proceed further, we come to the Door of the Holy. There we have a choice to make. Should we consecrate our life to God? If we go forward in consecration, we go through the Door into the Holy and become spirit begotten (Plane **M**). Strengthened by the “Bread of Presence,” and enlightened by the “Candlestick,” we are enabled to offer acceptable incense to God by Jesus at the “Golden Altar.” Finally, if we finish faithfully, we enter the Most Holy picturing Heaven itself (Plane **L**). We are resurrected at last—and ready to share with Jesus in the glorious work of the Kingdom of the Ages to Come (Plane **K**).

Praise God! Our graphic vision of God’s wonderful Plan is truly made “plain” (Habakkuk 2:2) with the Chart of the Ages.

STUDY THIRTEEN: THIS WORLD'S KINGDOMS

In the first book of Divine Revelation, God declares His purpose for His earthly creation and its government.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26-28).

Man's Original Dominion Over Earth

The dominion of earth was placed in the hands of father Adam. He was perfect and fully qualified to be ruler and king of the earth. But the dominion was not for him alone; he represented all his posterity. “Let them have dominion.” If the human race had remained sinless, this dominion would never have passed out of its hands.

No one was given dominion over his fellow man by this commission. Mankind was given dominion over the earth to cultivate its fruitage for the benefit of all. Vegetable and mineral wealth, as well as all varieties of animal, were given into man's command for his service. As the population would increase, it would become necessary for people to organize ways for just distribution of the common blessings. Eventually, representatives would be elected to manage affairs for the common interests of all. If mankind had remained sinless, loving God and one's neighbor as one's self, society would have run peacefully.

Thus, the original design of the Creator was for man's government to be a Republic. Every man would be a sovereign while working for the common good. Such a dominion over earth had only one law: Love (Romans 13:10). “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-40).

When God gave man dominion over the work of His hands (Psalm 8:5,6), he became God's representative in the first establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. But when Adam rebelled and sinned, God's Kingdom ceased immediately. Since that time God's Kingdom has not been reestablished except in a brief, typical manner with ancient Israel. Nevertheless, though mankind lost its dominion, God allowed him to exercise power according to his own ideas and choices “until he come whose right it is” (Ezekiel 21:25-27).

When Jesus died, he not only provided for man's redemption, but also for the recovery of man's original inheritance of the earth. The purpose of Messiah's rule over the Earth during the Millennium will be to put down all sin and rebellion and to prepare mankind to be God's representative ruler of Earth again (1 Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 19:15; 22:5).

God's Typical Model Kingdom

During the Jewish Age, God organized Israel as his “typical” kingdom under Moses and the Judges. Israel was called “the Kingdom of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 13:8), and “Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 29:23). Israel had a sort of Republic which, later, under the kings, became generally more repressive. However, the reigns of David and Solomon were used by God to represent, in measure, the coming Kingdom when Messiah should reign. When the people transgressed against the LORD, he chastised them repeatedly until finally in the days of Zedekiah, the last king of the line of David, the royal power was removed. The typical kingdom of God was overthrown.

God through Ezekiel prophesied regarding Zedekiah, “Take off the crown ... I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he comes whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezekiel 21:25-27). Removing the crown was fulfilled when the King of Babylon removed Judah's king and took the people captive. The prophecy decreed that it should remain overturned until Christ came to claim it. Cyrus the Persian later restored their national existence, but they were thereafter tributary, successively to Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Then, in A.D. 70, Israel was destroyed as a nation and the people scattered among the nations.

The Prince of This World

God's Kingdom was not set up at the First Advent of Christ, but Jesus promised that he would establish his Kingdom at his return (Luke 19:12). Satan continues to be the “Prince of this World” (John 12:31). Israel's being returned to its land today—though with much conflict and trouble—is an evidence that the time is close when Satan's “kingdom of this world” will fall. The time for God's Kingdom under Messiah is fixed and marked in the Scriptures and it will continue “forever and ever” in power and glory (Revelation 11:15, NAS).

The interval since the removing of God's scepter from Israel until it is taken up by Christ, is termed in Scripture, “The Times of the Gentiles.” God has indirectly recognized the Gentile governments until His purposes are complete. “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24, NAS). God “ordained” or allowed these intervening governments to take their own course, for a wise purpose. (Romans 13:1). Their imperfect rule proves that imperfect man is unable to govern himself. All this has been a part of God's Plan and, eventually, all shall work for good and even the “wrath of man shall praise Thee” (Psalm 76:10).

Satan is not the “Prince of this World” by right, but by usurpation. Through fraud and deception, he invisibly controls fallen men as “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). Satan misrepresents God's Plan and blinds men to the Truth. Satan even tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, offering him “all the kingdoms of the world,” if only Jesus would worship him (Matthew 4:8,9).

Meanwhile the world groans, and waits. Philosophers dream of a golden age, politicians unsuccessfully try to fix the problems of this world. The whole creation is longing for something better. They do not realize it, but what they are waiting for is “the revealing of the sons of God” with Kingdom power (Romans 8:22,19, NAS).

Prophetic Overview of the Kingdoms of This World

God has given us several panoramic views of the governments of this world and their overthrow, and the setting up of the everlasting Kingdom under Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

Before Jerusalem was destroyed the first time, Daniel—already in captivity—interpreted a perplexing dream for the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a mighty image composed of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay that was struck by a stone and destroyed. Daniel explained that it represented four great empires that would be given a lease to rule by God’s permission after the overthrow of Israel, God’s typical Kingdom (Daniel 2:31-45): “Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

“Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.



“This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee [‘ordained’] a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And where-soever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

“And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee [silver], and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided [mixed]; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken [brittle].”

Man’s Last Universal Empire

Although history reveals previous empires of Earth, only four universal dominions have ruled over the Holy Land. The Babylonian Empire, as the “head of gold,” was conquered by the Medo-Persian “breast of silver.” Then a third “brass” Grecian Empire conquered it and, in turn, was conquered by a fourth Roman Empire of “iron.” This last universal empire held sway in Jesus’ day. “There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed” (Luke 2:1). Rome was the strongest and longest enduring, even though it had feet dividing into ten “toes ... part of iron, and part of clay.”

These “toes” represent the nations of Europe which grew out of the old Roman Empire. Why part clay? Clay is like imitation stone. These countries were a mixture of church and state (clay and iron), and claimed to be Christ’s Kingdom—Christendom. Pagan Rome became Papal Rome which set itself up as a counterfeit “Kingdom of God,” and reigned with an iron hand throughout the centuries. Even Protestant countries such as England and Germany followed this example of churches wedded to governments. In the vision, when the image was hit by a “stone” at the feet, it was broken to pieces and blown away (Daniel 2:34, 35). Thereafter the stone became a great mountain. This stone represents the true Kingdom of God which will one day “fill the whole earth.”

World War I brought the fall of the dynasties which claimed to rule “by the grace of God.” Although continuing as governments after 1914, God’s lease of power to the Gentiles to rule ended. God began to prepare for His Kingdom on Earth to be established. Providentially timed, right after the War, Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 which provided for a Jewish State. “His Majesty’s government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” By 1948 Israel became a nation again. In due time, Israel will be revitalized by faith (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Zechariah 12:6-10) to then become the nucleus of God’s Kingdom on earth (Zechariah 8:21).

Daniel prophesied, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed ... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44). Notice, the governments are destroyed, but not the people. Our Lord Jesus came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them (John 3:17).

Various methods have been tried to govern the world—socialism, capitalism, communism, democracy—but the only lasting solution will be the Kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world will be “broken to shivers” (Revelation 2:26,27), but after that, the people themselves will be blessed

(Isaiah 19:22; Jeremiah 3:22, 23; Hosea 6:1, 14:4; Isaiah 2:3; Revelation 22:2).

The “stone” which strikes the image is the Church class. It was “cut out of the mountain without hands”—representing that the saints who will rule with Christ in glory are taken from the kingdoms of this world, “cut out” by the power of God’s holy Spirit (Daniel 2:45; Revelation 3:21). When the Church is complete in glory, then the Kingdom of God will begin to operate in the earth. It will work gradually at first, through Israel, then expand to fill the earth. “In the last days, the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains” (Isaiah 2:2,3). People from all nations will then come up “to the house of the God of Jacob” to be taught. “Out of Zion [spiritual Israel] shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem [natural Israel].”

Daniel’s Vision of Earthly Governments

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream illustrated the kingdoms of this world as men see them—according to their relative strength and grandeur. Daniel’s dream depicted the same governments from God’s viewpoint—bestly. The governments of earth certainly have helped to maintain a degree of order, but because of their lust for greatness and power, they have marshaled countless armies and made millions of widows and orphans. “And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up” (Malachi 3:15).

Daniel’s Dream Is Recorded in Daniel 7:1-11

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream ... then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters. Daniel spoke and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

“The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings ... And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear ... After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard ... and dominion was given to it.

“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.

“I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.”

Fourth Beast—Rome

In this dream the Lion represents Babylon, the Bear represents Medo-Persia, the Leopard Greece, and the fourth beast, “dreadful and terrible,” is Rome. We pay particular attention to the last one because it reaches into modern history. It had ten horns, and, like the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, these represent the divisions of power which came out of the empire once ruled by Rome.

A “little horn” arose after the ten. It replaced three of them and ruled among them. This “little horn” represents the gradual rise to power of the Church of Rome, Papacy. It effectively replaced three divisions of the Roman Empire in Italy (the Heruli, the Eastern Exarchate, and the Ostrogoths). Papacy became established as a civil power. The “eyes of a man” represent the intelligence of this system, and its “mouth” and words represent Papacy’s bombastic claims and decrees.

This fourth beast is also depicted in Revelation as a “dragon,” representing “the Devil” and his influence (Revelation 12:9). This dragon, Pagan Rome, persecuted the early Church and produced many martyrs, but then Satan changed his ways. As he often transforms himself to appear as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), so Pagan Rome was transformed from heathenism to Catholicism and claimed to be Christ’s Kingdom. Under Papal Rome, not only were God’s Plan and character misrepresented, but great bloody persecutions more severe and protracted than even those of Pagan Rome, were brought against the true Church.

After giving some details of the Papal horn, the Prophet states it would lose its dominion by a gradual process until it was completely destroyed. The turning point ending Papacy’s power to persecute came in 1799, when the Pope died in France as a prisoner of Napoleon. The prayers and curses of the Pope availed nothing. The Vatican’s temporal power waned rapidly until 1870 when it lost the last vestige of temporal power at the hands of Victor Emmanuel. Ironically, in that same year, with the great words which the horn was speaking (Daniel 7:11), Papacy declared the infallibility of the Popes!

The preceding beasts “had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time” (Daniel 7:12). As each one lost their empire, their dominion passed to the next. The lives of Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece were each prolonged as the succeeding empires absorbed their customs, cultures and practices into their own government. For example, when Persia conquered the Chaldeans at Babylon, Daniel was retained as an administrator. Alexander the Great of Greece adopted various Persian customs, and during the Roman Empire, Greek culture and language was widespread.

However, the life of the final beast, Rome, would not be prolonged. “I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame” (Daniel 7:11). No successor empire builds upon this one, or incorporates it. It is succeeded by the Kingdom of Christ, which is a new and pure government provided by God.

Fifth Universal Dominion Forever

No matter the means used, the cause of the fall of the kingdoms of this world will be the establishment of the Fifth Universal Empire, the Kingdom of God, under Christ.

“One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days [God] ... there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away. ...

and the greatness of the kingdom of the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the Most High" (Daniel 7:13,14,27).

Jehovah will place the dominion of earth in the hands of Christ. God will "put all things under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:27). However, the "kingdoms of this world" (Revelation 11:15; John 16:11), will not surrender peaceably, so it will first be necessary to "Bind their kings with chains ... execute upon them the judgment written; this honor have all his saints" (Psalm 149:8,9). Nor will Satan, the "prince of this world," quietly yield his usurped authority. He must be "bound" and restrained by force (Revelation 20:1,2).

Enthroned with their Head, the overcomers of the present age will rule, bless and restore the groaning creation, which suffered under the selfish and beastly governments of earth. In the meantime, as the "broken pieces" are blown away and the fourth beast awaits the consuming fire, we pray fervently: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

Attempts of Man to Govern Himself

We make no attempt to excuse our rebel race, but we can sympathize with its vain efforts to govern itself. Even these "beastly" governments have been better than no government—better than lawlessness and anarchy. Even when well intentioned, man generally cannot accomplish the good he wishes. But God has permitted man's efforts at self-government as an experiment, to show that without instruction from God, and when subject to the influence of Satan, man cannot achieve his goals.

The object of the nobler governments of man has been to promote justice and well-being for the people—but success has varied through the centuries. Noble efforts for just leadership have certainly been tried. Good laws and courts of appeal have been established to protect domestic and commercial interests. But, under Satan's influence, these have been infected by the baser elements of society. When justice is ignored, and the selfishness and corruption of tyrants prevail, costly revolutions and wars are the inevitable result.

Increase of Knowledge—Dissatisfaction

We recognize man's governments as the efforts of poor, fallen humanity to govern itself. But after centuries of experiment, dissatisfaction is more general and widespread than ever before.

This change of public thinking has exploded in modern times. The spirit of independence is now abroad. Although the invention of printing about A.D. 1440 increased enlightenment, not since the 1800s has education become general among the masses. Inventions and discoveries flood the marketplace. Communication is instant worldwide by Internet and Cell Phones. Knowledge and enlightenment are limiting the influence of Satan in some ways—in preparation for God's Kingdom on Earth. The light of truth on every subject is challenging our world and escalating the trouble. "There is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2, NAS).

This increase of knowledge awakens a feeling of self-respect and yearning among men for their natural rights, thus contributing to widespread dissatisfaction. With fallen human nature, this will finally express itself in world-wide revolution and anarchy. In the midst of man's confusion, God will establish His Kingdom and "the desire of all nations shall come" (Haggai 2:7). Man's extremity will become God's opportunity, and the Kingdom of God will be established in power and glory. "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 Church Not To Be Involved in World's Kingdoms

Knowing God's Kingdom would come in the future, neither Jesus nor the Apostles interfered with earthly rulers. On the contrary, they taught the Church to submit to these earthly powers even though they often suffered their abuse. Jesus' followers are taught to obey the laws of the land unless they conflict with God's laws (Acts 4:19; 5:29). They pay their taxes and are law-abiding (Matthew 22:21).

However, though man's governments are permitted by God, the Church should not get involved with politics. The saints of God should let their light shine, but it is not our mission now to help the world improve its government. Jesus himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). We are heirs of a heavenly Kingdom (Luke 12:32), and will bless the world from above during the Millennium. We should point forward to the promised Kingdom of God and its blessings. Then it will be our privilege to work for the blessing and uplift of the world.

False Church United With Kings of Earth

The early Christian Church was tempted to become involved in the politics of existing governments. Preaching the coming Kingdom of God, which will replace earthly kingdoms, was unpopular and brought persecution, so many Christians negotiated to combine with earthly powers for their mutual strength and benefit.

Thus everything changed! Instead of humility, came pride; instead of truth, came error; instead of being persecuted, a false church became the persecutor of those who condemned her. For control over the people, the doctrine of eternal torment evolved and proved useful. This worldly church "made all the nations drunk" with her errors (Revelation 17:2). Soon she was crowning or deposing the kings of Europe, becoming the "queen" of nations (Revelation 17:3-5; 18:7). Instead of waiting for Jesus to return with a Kingdom, Papacy established her own with the kings of earth. The Reformers abandoned many of Papacy's claims, but sought the honor of attaching themselves to the kings of earth. In this they became daughters of their "mother."

For centuries the kingdoms of Europe thus claimed to be Christian kingdoms, reigning "by the grace of God." Jesus taught we are "not of the world," and Paul exhorted "be not conformed to this world" (John 17:16; Romans 12:2). God never approved of calling these kingdoms by the name of Christ! As the two dreams interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar show, God permitted a limited grant for a limited time to the Gentile powers, but He does not endorse these kingdoms as His. Their imperfect laws and often selfish and vicious rulers have grossly misrepresented Christ's righteous Kingdom (Isaiah 32:1).

"Pilgrims And Strangers" On Earth

Thinking of the kingdoms of this world as Christ's Kingdom has distracted many of God's people from the promised heavenly Kingdom. Instead of being devoted to preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom, Christians have mingled in politics. Although Christians are to submit to the laws of the land, they were always to remain "pilgrims and strangers" on earth (1 Peter 2:11-14).

Today there is a global shaking of the nations. Should we hope for them to endure? We should rather look forward to what is to follow—the

Kingdom of Christ. The Fifth Universal Empire is being established amid the rubble of these kingdoms by the “King of kings” (Revelation 17:14), and soon the wind will blow them all away.

Jesus With The Saints To Reign And Bless

The world sees that “Christian nations” are not actually Christ-like. Some conclude that Christianity itself —by being in league with civil powers— seeks chiefly its own welfare. Meanwhile the governments of earth seek to retain their dominion, unaware of the better things to follow.

“Why do the nations tumultuously assemble, and the people meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure [saying], I have anointed my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

“Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss [make friends with] the Son [God’s Anointed] lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way; for his wrath may soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that take refuge in him.” (Psalm 2:1-12, KJV margin, Rotherham)

God’s wrath will be soon fully kindled. We take refuge in knowing that beyond Satan’s kingdom, “the saints of the most High [together with Christ] shall ... possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever” (Daniel 7:18).

STUDY FOURTEEN: GOD’S KINGDOM—HEAVENLY AND EARTHLY

The prominent theme woven throughout the Old and New Testament is the Kingdom of God and its ruler, Messiah. Because of all the promises and prophecies pointing toward the exaltation of their nation under Messiah, the Kingdom was the hope and “expectation” of every Israelite (Luke 3:15).

John the Baptist, forerunner of our Lord Jesus, announced to Israel, “Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Jesus himself “went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). All his parables taught the Kingdom theme from various standpoints. His lessons included the need of entire consecration to God, in order to share with Jesus in administering the Kingdom (Matthew 19:27,28; Luke 14:27-35; Matthew 22:37). The Apostles were then sent forth to preach the same message (Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2).

A Ransom Provided Before the Kingdom

Jesus encouraged his followers, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). He specifically promised his disciples, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may ... sit on thrones judging [ruling] the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29,30). How saddened and disappointed they were that, instead of being enthroned as king, Jesus was crucified! As the two on the road to Emmaus said to him, whom they supposed was a stranger, we had “trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21,25-27). Then Jesus opened their eyes by explaining from the Scriptures that his sacrifice was necessary before his Kingdom could be established.

God could have given Jesus the dominion of earth without redeeming man. “The Most High ruleth [over] the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he [pleaseth]” (Daniel 4:32), but in that case any blessings for the world would be temporary. For man to receive everlasting life, he must be first legally redeemed from the penalty of death.

When Jesus was about to ascend back to heaven, with hopes revived, the apostles enquired, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” The Lord did not respond, “Israel?—they just crucified me!” Instead Jesus’ answer did not contradict their hopes but simply said, “It is not for you to know the times and seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:6,7). His answer clearly implied a future time for the establishment of his Kingdom.

Earthly and Heavenly

At first the disciples, in common with the entire Jewish nation, had an imperfect concept of the Kingdom. They thought it was only an Earthly Kingdom, just as many today err in the opposite direction, thinking it is only heavenly. But Jesus taught both. His faithful disciples would rule with him from heaven, and that rule would be exerted over all the earth (John 14:3; Luke 19:17). For this reason Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Heavenly Kingdom Invisible

The worldly-wise considered Jesus an impostor and fanatic and his followers mere dupes. They could not explain his astonishing words or miracles, but it seemed absurd to them that Jesus would inherit, rule, and bless the world. His followers—fishermen and common people—seemed no match for the empire of Rome.

The Pharisees, hoping to expose Jesus’ claims and undeceive his followers, demanded to know when this Kingdom would make its appearance. They asked, “When will your soldiers arrive?” “He answered ... ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst’ ” (Luke 17:20,21, NAS). Jesus here describes the spiritual phase of the Kingdom. It was that which he introduced, and to which he called people. The Pharisees, whom Jesus styled “hypocrites,” were unable to understand this (Ephesians 4:4; Luke 16:16; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

There was some truth to the Jewish expectation of an Earthly Kingdom, and this will be realized in due time, but first the Heavenly Kingdom must be set up. Its presence will be invisible, and for a time unrecognized; but, when fully established, it will be everywhere present, ruling and powerful. Its effects will be clearly seen in the Earthly Kingdom.

The Questions of Nicodemus

One Pharisee, however, named Nicodemus, came to Jesus privately at night, anxious to solve the mystery of the Kingdom weighing on his mind. The conversation between the Lord and Nicodemus, (John 3) recorded in part, gives more insight into the Kingdom of God and may be paraphrased as follows:

Nicodemus—“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God is with him.” Yet, you and your disciples claim, “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand,” while you have no army or power! When and how will this Kingdom be established?

Jesus—I can answer your question about the Kingdom, but still you would not understand. “Except a man be begotten[†] from above, he cannot see[‡] [know or be acquainted with] the Kingdom of God.”

[†] The Greek word is *gennao*, Strong’s Concordance word number 1080. It can be rendered either “begotten” or “born,” according to the context. Both concepts are included, for a birth implies a previous begetting, and a begetting leads to a birth. (The English word “generated,” as applied to new life, would be similar.) When *gennao* is associated with a male, it is usually begotten—when associated with a female, it is usually born. (Thus in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 18 it should be begotten, because God, masculine, is the active agent.) However, sometimes the translation depends instead on the nature of the act. Thus when it is used with *ek*, meaning from or out of, it should be translated “born.” (As in John 3:5,6, “out of water,” “out of flesh,” “out of spirit.”)

[‡] The Greek word for “see” here is *eido*, Strong’s Concordance word number 1482, “to see” (literally or figuratively), for “to know.” For example, “consider” (Acts 15:6).

Nicodemus, even my disciples have much to learn about the Kingdom they are proclaiming! I cannot tell them more for the same reason I cannot tell you. Our Father requires obedience to the enlightenment already possessed before more light is given. Those worthy of sharing in that Kingdom need to walk by faith—sometimes seeing only one step in advance clearly.

Nicodemus—But what do you mean? “How can a man be begotten when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be

born?" I notice my disciples, like John the Baptist's, preach and baptize in water regularly. Is this baptism a symbolic birth, somehow necessary to see or enter your Kingdom?

Jesus—Our nation is a consecrated nation, baptized into Moses "in the sea" and "in the cloud" when they left Egypt (1 Corinthians 10:1,2). God accepted our nation in Moses as mediator of our covenant at Sinai. But this covenant has been forgotten. Many are openly sinners; others are self-righteous hypocrites. That is why John and my disciples preach repentance!

But more than this is necessary. You must also receive a begetting and birth of the spirit, in order to see my Kingdom. Repentance will bring you back to a justified condition—then you will be able to recognize me as Messiah, the greater Moses. When one receives me, and consecrates their life to do God's will, then one is begotten to a new life by our Father. After developing as a new creature, one will be "born" in the first resurrection. Then one will both see, and share in, the Kingdom.

The change to this new birth of the Spirit is truly great, Nicodemus. What is born of the Spirit is spirit. Let me illustrate: "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NAS). In the resurrection they will "enter into" or become part of the Kingdom administration. They will be like the wind—powerful, yet invisible.

Nicodemus—How can this be? Invisible beings?

Jesus—Now, Nicodemus, surely as a well studied Pharisee you know that spirit beings can be present, yet invisible. Remember Elisha and his servant as well as Balaam's ass. Spirit beings were present, yet invisible. Angels are invisible spirit beings. As I told you, except a man be begotten from above, he cannot understand the Kingdom of God.

To become a joint-heir with me in this Kingdom, you must follow the light step by step. You acknowledge me to be a teacher come from God, but with all my preaching and miracles, you have not acted on your faith and openly become one of my followers. What I have taught with earthly illustrations such as the wind, has not brought understanding or conviction, so "how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (verses 12,13) I know what I speak of, for I alone have descended from heaven and no man has ever ascended to heaven. The knowledge of heavenly things can only be received with the begetting of the Spirit. Heavenly things themselves can only be experienced when "born" as a spirit being (verses 3, 6).

Kingdom Now a "Little Flock"

Jesus as Messiah first offered participation in his Kingdom to "his own" Jewish nation (John 1:11,12), but only a "remnant" of Israel accepted (Romans 11:5). Later, after his resurrection, the call was extended to the Gentiles at the conversion of Cornelius. Still, even after including Gentiles, it is only a "Little Flock" who will appreciate the privilege of joint-heirship in God's Kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Today over a third of the world are called Christians. But most of these are "tares," not the true "wheat" of the Lord's flock. The Kingdom of God is not composed of tares. However there is a work of grace now in the hearts of believers, within the true Church. And there is a sense in which the true Church now is the Kingdom of God.

But ultimately the Kingdom will become worldwide. Christ will rule "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8), "all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Daniel 7:27), for "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Philippians 2:10).

Now the "prince of this world" rules a kingdom of "darkness" (John 16:11; Colossians 1:13). But when the Kingdom of God is established, Satan will be thoroughly bound "that he should deceive the nations no more" (Revelation 20:3). Then the Kingdom will be set up "in power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). The truth will become worldwide (1 Timothy 2:4; Jeremiah 31:34), and all will recognize the righteous authority of our Lord Jesus (Isaiah 25:9).

Kingdom Established When Jesus Returns

The parables of our Lord Jesus clearly teach that the Kingdom is established after the return of Christ. At first the disciples "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear," so Jesus gave a parable to explain there would be a lengthy delay. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (Luke 19:11,12).

The promise to us, who hope to reign with Christ, is "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"—not in this life, but in the next (Revelation 2:10; 5:10). Only "if we suffer" with Jesus will we "also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

By contrast, the nominal church often seeks friendship with the world. They consider temporal prosperity a sign of God's favor. Jesus warned, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23). James said, God has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith ... heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him" (James 2:5).

Embryo Kingdom Now in Preparation

The true Church at present is not the Kingdom of God set up in power and glory, but is only in its embryo condition, developing faith, knowledge, patience, love. If we "give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure," then we will receive an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10,11).

Jesus is our king now, and we accept his lordship now. In this sense we have already been "translated ... into the kingdom of his dear son" (Colossians 1:13). Paul refers to the kingdom in a similar way, "The kingdom of God is ... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). These texts refer to the blessings we enjoy now. But in time, when the Church is complete in glory, the Kingdom of God will extend to the entire world, under the reign of Christ and his Church.

The promises of Kingdom honor and joint-heirship with Christ are strong incentives to us for faithfulness under present trials and persecution. As the letters to the churches in Revelation repeatedly affirm, only overcomers in this present life gain Kingdom honors in the next life. "He that overcometh ... to him will I give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26; 20:6). "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

The Worldly, Premature Kingdom

Human nature seeks to avoid suffering and is ever ready to grasp honor and power. Even in the Apostles' day some began to claim the future honors for the present life. "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us" (1 Corinthians 4:8). The effect was toward pride, and away from sacrifice.

Meanwhile Paul, and other faithful ones, were still "fools for Christ's sake ... despised ... made as the filth of the world" (1 Corinthians 4:10-17). If the promised reign had begun, Paul reasoned, why was he not reigning also? The saints do not reign in this life. They enter their royal authority at their resurrection. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

The early Church endured much persecution under Pagan Rome, but after faithfully enduring much tribulation, theories began to spread that the mission of the Church was to conquer the world, establish the Kingdom, and reign over the nations before the Lord's return. Compromises with Paganism were made to ease the Christian's way. This led to great ceremony, pomp and show to impress the worldly. The wheat field planted by Jesus and his Apostles became overgrown with false wheat—"tares" (Matthew 13:24-30,36-42).

Step by step the Church rose in secular authority. During the fourth century it began uniting with the kings of earth, instead of waiting for Christ's return. For centuries Papacy herself crowned and uncrowned the kings of Europe, and her various Protestant "daughters" sought to imitate her political influence. Those systems also have more or less claimed that the reign of the Church is in progress. Alas, when Christ returns to "stand at the door [figuratively]," he finds the nominal church thinking she is "rich," although she is spiritually "poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17-20).

Any thoughtful observer can see a great difference in the view of Christendom, aspiring to earthly riches and authority, and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, that the Kingdom and its honors follow the return of Christ and our resurrection to glory.

Two Phases of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God does not come at first with outward show or "observation" (Luke 17:20). The spiritual part will always be invisible to man. When fully set up, however, the Kingdom will also include an earthly visible phase. The presence and power of the spiritual phase will then be made known chiefly through its human representation.

Those of the spiritual phase of the Kingdom are the overcoming saints of the Gospel Age—the Christ, Head and Body—glorified. Their resurrection is the "first resurrection" because it precedes all others and because through them all others are to be blessed.

"They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.* This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6, NAS).

The phrase, "*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed,*" was added sometime during the Fifth Century. (The phrase is not found in the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts—the Sinaitic, Vatican #1209 and #1160, nor the Syriac.) It was evidently copied into the text by accident from a marginal note, and is not an authentic part of Scripture for no manuscript dated earlier than the fifth century contains it. Additionally, this phrase would contradict the clear testimony of Scripture that the purpose of the Millennial Age is to give everyone a full opportunity for life again, including the dead of past ages, who must be raised during the Millennium to have that opportunity.

Those who come "to life" to reign attain the "first resurrection." All the rest of mankind are raised during—not after—the Thousand-Year Kingdom for the purpose of their restoration. Their resurrection (Strong's #386 *anastasis*, "a standing up again") will be a gradual re-standing to regain the fullness of life lost by father Adam in the Earthly Kingdom

Ancient Worthies Resurrected As Leaders

The "Ancient Worthies" are those men and women of faith who lived before Christ opened a "new and living way" to "glory and honor and immortality" (Hebrews 10:20; Romans 2:7). These include people like Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samson, David, Samuel, Rahab and the Prophets. "These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" (Hebrews 11:39). As men and women of proven faith, they will not be brought forth to judgment again, but will be raised as perfect human beings at the outset of the Kingdom.

Their leadership and example will inspire the world. They will be models of perfection for the world to see. As the world comes up from their graves with their handicaps and challenges, they will see the potential of perfect life exhibited in the Ancient Worthies. These Ancient Worthies will be the human representatives of the Heavenly Kingdom of God on earth.

We are not given explicit information as to the exact manner in which these two phases of the Heavenly Kingdom will operate, but we know that after the final removal of the kingdoms of this world, and the binding of Satan, these divinely honored agents of God will lead the world to a better future. The world will quickly learn to cooperate with them, follow their lead, and progress up "The way of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8).

The Ancient Worthies as perfect men will establish a perfect government. Well planned educational and charitable works will promote every aspect of human welfare. The wealth of the world will multiply and be distributed equitably among all who cooperate. The Ancient Worthies will draw upon the wisdom from above, and the human race will be elevated step by step, back to life, health, blessing, and ultimately to perfection.

As people have God's law written "in their inward parts ... their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33), every noble desire and ambition will be gratified. It will be glorious and satisfying. When the work of restitution is complete, at the end of a thousand years, the whole human race will stand approved, without spot or wrinkle, in the presence of God—excepting the few incorrigible, who will be removed (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21:8). The work and labor of the Ancient Worthies will never be forgotten by mankind who will be forever grateful. They will shine as "the stars forever and ever" and be held in everlasting remembrance (Daniel 12:3; Psalm 112:6). The saints in glory will "shine forth as the sun" (Matthew 13:43). The honors of heaven and earth will be laid at the feet of Christ and his heavenly "bride" class, and ages of eternal blessing will lie ahead (Romans 8:18; Ephesians 2:7-14).

First the “Stars,” Then the “Sand”

That God intended to establish both a heavenly and an earthly phase of the Kingdom was suggested as far back as God’s promise to Abraham. “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven [spiritual], and as the sand which is upon the sea shore [earthly]; ... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:17; 26:4). Abraham probably understood only the earthly promises, but God had in mind the superior heavenly promises as well—favor upon favor.

The Abrahamic Covenant was a root of promise. From this root grew fleshly Israel—but later Gentile believers were grafted in also, when the natural branches were cut off because of unbelief (Romans 11:17-21,25-32). The spiritual branches are developed during the present Gospel Age, but there will also be earthly branches developed during the Millennial Age.

While natural Israel, the branches, which grew during the Jewish Age, appeared first, the spiritual branches of the Gospel Age receive the greater honor and glory in the Kingdom. So it will be that “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30).

The earthly promises to the Ancient Worthies cannot be fulfilled until the higher promises to the heavenly Seed are completed. “These all [Ancient Worthies] died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:13,39,40).

After Jesus sacrificed his life on Calvary’s cross, he was highly exalted in heavenly glory. The overcoming Church join him, first in suffering and sacrifice, then in the glory to follow. As “heirs according to the promise” of Abraham, they receive the chief blessing (Galatians 3:29). Then, when the heavenly class is completed, the blessings of God will flow through them to all others.

Israel—A “Light to the Nations”

The earthly channel of the Kingdom blessings will flow through Israel. Around this fact cluster the many prophecies which relate to the prominence of that nation in God’s plan.

“I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God” (Amos 9:14,15).

“It is too small a thing that you should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6, NAS).

“And it will come about that just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you that you may become a blessing” (Zechariah 8:13, NAS).

“In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and sprout; And they will fill the whole world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6, NAS).

“Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem ... ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:22,23).

The children of Israel will be the first in the Kingdom to recognize and cooperate with the fathers of faith—Abraham, Moses, David, and others—who will be “princes in all the earth” (Psalm 45:16). “And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou [Jerusalem] shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26).

Israel, by training under the Law, with a heritage of respect for the Ancient Worthies of the Old Testament, will be prepared for a speedy acceptance of the Kingdom, its new laws and rulers. Because they are children of the patriarchs, to whom God’s covenants were given, they will have the special privilege to represent the Kingdom of God to the world.

Jerusalem—“City of Peace”

Jerusalem, “the city of the Great King,” was the seat of empire in the typical kingdom of God, and it will be again when the Kingdom of God is established during the Millennium (Psalm 48:2; Matthew 5:35).

The Church complete, ready to rule with Christ to bless the world, is depicted in Revelation 21:2 as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Thus “Jerusalem” from above, and Jerusalem below, constitute the two phases of the one Heavenly Kingdom to govern the world. It will be the government Abraham looked for, “which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10, NAS). This government is founded upon the “rock” of the righteousness of Christ, the value of man’s ransom which he gave, and the firmness of divine justice that can no more condemn the redeemed than it could previously excuse the guilty (Romans 8:31-34; 1 Corinthians 3:11).

Glorious City of Peace! whose “walls” signify “Salvation” (Isaiah 60:18) and protection and blessing to all who enter, and whose foundation is laid in justice which can never be moved. As the people walk upward on the “Highway of Holiness” toward perfection in the Kingdom, they will become “kings,” sovereigns of earth as was Adam. “And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it” (Rev 21:24-26, NAS). John, in his vision, saw the people walking in the light of the New Jerusalem, but none who would defile it by working deceit or unrighteousness could enter. No matter how good or how evil their present life has been, all will have an opportunity to inherit the Kingdom. But, each will first be thoroughly tested and proved before they receive the invitation, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

As the world turns to righteousness, and fills the Kingdom, it will expand to fill the world. “New Jerusalem” which comes out of heaven admits through its gates the redeemed world, and thus expands to include the entire Earthly Kingdom as well. Thus “Jerusalem,” mentioned by the prophets, has a wide application.

Many Old Testament prophecies use the city of Jerusalem to symbolize the future glories and splendor of the Kingdom of God established in the earth.

“Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem” (Isaiah 52:9).

“Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isaiah 65:18).

“Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her ... that ye may ... be delighted with the abundance of her glory ... Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream” (Isaiah 66:10-12).

“At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it” (Jeremiah 3:17).

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain [Kingdom] 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 [spiritual] shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem [earthly]” (Isaiah 2:3).

God Will Have Mercy on All!

When considering these beautiful prophetic promises to Israel, keep in mind that Israel is sometimes typical of the whole world of mankind. Her Law Covenant, which promised life for obedience, pointed forward to a “new covenant” for the world during the Millennial Age and beyond. The blood of atonement offered by Israel’s priesthood represented the “better sacrifices” (Hebrews 9:23) and blessings brought by the Royal Priesthood—Christ and his Church.

The Law had been given to Israel to be a schoolmaster to prepare them to accept Christ (Galatians 3:24). Though it brought only a remnant of them at the first advent, in the second advent it will bring Israel as a people to the Lord. Israel will be a first-fruit among nations in the Kingdom. Under that government, God “will render to every man according to his deeds ... glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:6,10,11).

When Jesus came, Israel did not achieve what it sought—the chief place in divine favor and service. “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Romans 11:7). Israel, as a whole, failed to grasp the high calling to heavenly glory and joint-heirship with Jesus, therefore God expanded the call, and “did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14).

But from the Gentiles there are also only a few who have responded. Only a few, by obedience and self-sacrifice, make their “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Only a few actually become part of the Little Flock.

Many of the natural branches were broken off for unbelief, and we should take warning as well. “Boast not ... take heed lest He also spare not thee” (Romans 11:18-21). As to the Jewish people, despite the many broken branches, God’s election stands. Israel will yet have a special role in the Kingdom. “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father’s sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:28,29).

God is as able to “graft them in again” (Romans 11:23,24). Israel missed the chief blessing of the heavenly promises, hidden among the earthly promises. But those great earthly promises are still valid. Israel will still have a wonderful service for the world during the Millennium.

Israel’s “blindness”—their “hardness of heart” (Romans 2:5)—is only temporary. When the full number of the Gentile Church is complete, then Israel will be saved by Christ—Head and Body—who “shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” God will have mercy on all, blessing the Gentile world through the glorified Church from above, and through Israel, led by the Ancient Worthies.

“A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’ ... they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable ... because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ... Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Romans 11:25- 33, NAS).

Jerusalem on Two Mountains

“Who shall ascend into the hill [mountain] of Jehovah? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3,4).

Jerusalem was built on a double-top mountain, separated into two parts by the Tyropoeon Valley. It was one city, with one wall, and bridges connecting the two parts. On one mountain was the Temple, symbolizing the priestly office of the glorified Church. The other mountain might be understood to represent the earthly phase of the Kingdom.

It was an honor to be in the city at all, and a still greater honor to ascend the mountain with the holy Temple, where priests would officiate. “Clean hands and a pure heart” are necessary to attain either honor—whether the heavenly call now, or the earthly call during the Millennium.

Those who aspire to the Royal Priesthood, the Heavenly Kingdom, “walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit” (Romans 8:1). The Ancient Worthies, who will serve in the Earthly Kingdom, also loved righteousness, hated iniquity, and were grieved when overtaken by weakness. During the Millennium, when God’s spirit, the spirit of truth, is poured out upon “all flesh” (Acts 2:17), mankind will also need to strive for purity of heart if they would have a right to enter the city—the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34)—the original dominion of earth restored.

The Rule of Iron

Not all will be pleased, however, to see the Kingdom with its restrictive laws. “He shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:6-9; Revelation 2:27). The liberty to defraud, abuse, misrepresent, deceive, or hurt fellow men will be halted. Even the liberty of self-indulgence to abuse oneself will be

removed. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9). All present institutions founded upon wrong principles will be destroyed. Corruption of every kind will be exposed and ended. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail [righteous judgment] shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters [truth] shall overflow the hiding place" (Isaiah 28:17; Matthew 10:26).

Many will feel rebellious against the perfect and equitable rule because accustomed to lording it over fellow mortals. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you" (James 5:1-6, NAS). Many and severe will be the "stripes" (Psalm 89:32) which a present life of self-indulgence and gratification will naturally demand and receive under that reign before the lessons of righteousness have been learned. But the liberty to do good in any and every way will be immediately rewarded. Under Christ's reign the vast majority will learn to love righteousness and live forever. Still, some may refuse to conform to Kingdom equity, justice, and righteousness. These will be "destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23).

The Everlasting Kingdom

"The LORD [Jehovah] shall be King over all the earth in that day" (Zechariah 14:9). The Kingdom is Jehovah's. However, during the Millennium, the Kingdom will be under the direct control of Christ. After World War II, the aggressor nations were under temporary occupation in order to establish responsible democratic governments.

It will be similar with the world during the Millennial Age. The reign of Christ over the affairs of earth is for a limited time and for a particular purpose, and will terminate once that purpose is accomplished.

Man forfeited his rights through rebellion. God redeems those rights, through Christ, and restores them to man—but He requires man to work toward his own recovery. To administer this process requires a strong and perfect government, and heading this government is the privilege accorded to Christ. "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Then Jesus will turn it back to God, "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:25-28, NAS). Mankind will then deal directly, as at first, with Jehovah. The mediation of Christ and his Church will have accomplished completely the grand work of reconciliation.

Our acceptableness to God now is only through the merit of Christ's ransom sacrifice. But when the Kingdom is turned over to God, all people will be able to render perfect obedience in letter as well as spirit. All will be able to stand faultless before God, and receive the blessed result—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

The special intervention and reign of Christ and the Church over earth will then be finished. But the higher Kingdom and honor for the Bride and joint-heir of Christ—"ordained before the world unto our glory"—will never close (1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:4). Jesus with his Bride will forever share in increasing glory. What wonderful works in other worlds of our boundless universe await the power of this highly exalted agent of Jehovah!

Until then, while trouble in the world increases, the whole creation groans and waits. It is waiting for this Kingdom, "for the manifestation of the Sons of God" (Romans 8:19,22). God's Kingdom alone will crush out evil, heal and bless all. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

STUDY FIFTEEN: THE DAY OF THE LORD

The “Day of the LORD” [Jehovah] is the period of time in which God’s Kingdom is gradually set up under Christ, and the kingdoms of this world pass away. During this time Satan’s power and influence decline and flashes of truth of every kind, like “lightnings,” lead to revolution and war as never before (Psalm 97:1-4). The result is “great tribulation such as never was since there was a nation” (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1). It is called the “Day of Jehovah” because, though Christ is present with royal title and power, his work is more as the General of Jehovah subduing all things, than as the Prince of Peace blessing the world. Ultimately Christ will be recognized by all as King of kings.

The prophets represent this period of transition as the work of Jehovah to set up the dominion of Christ. “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom” (Daniel 2:44). “The Ancient of days did sit ... and they brought before him ... one like unto a son of man, and there was given him a dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages...and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:9,13,14,27). “I will give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance” (Psalm 2:8). When Jesus finishes the complete object of his reign, “then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him [the Father] that PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIM (1 Corinthians 15:28).

This time is also called the “Day of Vengeance of our God” and a “Day of Wrath.” (Isaiah 61:2; 63:1-4; Psalm 110:5). God’s wrath is not the result of divine malice—but rather because of violation of His just laws of righteousness for the good of all. Israel as Abraham’s descendants violated God’s written Law and suffered consequences. The Gentiles have also violated the law of “conscience.” Both Jews and Gentiles have thus stored up wrath awaiting “the revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Romans 1:28,29; 2:1-16). However, this correction while introducing the Millennial Kingdom of Christ will prove a remarkable blessing for the entire world.

Trouble—A Natural Result of Sin

In one sense, God’s wrath is a result of man’s disregard of Jesus’ righteous instruction, which reproves “the world of sin” (John 16:8). But in another sense, the coming trouble is but the natural and legitimate consequence of sin. Mankind generally neglects the advice of Scripture, and the influence of the holy Spirit working through his people. The time of trouble is a rebuke to this neglect.

God’s invitation to the Church has been to sacrifice with Christ (Romans 12:1)—but his message to the world has been more simple. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile; depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:13,14). But few heed either message. The saints who sacrifice with Christ are relatively few. The worldly often seek riches, honor, and power, no matter by what method.

The trouble of the Day of Jehovah could have been avoided by observing the principles of God’s Law, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... and thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39). But the depraved or carnal mind is opposed to this law of God, and as a natural consequence trouble will come as reaping after sowing.

Through the centuries of man’s history, too often selfishness and power have ruled. Only under Messiah’s rule of force by the “rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15) will mankind learn the superior benefits of the rule of righteousness and love. Then man will be changed from the inside. “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26,27).

History of Greed and Oppression

The change from Godlike love to selfishness can be traced back to when Adam and Eve were expelled from their home in Eden. Then, instead of having everything bountifully supplied, Adam was condemned to labor— “By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). Survival became the main drive for mankind, generally dwarfing his exercise of the more noble qualities of mind. Beyond necessity, man became greedy, grasping for the “Mammon” of wealth and luxury (Matthew 6:24). And Satan has taken great advantage of this tendency!

For thousands of years ignorance, racial prejudice, and national pride concentrated wealth in the hands of a few. Strangely, the masses often took pride in fearful obedience to these few. However, as the time neared for Jehovah to bless the world through a “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21), people have been awakened to their rights. Through the light of education, ignorance and superstition have given way to challenging the power of despots and rulers.

Since the late 1800s there has been a growing bitterness between those who control the means of production and the wage earning masses. World economies, now stressed with global financial meltdown, face bankruptcies. As a result, the wealthy are drawn closer to the governments, while unemployment pushes the poorer classes towards Socialism and even anarchy, through which they hope to find a better life.

Commendation should be given to the kindhearted rich who donate for the good of the general population for schools, hospitals and libraries. Nevertheless, tension and bitterness continues to grow between the wealthy and the laboring classes. But all these trends are preparing for the ending of the present systems so that the Kingdom of Christ can be established.

Prophecies About Babylon, the Rich and the Poor

Many prophecies of the Old Testament forecast how the present civil, social and religious systems will pass away. Prophecies concerning Egypt, Babylon and Israel had literal fulfillments—but they also have a later, and larger, End Time fulfillment. For instance, the prophecies about Babylon in Isaiah and Jeremiah are referred to in Revelation, long after literal Babylon was destroyed. (Compare Isaiah 47:7-9 with Revelation 18:7-9, and Jeremiah 51:63-64 with Revelation 18:21.)

In Revelation, “Babylon” clearly represents the nominal church, called Christendom. (Revelation 17:5, 9,18). Egypt in the bigger picture represents the world which God calls His people to leave. Israel of old often represents mankind in the Kingdom benefiting from atonement by its Royal Priesthood. Thus, God promises blessings to Israel, plagues to “Egypt,” and complete destruction to nominal Christendom “as a great millstone cast into the sea (Revelation 16:8; 18:21).

The Apostle James describes this day of trouble as the result of conflict between capital and labor, rich and poor:

Come now, you rich, weep and wail for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure” (James 5:1-6, NAS).

Though many reforms have been tried to help the common person—charitable organizations, unions, minimum wage laws, etc.—they will not help in a global financial crises. Because the whole world is so inter-connected, what happens in one country affects the others. Because business is conducted largely on credit, society will eventually collapse on itself. As unemployment rises, people will become more desperate. Failure in true reform will result in the revolt of the masses. The time is fast arriving, “Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity ... men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:25,26). “Perplexity” means “no way out.”

As the Prophet Ezekiel (7:10-19, NAS) prophesied, “The time has come, the day has arrived ... for My wrath is against all their multitude ... The sword is outside, and the plague and the famine are within ... They shall fling their silver into the streets, and their gold shall become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD.”

Although Jehovah will use the wrath of the poor as willing instruments in breaking down present systems, they also will be punished for their unjust behavior. “And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king’s children. ... In the same day also will I punish all those ... which fill their masters’ houses with violence and deceit” (Zephaniah 1:8-9). The coming trouble will involve all classes of mankind.

The (Symbolic) Fire of Destruction

This destruction will destroy many of the wealthy in the sense they will cease to be wealthy. Doubtless, there will also be a loss of lives, though the destruction of people is not the primary intent.

“The great day of the LORD is near ... the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess [uncertainty and foreboding], a day of clouds [trouble] and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet [symbolic ‘seventh trumpet’] and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers [clamorous and conflicting cries against governments]. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men [groping in uncertainty], because they have sinned against the LORD. ... Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath [as previously] ... but the whole land shall be devoured by the [symbolic] fire of his jealousy” (Zephaniah 1:14-18; Revelation 11:15-18).

Zephaniah later speaks of this “fire” of anarchy, and shows that it will be followed by a blessing from God for all people. Thus the people are not destroyed. They pass through the ordeal, to be blessed with the “pure” truth of God’s Word, and learn to serve God “shoulder to shoulder.”

“Wait ye upon me, saith LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for my decision is to gather the nations to draw together the kingdoms, to pour upon them my indignation, even all my fierce anger. For all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my zeal. Yea, then [after the trouble] will I turn unto the people a pure language [the pure Word] that they may call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one accord [‘shoulder to shoulder’]” (Zephaniah 3:8,9, KJV and NAS).

This trouble is already apparent. World Wars I and II were part of the process. When at last the saints are all gathered to be with Christ in glory, then Armageddon will follow. After the trouble has run its course when “every man’s sword shall be against his brother” (Ezekiel 38:21), God will end the strife and the world will be taught to serve Him acceptably.

Symbolic Language of Scripture

In studying prophecies about the Day of Wrath, such as described by the Apostle Peter, it is important to understand the Bible language of symbols:

- “Earth” represents society;
- “Mountains” represent kingdoms, governments;
- “Heavens” represent powers of spiritual control;
- “Fire” represents destruction;
- “Brimstone” intensifies the meaning of destruction with deadly fumes of sulfur;
- “World” represents a dispensation of time.

Peter first talks about “the heavens of old, and the earth” as the “world that then was, being overflowed with water [that] perished” in the flood long ago (2 Peter 2:5, 6). Of course the literal earth and heavens were not destroyed—it was society, under the influence of the fallen angels, that was destroyed (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Hebrews 2:5). “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4). Peter goes on to say:

“The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night [unobserved], in the which the heavens [present powers of the air under Satan] shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth [society] also, and the works that are therein [wealth, power], shall be burned up. The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens [a new spiritual power, Christ’s Kingdom] and a new earth [new society based on justice and love]” (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Thus Peter (and Paul and John) were Apostles who were also Prophets. They were moved to prophesy things to come. Like the Prophets of the

Old Testament, they were guided in their words and used symbolic language. God in His own time has raised up suitable servants to expound upon those prophecies, as Jesus suggested would occur (Matthew 24:45-51). Now the understanding of these prophecies is “meat in due season” for the household of faith.

Pride of the Proud to be Burned

The Prophet Malachi (4:1) tells of this Day of Jehovah using the same symbol of fire. “The day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up.” Pride and oppressors will be greatly humbled. Ultimately, during the Millennial Kingdom, those who refuse its disciplines and benefits will perish with their pride (Revelation 20:7-9).

Meanwhile, the Lord’s people are purified and blessed. The dross of error and character are burned away and they are refined as “gold and silver.” Even proud, compromising Christians who are able to let go of their pride may be saved “out of the fire” (Jude 23), and purified.

“The Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand [the test] when he appeareth? for he is as a refiner’s fire ... and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi [typical of the Lord’s people] and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:1-3).

Clearly, the “fire” represents a purgative influence for great benefit. The Apostle Paul also uses “fire” symbolically referring to purifying a Christian’s faith and character:

“Now if any man build [character] upon this foundation [Christ’s ransom sacrifice] gold, silver, precious stones [divine truths and matching character or], wood, hay, stubble [traditional errors and corresponding unstable characters]; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is [2 Peter 1:5-11]. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward” (1 Corinthians 3:12-14).

All those who build on the “foundation” of Christ’s ransom but then become careless in their building—God can mercifully recover. “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15). However, those who persist in willfully rejecting Christ after “once enlightened” by the holy Spirit, “it is impossible ... to renew them again unto repentance seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh” (Hebrews 6:4- 8; 10:26-31). They become subject to “second death” (Revelation 20:6).

Trouble Introducing the Kingdom

The inauguration of the Law Covenant at Sinai was a dramatic picture of the introduction of a New Covenant for the world at the opening of Christ’s Kingdom (Hebrews 12:18-29). Instead of Moses receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai with blazing fire, blasting trumpets and shaking, we have come with Jesus, the “mediator of the new covenant” (verse 24) to “Mount Zion” (verse 22). The trouble of the Day of Jehovah is symbolically described.

“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’ And this expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, ... we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken.”

Thus, storms, fire, and shaking represent the sweeping away of the false ideas of man about God, as well as society’s estimations of what is good. When the shaking has done its work, the dark night of trouble will give way to the glorious brightness of the Kingdom of Righteousness which can never be shaken (Matthew 13:43).

In the Book of Psalms, the prophet David also gives a vivid and symbolic description of the Day of Trouble which introduces Jesus’ glorious reign.

Psalm 50:3 “Our God shall come ... a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.”

Psalm 97:2-5 “Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and justice are the support of His throne. A fire goeth before him ... His lightnings give light to the world; the earth seeth it and trembleth. The mountains melt away like wax at the presence of the LORD.”

Storm and fire are also used in the last prophecy of the Bible, the book of Revelation, to show that the Day of Jehovah will bring trouble and destruction to every form of evil. In one symbol that Day is a “battle” (Revelation 16:14-16); in another, a harvest of the “vine of the earth,” after which the King of Kings “treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (14:14, 18-20). Jesus is pictured on a “white horse” conquering (19:11- 16). The three croaking “frogs” (16:13), the “beast” (19:19), “the lake of fire” (19:20; 20:10, 15†), the “winepress” (14:19, 20; 19:15)—all of these are symbolic.

† The symbol “lake of fire” is directly interpreted for us, “the lake of fire ... is the second death” (Revelation 20:14).

In Revelation 11:17, 18, the Day of Jehovah is described as the time when the Lord takes his great power to reign: “The nations were enraged and thy wrath came.”

In Revelation 19:15, “He shall smite the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron”—not a literal rod, but with strict exacting justice. “Thus I will punish the world for its evil. And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless” (Isaiah 13:1-11).

The variety of symbols used in these various texts helps us better appreciate all the features of that great and notable Day of Jehovah.

The Present Crisis Building

What end-time prophecy has forecasted is now unfolding before our eyes. True, there has always been trouble in the world, but now is a time of extraordinary trouble. While the nations are crying for peace, unrest is multiplying with greater intensity around the globe. Wealth, arrogance and pride are on one side—widely prevailing poverty and a keen sense of injustice are on the other.

The wealthy feel justified because they provide employment and take on business risk. The common person, frustrated with unemployment and rising costs, grows more desperate. Both sides, however, are inspired by selfish motives. The “waves” of the “sea”—the laboring masses of people—are roaring and lashing out against the wealthy of earth. Thankfully, by knowing God’s Plan, the Scriptures give us solid hope:

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth’ ” (Psalm 46:1-3,6, 9,10).

In the last century, with a tidal wave of knowledge, discoveries, and inventions, even the common people benefited, though not evenly. Labor unions have benefited the worker. But automation, high tech advancement and out-sourcing to cheaper labor markets challenge the local worker. Cycles of over-production and unemployment bring tension when supply exceeds demand. Then, because profits are cut, the rich are distressed. In turn, wage earners press for protective laws, and in some cases labor demands are expressed by violence.

Giant corporations and cartels continue to grow with the flood-tide of technology. In an atmosphere of easy credit, many laborers are swept under in a riptide by the ebbing force of debt. At first the blessings once shared by all actually delayed the conflict, but the creation and bursting of asset “bubbles” has led to tremendous economic instability. It is not hard to imagine a crisis from which the world economy cannot recover.

Many Proposed Remedies

Many are the proposed remedies of the twenty-first century for both producers and workers, shifting from over-expansion and over-consumption, to downsizing and reduced purchasing.

Workers are trapped. Reducing the work force leaves them either jobless or bearing the load of those fired. Unions have worked vigorously and successfully for the workers’ betterment, but the century concluded with unions greatly weakened, and many company executives over-compensated and unconstrained by law.

One proposed solution is that certain industries should become the property of the people—operated by government officials. In the twentieth century weakened railroads became the property of the government in order to insure their survival. More recently, U.S. financial institutions are being rescued with trillions of tax-payer dollars—with obligations to the government.

The masses of people should really share more evenly in profits and blessings of the technological boom. However, manipulation of financial markets—overvalued stocks, sub-prime mortgages, overextended credit and insurance—have contributed to one of the most extensive financial crises the world has ever seen. Why so extensive? Globalization has inter-linked financial markets and means of production across the world.

Collapsing financial markets on one side of the world generate crisis issues on the other side. The steel industry in China, Russia and the U.S. have felt the brunt of a worldwide economic slowdown. Multinational corporate giants which owe allegiance to no country, operate virtually outside of the law. They claim protection from one jurisdiction while abusing the laws of another. Workers employed by the multinationals or conglomerates have little defense against such giants.

If the “Golden Rule” were implemented, relief could be expected soon. “Do to others what you would want them to do to you.” If the rich would cooperate to benefit the masses, the people might make reasonable demands. But fear of competition among corporations can limit the generosity of its managers. If the wealthy who have sympathy for the laborers shorten hours and increase wages, their competitors would undersell them. Financial disaster would follow, first to them and then quickly to their employees. The iron law of supply and demand works together with man’s fundamental selfishness, to rule the day.

With globalization, some labor markets are willing to work longer hours for less pay. The lifestyle in the West is supported by cheap labor in the East providing less costly products, even as employment options in the West are thus reduced. It is remarkable, and fortunate, that such strains have been absorbed by society through many decades, but this state of things cannot go on indefinitely.

Results of Natural Causes

Thus we see the natural causes of trouble in this “Day of Jehovah.” Selfishness will control the majority on both sides and the arrogant will gain control. Thousands thrown out of employment will become desperate, demands will be resisted, and the general public will distrust capital. Ultimately, law and order will be swept away as the “mountains” are swallowed up in that stormy “sea.” Both the symbolic “earth” (society) and the “heavens” (ecclesiastical rule) will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:7). The nominal church siding with the governments of earth will also be destroyed symbolically by “fire” in the climax of this “Day of Jehovah” (Revelation 18:9).

The whole purpose of this trouble is to teach mankind that as long as selfishness is in control, man’s plans are futile. When man is flat on his back, he will finally look up. Christ’s Millennial Reign will be a strong and righteous “rule ... with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:7- 9; Revelation 19:15). Instead of patching the old order, mankind will benefit from a “New Covenant” which will “put [God’s] law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.” When this is done, “They shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:33,34, NAS).

None will entirely escape the trouble. But the “meek” who humbly seek righteousness will suffer less than others—especially from harassing fear and foreboding. “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:3, NAS).

When “men’s hearts [are] failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken—then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [deliverance] draweth nigh” (Luke 21:26-28). Those who understand from the Bible the near outcome of the trouble will rejoice.

“Travail” Suddenly—But Not 24 Hours

The Day of Jehovah is not a 24-hour day. It is a period of years in the ending period of the present Gospel Age. It is a period of transition from the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of Christ. The trouble is compared to the labor pains of a woman in childbirth and is characterized by spasms of trouble with intervals of peace. Then the intervals become shorter and the pain greater. World War I was the first pang, followed by World War II, the Cold War, the Mideast crises, and the continued growing unrest, reaching a crescendo in the struggle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16-21).

It has come as “a thief in the night” in the sense that its approach was not recognized by the world in general. “For yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2,3).

With the masses struggling in pain, the cord of civilization will eventually snap. Law and order will falter, and anarchy will result. This “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time” is difficult, but Jesus assures us it will never be repeated again (Matthew 24:21). The old order will die, but the “baby” will be beautiful—the Kingdom for all mankind! The “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” will forever be ruled by justice and love (2 Peter 3:13).

Israel’s deliverance from Egypt through plagues well illustrates the emancipation of the world by Jesus, the great leader prefigured by Moses. The temporary removing of the plagues on Egypt hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and stiffened his resistance. Likewise, the intervening periods of peace between the spasms of “travail” of the present day (Exodus 5:4-23; 12:30-33), tend to stiffen the resistance of many, making the next blow more difficult.

The nominal church also receives “plagues” and is judged (Revelation 18:7-9). In the last plague a “great earthquake”—a revolution—erupts. At this time “great Babylon” (Christendom) falls, “And every island [republic] fled away, and the mountains [monarchies] were not found” (Revelation 16:18-20).

God’s Due Time

From the testimony of the Law and the Prophets—as well as from Jesus and the Apostles—we see that the trouble of the Day of Jehovah is already upon us, with the climax still impending.

For 6,000 years mankind has been toiling under sin and death, condemned to labor. “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:19, NAS). This curse was for the ultimate good of humanity. It has protected men from their own perverted tendencies. Because of sin, idleness would have gotten people into more trouble, more quickly. Now, labor-saving machinery removes the physical burdens of many.

With the increase of invention and enlightenment, as we approach the time of the glorious Millennial reign of Messiah, man tastes the potential for what could be. The fond desire for it stirs the interests and longings of men all the more. This is one of the factors precipitating the “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation” (Daniel 12:4,1).

Thus, at the dawn of the Millennium, the first effect of advanced education, technology and science brings advantages—but also lessons about man’s inability to govern himself in his present sinful condition. The increase of technology will be useful in managing the affairs of mankind during the Kingdom, as generation by generation the dead of past ages augment the present population of earth. But first it propels the world toward a crisis.

The “rod of iron” will break present institutions in that hour of crisis and open the way for the Kingdom of Christ to become established in the earth. Then the world will be restored to its original perfection and everlasting life. This Kingdom will work, because it will deal with man from the inside—by changing his heart.

The Privilege and Responsibility of the Saints

God’s people will not feel the same anxiety and hopeless dread that will overspread the world. They understand the trouble as an introduction to the blessing of the world. They may share in the trouble, but they will rejoice by faith in the glorious result to follow.

Discontent will rise among the worldly. But the Lord’s people should be an example of contentment to their neighbors, fellow workers, and families. “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Though many enjoy more blessings and conveniences, still the poor world groans under both its real and imagined wrongs (Romans 8:19,22).

People are clutching for wealth. And those who possess wealth are discontent and clutching for more. But the saints should take no part in this grasping struggle. Their consecration vow was to run for a heavenly ambition and follow the example of Jesus and the Apostles. Except to provide what is decent and “honest” for their families and seek to “live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:17,18)—they lay up “treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19,20).

Unfortunately, not all of God’s children have such peace and contentment. Some leave Jesus’ footsteps and seek earthly things. We should instead seek the peace which the world can neither give nor take away. The Lord’s people should abandon discontent and strive for the higher riches and the peace of God.

“But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith. ... But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Timothy 6:6-12, NAS).

The saints are to be living examples of joyful anticipation of the nearing Kingdom of God and its satisfying blessings. While not getting involved in the issues being contended by both sides of any question, our mission is to preach the good tidings of the ransom for ALL. Advantage should be taken of every opportunity and circumstance to witness to the good news of this incoming Kingdom. "How beautiful upon the mountains [kingdoms] are the feet of him [the last members of the body of Christ] that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good" (Isaiah 52:7).

The trouble of this "Day of Jehovah" will give wonderful opportunities for preaching the coming Kingdom. But we are not to take political positions on social questions or remedies to fix the impending catastrophe. Our mission is simply to proclaim calmly and confidently His Kingdom at hand as the only possible remedy—and all mankind's only hope. The sympathies of the LORD's people lie with all of the poor groaning creation and we can give comfort to the worried and frightened, knowing that all the trouble is only a brief prelude. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9).

"And in this mountain [Kingdom] shall the LORD of hosts ... swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:6-9; Revelation 21:4).

STUDY SIXTEEN: REVIEW—AND RESPONSIBILITY

As we have seen in our studies of both nature and revelation, we have a wise, intelligent, almighty and righteous Creator. The Bible is the revelation of His character and plan for man. Through it we have learned that while evil has been permitted, it is for a very good purpose and for a limited time. The darkness and suffering on this earth will soon be replaced with His glory and overflowing blessings.

Through the Ages of time, God's great Plan has progressed silently but grandly forward. Mankind's 6,000 years of experience with sin and suffering will prove to be a great advantage when as individuals they will be placed on trial for life. In the 1,000-year Judgment Day, mankind's Judge will be the very one who died for us all (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus' faithful followers, exalted to glory with Christ, will administer the Kingdom with him (1 Corinthians 6:2). On earth, the Ancient Worthies will be his human representatives (Isaiah 1:26; Psalm 45:16). By this means "all the nations of the earth" will be blessed, as God promised Abraham (Genesis 22:18, Galatians 3:29, Zechariah 8:13).

Mankind Returns to God on a "Highway"

Instead of a Narrow Way, a grand "Highway of Holiness" will be open for the entire world. All the stumbling stones and pitfalls will be gone. "No lion [Satan] shall be there, nor any ravenous beast [destructive influence] shall go up thereon" (Isaiah 11:9; 35:8,9; 62:1-3). Some will make fast progress, others slow progress—depending on what character had been previously sown. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

The Day of Judgment does not begin until the ruler of the world has come again. A trial cannot proceed until the judge (Jesus) is on the bench and the court (the Bride class) is in session. During that Day, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). Then "the books" of the Bible will be "opened" and the world will be judged from its principles and standards (Revelation 20:11-12). Everyone who is now "dead" in Adam will have the opportunity to have their names written in the "book of life." Those who live righteously then will be judged worthy of everlasting life in a perfect society—for all the ages of joy to come.

Knowledge of God's Plan Gives Comfort

Meanwhile, when the consecrated children of God today see what is happening in the world, we find comfort in the knowledge of God's character, promises and plan. We can "look up" and rejoice because we know our deliverance is near—which then means deliverance for the world (Luke 21:28). We also look away from earthly cares and personal weaknesses and claim the merit of Jesus' ransom price to cover our imperfections. With knowledge of God's promises, we claim them while seeking to develop Christian character and strive for the prize of divine nature. As Peter expressed it:

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:2-4).

In seeking the knowledge of God and His Plan, our sincerity is tested. Will we find time to search the Scriptures to prove for ourselves the wonderful Plan of God? Are we willing to give up our own theories and ideas and study the Bible without prejudice? In our pursuit of truth, are we committed to give all to our Heavenly Father? Are we willing, if necessary, to sacrifice friendships and other ties? (Luke 18:28-30) During the present "Harvest" period of the Gospel Age, we have come to the "hour of temptation"—of testing (Matthew 13:39; Revelation 3:10). How will we respond?

Our love for God's Plan should give us determination and energy to share this precious truth with those of faith who may receive it. We do not expect the world to appreciate it (1 John 3:1). They will think us "fools" (1 Corinthians 4:10; 3:18). But, like the noble "Bereans" of Paul's day, let us receive the truth "with all readiness of mind" and then search "the Scriptures daily," to understand their testimony (Acts 17:11). If we appreciate the value of the truth, God's loving Plan will then become the all-absorbing theme of our lives.

God's Plan Harmonious and Complete

God's Divine Plan is complete and harmonious with itself in every part! Beyond human invention, it reveals the wisdom, justice, love and power of our marvelous God. No reasonable question about it need go unanswered. Others may suppose their creeds or traditions to be an unexplainable "mystery"—but not so with the truth, revealed to the saints in the Scriptures.

Some ministers who recognize various errors in the creeds of men ignore the issues and resort to preaching a "Social Gospel." Sadly, others discard parts of the Bible itself. False doctrines hide the truth and even cast a shadow over the character of God. Errors also hinder the sanctification of the heart (John 17:17). Therefore, all the more, let us be careful to appreciate God's Plan of the Ages in all its beauty and clarity, and cast aside the false doctrines so common.

Truth, as it is disclosed, becomes "meat in due season" for all the Lord's people (Matthew 24:45). "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18). Other studies elaborate in more detail on various branches of the one Plan of God. The matchless harmony of the Bible is awe-inspiring!

However, understanding brings responsibility. The light of truth must be either received and acted upon—or rejected. Further, we are constrained "to give light to them that sit in darkness" (Luke 1:79)—especially intended for all the "Household of Faith" (Galatians 6:10). As faithful stewards, we must "lift up a standard" pointing to the wonderful outcome of God's Grand Plan of the Ages.

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