


ONE GOD  
ONE MESSAGE

*Part 8*

*Reversing*  
**The Curse**

by P. D. Bramsen

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- ☞ Stage 1: God's Past Program
  - ☞ Stage 2: God's Present Program
  - ☞ Stage 3: God's Future Program
  - ☞ A Preview of Paradise

**ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE - PART 8**  
**FULFILLING THE PLAN**

by P. D. Bramsen

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# Reversing The Curse

Dear friend,

Have you ever had an “*If only...*” moment?

“If only I had invested my money in a different way!”

“If only I could take back those hurtful words!”

“If only I could live my life all over again...”

If it were possible, many people would give everything they own to reverse the direction of their lives and be given a fresh start. In the final part of this eight-part series, we will be given an overview of what God has done to offer sinners a new beginning, without compromising His standard of perfect justice.

For all who trust in Him and His way of forgiveness and righteousness, the Lord God promises to reverse the curse and consequences of sin:

- past.
- present.
- future.
- forever!

It is our prayer that this final leg of the journey through God’s Book will clear up any remaining concerns you may have about life’s great questions. We look forward to receiving your answers to the chapter questions and to hearing your personal story. It has been an honor and a privilege to take this pilgrimage with you.

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# 27



## STAGE 1: GOD'S PAST PROGRAM

*“Today you will be with Me in Paradise!”*

—The Lord Jesus (Luke 23:43)

A few minutes ago, my laptop computer's battery was almost dead, but now it is being infused with new life. How has its dying condition been reversed?

I plugged it into an electrical outlet.

Whether in a laptop, cell-phone, or flashlight, batteries are constantly dying—losing their charge—until such time as they are recharged by a superior power source.

Adam's descendants are somewhat like dying batteries. We began dying the day we were conceived, with no way to reverse the curse brought on by sin.

As we enter the last part of our journey, I'd like to tell you the story of a wandering Frenchman whose future seemed as hopeless as a dying battery.

### LE MISÉRABLE

I met the 26-year old Bruno in March of 1987.

Many years earlier, this young man had begun to ponder the meaning of life. He felt empty on the inside—an emptiness that neither his Catholic upbringing nor worldly pleasures had filled.

As a boy, Bruno observed that those who taught him about God failed to practice what they preached. As a rebellious teenager, he saw a world filled with injustice. By age 18, Bruno's singular purpose in life was to hang out with his friends on weekends, get drunk and forget his misery. His despair was intensified when his girlfriend was killed in an automobile accident. He became angry with God.

Bruno decided to travel to India. Perhaps he would find the meaning of life among its many religions. After a grueling voyage by land, Bruno arrived in one of India's crowded cities where he was confronted with intense religious fervor and indescribable human misery. In Bruno's own words, "I saw people who, despite their religion and faith, were more miserable than I."

After spending nearly a year in India, Bruno concluded that if he was ever to discover ultimate truth, God alone must reveal it to him. So he addressed this simple prayer to his Creator, "If you exist, reveal yourself to me!"

One day, while walking the streets of Calcutta, Bruno noticed a shop with a sign: *BIBLE HOUSE*. On an impulse, he stepped inside and asked the clerk, "Do you have a Bible in French?" They had one copy.

He bought it and began to read.

Many things surprised him. For instance, he was struck by the first and second of the Ten Commandments in which God says, "*You shall have **no other gods** before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall **not bow down to them** nor serve them.*" (Exodus 20:3-5) Yet what Bruno witnessed around him were temples with people bowing down to idols. And as he thought about the religion in which he had been brought up, it dawned on him that the religious people he knew were also guilty of breaking God's commandments as they bowed and prayed before statues of Mary and the saints.

Bruno was equally impressed by another verse: "***This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.***" (Joshua 1:8)

Convinced that the truth he sought could be found only in the Bible, Bruno left India and returned to France. However, instead of continuing to read his Bible, he put it on a shelf and went back to working and partying—a way of life that left him with a bitter taste and an empty heart.

Four years went by.

One day, as Bruno thought on his meaningless existence, he remembered a Bible verse in which God promises: “*You will seek Me and **find Me**, when you search for Me **with all your heart.***” (Jeremiah 29:13) Bruno prayed, “OK God, I will search for you with all my heart and find out whether or not your promise is true.”

To separate himself from the influences of home, Bruno decided to take another journey, this time to Africa. As he traveled by land, he read his Bible and prayed, “God, lead me to *your* truth and keep me from falsehood.” After crossing the Sahara he came into northern Senegal. He spent his first night in the same town where my family and I lived.

The next morning, Bruno went for a walk in town. As in Calcutta, a sign over a door caught his attention. This one said:

*ECOUTEZ! CAR L'ETERNEL DIEU A PARLÉ!*

(Listen! for the LORD God has spoken!)

Bruno entered.

It was my office. Looking up from my work, I saw a bushy-bearded man holding a small, blue, well-worn book—the Bible he had purchased in India. I can still hear his first question:

“What are you, Catholic or Protestant?”

“I’m just a Christian—a follower of Christ,” I replied. Bruno was surprised and pleased by this response, since, in reading through the Bible, he had observed that it never mentions *Catholics* or *Protestants*, but it does speak about *Christians*—believers in Christ. Later, Bruno told me that if I had answered either “I’m Catholic” or “I’m Protestant,” he would have turned on his heels and walked out. He was weary of religion. He wanted reality.

Over the next several days, Bruno peppered me with questions. I pointed him to God’s answers in the Bible. On the eve of his departure (he hoped to travel on to South Africa), I challenged him, “Reread your Bible and observe what God has done for you.”

Six weeks later, my wife and I received a letter from Bruno in which he explained that he was renting a room in a nearby fishing village. He had just finished rereading the entire Bible, comparing the Old and New Testaments.

He had seen Christ in all the Scriptures.

In Bruno's own words, "One night, as I was outside all alone, Jesus' promise came to my heart with power, '*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*'" (Matthew 11:28) In reviewing my life with all its failures, bitterness, and regrets—a great conflict raged in my heart. I knew that if I followed Christ, I would no longer be free to follow my lusts and desires. At last I gave in. God opened my eyes. I believed that Christ shed His blood on the cross and rose again *for me*. Peace flooded my soul. I began to cry and couldn't stop. The heavy burden of my sin was gone!" Bruno went on to say, "*En somme, je suis né de nouveau!*" ("To sum up, I've been born again!")

Bruno found what he had been searching for: a cleansed heart and conscience, a relationship with His Creator, and eternal life. He now understood why he was on earth and where he was going.

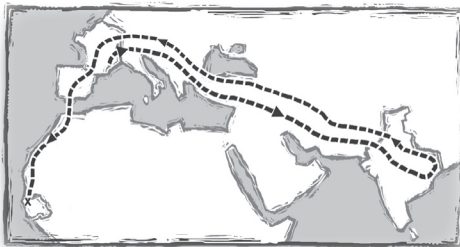
His search was over.

The Bible says:

*"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Immediately, Bruno's life began to change in small and big ways. For example, although he had smoked cigarettes since he was eleven years old, the Lord delivered him from this habit. His self-absorbed, drunken and immoral lifestyle became a shameful memory of the past. The Scriptures now made sense to him and prayer became as natural as breathing.

Instead of traveling on, Bruno spent the next six months in Senegal to study the Scriptures, spend time with believers in Christ, and tell others what God had done for him.





Bruno had become a new creation.

Though two decades have passed since I first met Bruno, we still keep in touch. Today the “new Bruno” lives in France where he and his wife are walking with God and raising their four children in the knowledge and blessing of the Lord.

Does this mean that Bruno’s life is free from heartache, struggle and pain? No, both he and his family face a variety of trials and temptations, but they are not alone.

The Lord Himself is with them.

### GOD’S THREE-STAGE PROGRAM

Perhaps someone is thinking: “Wait a minute. If Jesus has defeated Satan, sin, and death for us—why then do people, including believers in Christ, continue to struggle in so many ways? Why is our world filled with evil and strife? Where is the promised deliverance and perfection?”

The answer is found in the fact that God’s age-old plan to intervene in human history includes three stages:

Stage I: God would deliver His people from  
*the **PENALTY** of sin.*

Stage II: God would deliver His people from  
*the **POWER** of sin.*

Stage III: God will deliver His people from  
*the **PRESENCE** of sin.*<sup>235</sup>

The following quotation from the New Testament summarizes God’s three-stage program—past, present, and future:

*God has “**delivered us** from so great a death [Stage I] and **does deliver us** [Stage II]; in whom we trust that **He will still deliver us** [Stage III].” (2 Corinthians 1:10)*

The remainder of our travels through the Scriptures will focus on this three-stage program by which God will forever undo the effects of Satan, sin, and death. The final leg of our journey will be extra spectacular as it gives us a glimpse into Paradise itself.

## REVERSING THE CURSE: STAGE ONE

When Adam and Eve listened to Satan they forfeited their friendship with their Creator-Owner and brought upon themselves and all their descendants the curse of sin. The original, perfect world was suddenly changed into a place where people wanted to hide from God and go their own way. Life became characterized by grief and pain, disease and deformity, poverty and hunger, sadness and strife, old age and death.

Sin brought a curse. But at the appointed time, just as God had promised, the Eternal Son of God came from heaven to earth as *the Seed of a woman* to rescue Adam's descendants from Satan, sin, and death.

*“**God**, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **has in these last days spoken to us by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, **when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**”* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

The Lord Jesus was uncontaminated by sin.

He displayed complete authority over every element of the sin-cursed creation. With a word from His mouth or the touch of His hand, He caused evil spirits to flee, blind eyes to see, lepers to be cleansed, and the dead to be raised. He walked on water, calmed storms, and multiplied bread for the hungry. He forgave sin and brought peace to hurting hearts.

And then He did what He came to do.

He suffered, died, and rose again to glorify His Father, fulfill Scripture, and redeem all who believe in Him.

*“**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us** (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’) **that the blessing of***

*Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:13-14 [Deuteronomy 21:23])*

## AMAZING GRACE

Jesus, who kept God's laws perfectly, came to redeem lawbreakers *“from the curse of the law [which demands perfect obedience], having become a curse for us!”* Jesus willingly took the punishment we deserve in order to deliver us from everlasting punishment.

Even while the Lord was suffering on the cross, He demonstrated His purpose to reverse sin's curse.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals who had been sentenced to death for treason, theft, and murder. Let us listen again to the conversation that took place between the Lord and these two sinners. At first, both men mocked Jesus, but as the hours wore on, one of them repented.

*“One of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’*

*But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we [are punished] justly, for we [are getting what our deeds deserve]; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’*

*And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” (Luke 23:39-43)*

These two lawbreakers were about to die and enter hell. Then, in those final hours, one of them recognized his sin before God and placed his trust in the sinless Savior who was nailed to the middle cross.

Jesus gave him a promise:

***“Today you will be with Me in Paradise!”***

Instead of spending eternity in the place prepared for the devil and his fallen angels, this forgiven lawbreaker would spend it in the presence of His Creator-Redeemer.

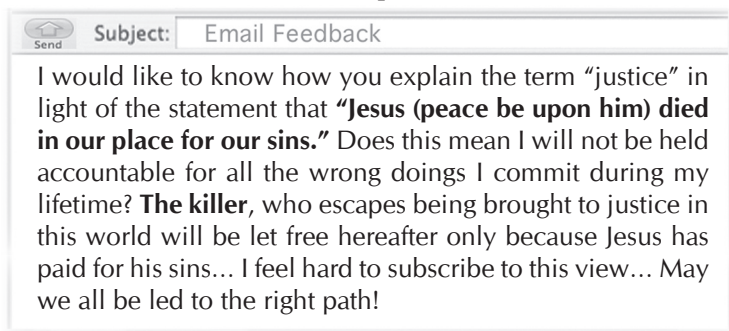
What a reversal!

Based on his trust in the Lamb of God who was, at that very moment, shedding His blood to pay sin's penalty, God erased this man's sins from the record books, credited him with Jesus' righteousness, and permanently inscribed his name in *the Lamb's Book of Life*—the Book that will eternally bear the names of all who have received God's gift of redemption.

For this helpless sinner, sin's curse was forever reversed.

## CAN KILLERS BE FORGIVEN?

This e-mail came from an inquirer:



Is Jesus' death on the cross in the place of sinners consistent with justice? Can even a “killer” be forgiven by God? Let's address the last question first with a few testimonies from “killers” who have been forgiven and transformed.

## CANNIBALS

In his book *Lords of the Earth*, Bible translator and anthropologist, Don Richardson, tells of the Yali people—the fierce, mountain-dwelling cannibals of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. For centuries it had been their practice to torture, kill and, yes, *eat* the enemy people of neighboring villages. Revenge and fear were a “normal” way of life.

Then the Gospel was brought to them.

The Yali and neighboring tribes heard God's good news about forgiveness of sin and new life in Christ. Many believed. Their way of thinking and living was transformed. As born-again children of God, they now had a new standard of "normal." Those who had previously hated and feared each other became brothers. To facilitate friendship with their former enemies, they made "better quality footpaths linking Yali villages."<sup>236</sup>

Today these former killers show compassion to those who try to harm them, since God's Spirit has changed their hearts and taught them: *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."* (Ephesians 4:32)

### A DESPERATE GIRL

Emma was brought up in a strict Muslim home in Singapore. Due to her parents' divorce and dysfunctional family life, at age 16 she made the decision to kill someone—herself.

Emma determined to jump from the balcony of their ten-story apartment building. Just prior to carrying out her plan, she cried out in anger and desperation to the God she did not know, "If you really exist, somehow tell me!" She then made her way down a short flight of stairs that led out to the tenth-floor balcony...

On the steps lay a Bible!

She picked it up and hurried back to her room. The Bible fell open to these words:



***"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever."*** (Psalm 23)

As Emma read this Psalm, she was overwhelmed by God's reality AND LOVE. Not long afterwards, she placed her trust in the Lord Jesus who said, "***I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.***" (John 10:11)

Emma became one of His sheep. She no longer wants to kill herself. Instead, she is a joyful wife and mother of five. Her passion in life is to help others find what she has found in Christ—THE ABUNDANT LOVE OF GOD.

When I sent this story to Emma to check it for accuracy, she e-mailed it back to me, adding the words in caps about *the love of God*. In the midst of potentially overwhelming pressures and challenges faced by women around the world, Emma finds her daily strength and joy in the Lord's amazing love and care.

## A VIOLENT MAN

Finally, consider *Saul of Tarsus*, a religious zealot who killed people in the name of God.

Saul was born in Tarsus, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), during the time of Christ. Saul did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God. Shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven, Saul was commissioned by the Jewish high court to arrest, try, and put to death all followers of Jesus. He believed that he was serving God by imprisoning, flogging, and executing Jews who believed in Jesus.<sup>237</sup> Here is what happened one day as Saul and his men were carrying out another mission to arrest a group of Jewish Christians.

*"As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **Me**?'"*

*And he said, 'Who are You, **Lord**?'"*

*Then the Lord said, 'I am **Jesus**, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*

*So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?'"* (Acts 9:3-6)

Saul's view of Jesus did an about face. As a student of the Old Testament Scriptures, he suddenly understood that Jesus was the Messiah of whom all the prophets had written.

The great antagonist became the great protagonist.<sup>238</sup>

*Saul*, who later changed his name to *Paul* (meaning “little”), testified:

*“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”*

(1 Timothy 1:13-15 NIV)

## CHRIST'S SPECIALTY

Can even “killers” be forgiven and transformed by God?

That is what has happened to the cannibals of Irian, Emma of Singapore, and Saul of Tarsus. That is what happened to the repentant murderer on the cross next to Jesus. That is what is happening every day to sinners around the world—inside and outside of prisons—when they believe God's message.

Redeeming and changing the hearts of the worst and “best” of sinners is Christ's specialty. That is what God's mercy and grace are all about.

Of course, sin has its consequences.

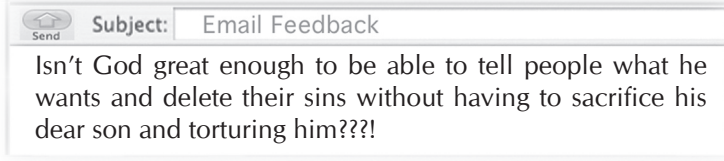
The criminal on the cross still suffered for his crimes. He never experienced in this world the peace and joy that comes from knowing the Lord, living for Him, and helping others to know Him too.

Nevertheless, *the way* by which a sinner is forgiven and made righteous before God is always the same: by recognizing his or her sinful condition and by trusting in God's provision of salvation.

To not believe in the Lord Jesus is to perish along with the unrepentant criminal crucified on the other side of Jesus.

## MERCY AND JUSTICE TOGETHER

The e-mail writer a few pages ago also asked: “*How [do] you explain the term ‘justice’ in light of the statement that ‘Jesus died in our place for our sins’*”? Ahmed raised the same question earlier:



As we have seen repeatedly, it is *because* God is great—in justice and faithfulness—that He cannot “*delete*” people’s sins unless those sins have been adequately judged and punished.

Remember the illustration in chapter 13 about the judge who granted mercy without upholding justice. His actions aroused the indignation and contempt of the entire court.

God is not like that whimsical judge. Not a speck of dust can be found on His character or reputation. He never grants mercy at the expense of justice. That is why, out of His great love, He sent His Son from heaven to earth to be nailed to a cross and there to display God’s mercy and truth in perfect combination.

*“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.”* (Psalm 85:10-11)

Because Jesus endured the wrath of God for us, God can “*look down from heaven*” and offer us His gifts of pardon, perfection, and eternal life. By taking our place, the Lord Jesus demonstrated God’s *justice, mercy, and grace*. As we already observed:

*Justice* is receiving what we deserve.

*Mercy* is not receiving what we deserve.

*Grace* is receiving what we don’t deserve.

All who trust in Christ receive *what no one deserves*: cleansing from sin, Christ’s own righteousness, a place in God’s family, and eternal life. All who reject or ignore Christ will get *what all deserve*: eternal punishment.



Seven centuries before Christ came, the prophet Micah wrote: “*They will **strike** the judge.*” (Micah 5:1) Think of it! The Judge of all the earth took on human flesh in order to be killed by the ungrateful sinners He came to rescue!

Justice, mercy, and grace don’t get any better than that.

*“When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the **ungodly**. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

(Romans 5:6-8)

## JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER

In the first stage of His plan, God opened a way of pardon for sinners without lowering His own perfect standards. He is both “***just** and **the Justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus.*” (Romans 3:26)

God is *Just* because He has sufficiently punished sin.

God is *the Justifier* of all who trust in the Savior He sent.

The moment I stop relying on my own efforts and transfer my trust to Christ and His death and resurrection for me, the Righteous Judge will stamp across the record book of all my offenses:

## **JUSTIFIED!**

To be *justified* is to be *declared righteous* by a judicial act of God. He clears my record and declares me right.

How can He do that?

He can do it because, on the cross, He paid my sin-penalty.

When Adam sinned, God declared the entire human race as *unrighteous*. But since Jesus died and rose again, God declares all who believe in Him as *righteous*.

*“For as by one man’s disobedience many were **made sinners**, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be **made righteous**.”* (Romans 5:19)

Even as Adam’s sin produced defilement and death, so Christ’s death and resurrection provides cleansing and life.

***“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:22)

As the Righteous Judge looks down from heaven, does He see you *in Adam* and his filthy unrighteousness? Or does God see you *in Christ* and His pure righteousness?

Heaven’s courtroom knows no third option.

## MAN’S DOUBLE TROUBLE

As the third chapter of Genesis revealed, when Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator, they brought on themselves the double dilemma of *sin and shame*.

Their ***sin*** drove them into hiding.

Their ***shame*** incited them to cover their nakedness.

God *in His justice* rejected their self-made coverings of fig leaves, but God *in His mercy* clothed them in the skins of sacrificed animals. The animal blood symbolized what was necessary to remove their *sin*, and the animal skins symbolized what was necessary to cover their *shame*.

We share our ancestor’s sin and shame. Before God, we are defiled sinners and spiritually naked. We are shamefully unfit to dwell in His presence. We need ***His pardon*** and ***His perfection***.

Our *double trouble* can be summarized in two questions:

1. How can we be ***cleansed*** from the sin that separates us from our Creator?
2. How can we be ***clothed*** in perfection so we can live with Him forever?

## GOD’S DOUBLE CURE

Only God has the remedy for man’s sinfulness and lack of righteousness. When Jesus, God’s sinless Son, shed His blood on the cross,



*He took **our punishment**,  
and, as the One who  
conquered death,  
He offers us  
**His righteousness**.*



*“God will credit righteousness [to all] who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to **death for our sins** and was raised to **life for our justification**.”* (Romans 4:24-25 NIV)

*“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. God...has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ... For He made Him who knew no sin to be **sin** [a sin offering] **for us**, that we might become **the righteousness of God in Him**.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18,21)

The moment you *abandon your trust* in yourself and your religion, and *place your hope* in Christ and the perfect blood He shed for you:

- 1) He will *cleanse you* from sin's defilement, and
- 2) He will *cover you* with His perfect righteousness.

God offers no other cure.

## GOD'S EXCHANGE PROGRAM

By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ took *our sin* and gives us *His righteousness*. This is God's great exchange program: ***My sin for His righteousness***.

Why would anyone refuse such an amazing offer?

The tragic reality is that most choose to refuse God's provision. Nonetheless, His offer stands: All who *receive* God's gift of salvation are declared righteous. All who *refuse* it will pay for their own sins, not in some imaginary, temporary purgatory, but in the everlasting hell prepared for the devil and his demons.

Many religious people insist, “Each person must pay for his or her own sins.” There is a sense in which all who reject God's gift of forgiveness and righteousness will do just that. However, their sin-debt will never be paid off, since it is a perpetual debt. Furthermore, while lost sinners will go on eternally paying for their sins in the lake of fire, they will never be able to gain the required righteousness to live in heaven. Only God can give helpless sinners the forgiveness *and* the righteousness they need to live with Him.

Seven hundred years before the Savior came, the prophet Isaiah wrote about God's great exchange program:

*"We are all like **an unclean thing**,  
And all **our righteousnesses are like filthy rags**.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way  
And the **LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all**.  
My soul shall be joyful in my God;  
**For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,**  
**He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.**"*

(Isaiah 64:6; 53:6; 61:10)

Are you still *an unclean thing* before God? Or have you been **cleansed by the blood of Christ**?

Are you clothed in the *filthy rags of self-righteousness*? Or are you **clothed in the pure robe of Christ's righteousness**?

It all comes down to one question.

*"Who has **believed** our report?"* (Isaiah 53:1)

Have you believed God's report? Have you abandoned all other options for His truth?

### **"THAT YOU MAY KNOW"**

God's Word says: *"These things I have written **to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.**"* (1 John 5:13)

Years ago, I spoke with a very religious lady about God's gift of eternal life. Though she called herself a Christian, she had never placed her trust in God's provision of salvation in Christ.

When I told her, "I know I will go to heaven when I die," she replied with some indignation, "Oh, you think you are *so good* that you will go straight to heaven, do you?"

"No," I replied, "it's not because I'm 'so good.' It's because God is so good. He is the One who has told us that we can '**know that [we] have eternal life**' if we believe in Him and what He has done for us."

*"For the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal **life** in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23)

## HOW ALI CAME TO *KNOW*

In the first chapter of this book, I mentioned Ali, who was rejected by his family because he believed God's message.

Like Bruno, Ali was 26 years old when I first met him. However, unlike the pleasure-seeking Bruno, Ali sincerely practiced his religion—reciting his daily prayers in the specified way, observing the month-long annual fast, and trying to treat other people well. Yet in his heart he felt a gnawing lack of peace.

Ali would lie awake in his bed at night thinking, "I've performed my religious duties—why am I so fearful of eternity? Oh God, is there no way for me to *know* where I will go after I die?"

Ali put this question to his father and local religious leaders, "How can I be sure God will let me into Paradise?" Everyone parroted the same answer: "You can't know. No one can know their fate. Only God knows."

Their answer did not satisfy Ali.

At home and school, Ali had been taught from the Qur'an that Jesus, the son of Mary, was a righteous prophet who was born of a virgin. He also learned that Jesus was a mighty miracle-worker who bore the titles *Messiah*, *Word of God* and *Soul of God*. "Maybe the Prophet Jesus can provide me with the answer I seek," he thought.

Ali decided to find a book about Jesus. Some weeks later, our paths crossed. I gave him a Bible, which he began to study with intense interest. Here, in his own words, is what Ali discovered after searching the Scriptures for nearly a year:

I learned that all the prophets pointed to Jesus. I read where Jesus Himself said: "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ...I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.***" (John 14:6; 5:24 NIV)

These and other verses helped me understand and accept Jesus for who He is: the One and only Savior who shed His blood and rose from the dead to provide a sure salvation. I placed my faith in Him and in the fact that He suffered and died for my sins, in my place.

The moment I believed, I felt an inner peace I had never known before. What a change! I no longer worry about my eternal destiny because I know the Lord has paid the full penalty for all my sins which condemned me. I now *know* that I will go to heaven—not because I am good, but because of God’s grace provided in Jesus Christ. Now I *want* to please God in all things—not to earn my salvation, but because God has saved me and changed my heart.

For Ali, sin’s curse had been reversed. Today he, his wife, and their sons not only know where they will go after they die, they know why they are on earth: to know, love, and serve their Creator-Redeemer and to lead others to know Him too.

## DEATH: THE BELIEVER’S SERVANT

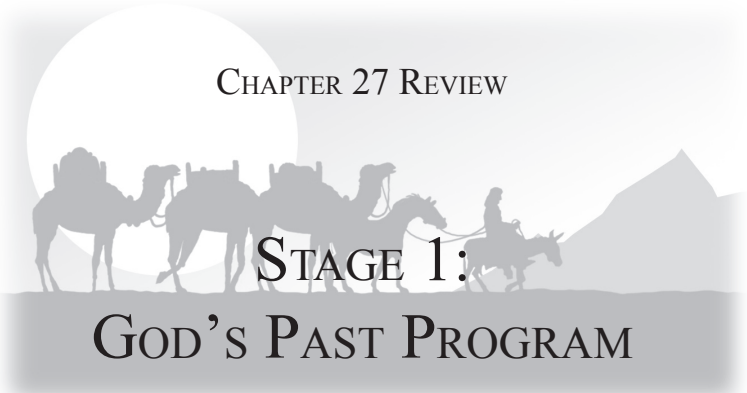

At His first coming to earth, the Messiah fulfilled the first part of God’s three-stage plan to reverse sin’s curse. Through His life, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus broke through the seemingly impenetrable wall of sin and death. The thief on the cross, the cannibals, Emma, Saul, Ali, Bruno, and all who sincerely believe God’s message, are the beneficiaries.

For believers in Christ, the cruel tyrant, Death, has been reassigned to the post of a humble servant whose job is to open heaven’s door at God’s command. As the Scripture says: “**Precious** in the sight of the LORD is the **death** of His saints.”<sup>239</sup> (Psalm 116:15)

Who would have ever dreamed the word “*precious*” could describe “*death*”? Thank God it does—for all who believe.

*“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? ...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”* (1 Corinthians 15:55,57)

The past curse of sin has been reversed.



## CHAPTER 27 REVIEW

### STAGE 1: GOD'S PAST PROGRAM

1. Chapter 27 contains transformation stories about a truth-seeking traveler, a crucified criminal, a cannibal tribe, a suicidal teenage girl, a religious zealot, and a devout Muslim young man. With which story do you best identify and why?
2. To the criminal on the cross, Jesus promised, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise!” First, from what was this repentant criminal eternally saved? Second, based on Jesus’ promise, in what place did he find himself the moment he died?
3. How would you explain to a child the concepts of justice, mercy, and grace?
4. What is man’s “double trouble”? What is God’s “double cure”?
5. According to the Bible, can people know where they will spend eternity? Do you know where you will go after you die? Explain your response.
6. In your own words, explain 2 Corinthians 5:21. *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

# 28

## STAGE 2:

### GOD'S PRESENT PROGRAM

*"I will put My law **in their minds**,  
And write it **on their hearts**."*

—The LORD (Jeremiah 31:33)

**W**hile not many people give much thought to sin's *deadly curse*, most live in bondage to what might be called life's *daily curses*.

The majority of the world's population lives in fear of misfortune, sickness, and death. Many worry about not having enough money to buy food or to pay off their debts. Others fear bad luck, black magic, or the evil eye, being careful not to speak out loud of their happiness lest some malevolent spirit hear and bring misfortune on the object of their happiness. To ward off evil spirits and calamity, some fasten amulets or charms on themselves and their children, as well as in their houses. Many drink potions or recite formulas for protection.<sup>240</sup>

Thankfully, those who know and trust their Creator-Redeemer have no need for such precautions since He is infinitely greater than all forces of evil, whether imagined or real. There is nothing for a believer to fear since the Lord Jesus has authority over every power including death itself.

Jesus came not only to reverse the effects of sin's curse on *our eternal destiny*, but also to reverse the effects of sin's curse on *our daily lives*.



## REVERSING THE CURSE: STAGE TWO

The Scripture says, “*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the forces of evil], because **He who is in you is greater** than he who is in the world.*” (1 John 4:4)

Who is this “**He who is in**” the believer?

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples:

*“I will pray the Father, and He will give you **another Helper**, that He may abide with you forever—the **Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for **He dwells with you and will be in you.**”*

*I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you.***

*These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But **the Helper, the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send **in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**” (John 14:16-18,25-27)*

## ANOTHER HELPER

Jesus promised His disciples that, after He returned to heaven, the Father would send them “**another Helper... the Holy Spirit.**”

The Greek word translated *helper* in English is *parakletos*, meaning *helper, comforter, counselor, or advocate*. In Scripture, *Parakletos* is used both for *the Son of God* and for *the Holy Spirit of God*.<sup>241</sup>

Just as the Son came to save sinners from sin’s *penalty*, so the Spirit came to save believers from sin’s *power*.

*The Holy Spirit* has always been with God, even as *the Son* has always been with God. That is why He is identified in the opening declaration of God’s Book as “**the Spirit of God.**” (Genesis 1:2)

To suggest, as so many do,<sup>242</sup> that the Holy Spirit was a future prophet (or the angel Gabriel!) not only contradicts the Scriptures of the prophets, but also goes directly against what the Lord Jesus said and did.

Jesus told His disciples that after He died on a cross and came back to life, He would ascend to heaven so the Holy Spirit could descend and take up residence in the hearts of all who believe God's message. The Son would go up and the Spirit would come down. Jesus told His disciples: *"I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, **the Helper** will not come to you; but **if I depart, I will send Him to you.**"* (John 16:7)

Up to this point in history, the Holy Spirit had been at times *with* believers to empower, guide, and bless them. However, it was only after Jesus had dealt with the world's sin-problem that the Holy Spirit could come to live permanently *inside* believers.

The Lord Jesus was announcing a very special event. *"The Spirit of truth... dwells with you and **will be in you.**"* (John 14:17)

## THE HOLY SPIRIT'S COMING

After Jesus rose from the dead, the Scripture records:

*"And being assembled together with [His disciples], He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the Promise of the Father**, which, He said, you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with **the Holy Spirit** not many days from now. ... **You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**"* (Acts 1:4-5,8)

That is exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost,<sup>243</sup> fifty days after Jesus arose and ten days after He ascended to heaven.

*"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they [about 120 believers, both men and women (Acts 1:14)] were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit....**"* (Acts 2:1-4)

The New Testament records this dramatic event in the second chapter of Acts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples began to proclaim God's good news in the various languages of the many foreigners who had gathered in Jerusalem from Asia, Arabia, and other areas of the world.

The same day the Holy Spirit descended, three thousand people believed God's message and received His gift of eternal life. The number of believers grew rapidly.

The book of Acts records the history of the first believers in Christ and tells how the good news of the risen Messiah spread throughout the Roman Empire—not by the power of the sword, but by the power of God's love and Holy Spirit.

### **CALLED-OUT ONES**

God's main program on earth at this present time is "*to take out of [the nations] a people for His name.*" (Acts 15:14)

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost gave birth to a special family of believers called *the church*. The original Greek word for *church* is *ekklesia*, meaning simply: "assembly" or "called-out ones." Today the word "church" is riddled with erroneous concepts and innumerable denominations. Many who call themselves Christians openly dishonor the name of Christ by the way they live. Many have *religion*, but they do not have a genuine *relationship* with God. They have never been cleansed from their sins through faith in Jesus' blood.

The good news is that God invites all people everywhere to trust in His Son, become His special new creation, and be adopted into the family of believers that will spend eternity with Him.

All those who believed God's promises *before Jesus came* (in Old Testament times) are a part of God's family, but only those who have believed *since Jesus came* are a part of the living organism known as "*the church.*" The church is also called "*the body of Christ*" and "*the bride.*"<sup>244</sup> To all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Scripture says:

*"You are... **His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into*

*His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now **the people of God**....”* (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The first and second chapters of the Bible reveal how, in the beginning, God made humans *His own special creation*. The third chapter records how Adam sinned and separated himself and the entire human race from God. However, the Scriptures that follow explain what God has done so that unclean sinners can once again become “*His own special people*.”

Are you a part of God’s *special people*? If so, then you have already entered into the second stage of God’s program to reverse the curse.

## SAVED AND SEALED

The first thing the Holy Spirit does in the life of a sinner who receives God’s gift of salvation is to give him or her *new life*. All who transfer their trust from themselves and their own efforts to Jesus Christ and what He accomplished for them on the cross will be reborn spiritually by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said,

*“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘**You must be born again.**’ ...For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**”* (John 3:6-7, 16 NIV)

What a wonderful thing it is to be “*born again!*” For a sinner to be reborn spiritually is the work of the living God in all His complex oneness. The new birth is possible because *the Father* sent His Son, *the Son* shed His blood for sin, and *the Holy Spirit* infuses the believer with new life.

The Holy Spirit not only gives us eternal life; He seals us forever, marks us as God’s own possession, and takes up permanent residence inside of us. He also guarantees our safe arrival into the Father’s house when our turn comes to leave this world.

*“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, **having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance.**”* (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Nothing can cause a true believer to lose his or her eternal salvation. *“The Holy Spirit...is the **guarantee.**”*

### FREED TO SIN AGAIN?

From time to time, I hear people say cynically, “OK, so all I have to do to be guaranteed a place in Paradise is believe that Jesus died for my sins and then I can go on sinning as I please, isn’t that right?”

Using this same logic, if someone rescues you after you were hopelessly lost in a wasteland, would you tell your rescuer, “Thanks! Now I’m free to get lost again!”?

Or if a creditor forgives you a great debt, would you intentionally want to do the things that offend him?

Or if you just put on clean and neatly pressed clothes, would you think, “Good! Now I can go lie down in the dirt!”?

Such a mindset is unthinkable.

Why then do the children of Adam think that way when it comes to sin and its consequences?

The answer is sadly obvious. Sin has a powerful grip on our minds and hearts, even to the point of convincing us that sin is good and desirable. Of course, such an outlook is nothing new. Adam and Eve also viewed sin—the prospect of taking the forbidden fruit—as *“**desirable to make one wise.**”* (Genesis 3:6)

What needs to be understood is that the moment a sinner believes God’s message, he or she is *no longer lost* in the wilderness of sin. That burdensome debt has been *paid in full*. The believer is now *clothed* in the pure righteousness of Christ.

The *Holy Spirit* installs in a newborn child of God the *holy* conviction that sin is a bad thing, not a good thing. He empowers God’s people to live lives that reflect His *holy* character and conduct. As members of the heavenly family, God’s newborn children will want to live lives that maintain the family honor.

While believers can ignore the Holy Spirit and dishonor the Lord by the way they live, all true believers in Christ have this heavenly Guest living inside them. That is why the Scriptures exhort all who have trusted in Christ:

***“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*** (Ephesians 4:30)

Believers in the Lord Jesus can never lose the salvation they have received by faith, but they can “*grieve the Holy Spirit of God*” by living like unbelievers. While the Lord’s people are still ***in the world***, they are no longer “***of the world, just as [He is] not of the world.***” (John 17:16)

Just as the Lord Jesus hates the ungodly practices of this world, so should His disciples.

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? **Certainly not!** How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”* (Romans 6:1-2)

***“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have **taken off your old self** with its practices and have **put on the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*** (Colossians 3:5-10 NIV)

## GOD’S LIFE IN THE BELIEVER

Even as *the Son of God* came to deliver believing sinners from *sin’s penalty*, so *the Spirit of God* has come to deliver believers from *sin’s daily power*.

Here is how it works.

The moment a person places his or her trust in Christ, God's Spirit establishes His kingdom inside that person by coming to live in their spirit, their inner control center. He gives the believer a new nature that *wants* to please the Lord. This does not mean the person's selfish, sinful nature is removed. The old nature will only be eradicated once the believer is with the Lord in heaven. In this world, believers do not reach a state of sinless perfection. However, they should be deeply grieved whenever they displease the Lord.<sup>245</sup>

In the life of every true believer there is an ongoing battle between the old nature (inherited from Adam) and the new nature (implanted by the Holy Spirit). The indwelling Spirit of Christ gives the believer a heart-felt desire to please God. He teaches His people that although sin can provide "*passing pleasures*" (Hebrews 11:25), "*the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin... you have your fruit to holiness.*" (Romans 6:21-22) The Holy Spirit produces major changes inside the believer.

*"The fruit of the Spirit is:  
love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.  
Against such things there is no law."* (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV)

Religions of self-effort do not produce spiritual fruit. While religious laws may modify a person's *outward* behavior to some extent, only the Holy Spirit can change a person's *inward* nature.

God wants to administer His rule in your life. Instead of giving you a list of rules to follow, He lives His life in you and through you for the blessing of others and the glory of His name.

## LISTS OR LOVE?

The story is told of a man whose wife died. The widower hired a lady to clean his house and do his laundry three days a week. The man posted on the refrigerator a list of duties he wanted the housecleaner to accomplish each time she came. And, yes, he paid her for her work.

Over time, the man fell in love with this lady and asked her to be his wife. She accepted. After they married, the man removed the task-list posted on the refrigerator. He also stopped paying her an official salary. Why? Because the “housecleaning lady” had become his beloved wife! Now she gladly cleaned the house, did the laundry, and fulfilled a host of other tasks that were never even on *the list*. Why? Because she *loved* her husband and *wanted* to please and serve him. The rules on the refrigerator were now written in her heart.

That is what God does for those who belong to Him.

*“I will put My law **in their minds**, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* (Jeremiah 31:33)

Like the list on the refrigerator, man’s **religion** presents you with a list of duties to fulfill, promising that you will hopefully get “paid” on Judgment Day, “if God wills it.”

In glorious contrast, the Lord offers you a **relationship** with Himself. Not only has He taken your punishment and offered you eternal life, but He also wants to come and live inside of you by His Holy Spirit if you will accept His proposal.

Instead of imposing on you a long list of duties you can never fulfill, God promises to give you the *desire* to please Him and to serve Him *from a heart of love*. A relationship of love provides a better motivation for good works than a religion of lists and laws. That’s because:

*“...**love** is the fulfillment of the law.”* (Romans 13:10)

Religion may *promise* you a new life and a place in Paradise, but only the Holy Spirit can *provide* it. He is the only One who can fill you with God’s love, joy, peace, and eternal security.

*“Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit** who was given to us.”* (Romans 5:5)



## JOYFUL OBEDIENCE

Of course, the fact that believers serve the Lord and people from hearts overflowing with God's love does not mean they have no commands to obey. For example, just before Jesus returned to heaven, He told His disciples:

*"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all things** that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus commanded His followers to proclaim the good news of salvation to "*all nations*." After a person receives God's gift of salvation, he or she should then be taught "*to observe all things*" that Jesus commanded. For example, Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies and be joyful servants to all. The passion of Christ's followers should be that the one true God might be known, trusted, and praised throughout the world.

Jesus also told His disciples to baptize new believers "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*." Notice it is "*in the **name** of*" (singular), not "*in the names of*" (plural). Only those who see themselves as helpless sinners and believe the good news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection will enter into an eternal relationship with the one true God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Those who believe God's message are to show their faith by being baptized in a river or any other body of water.

## WHY BAPTISM?

Does a believer need to be ceremoniously put under the water to be cleansed from sin? No, the believer has already been cleansed and declared righteous by God because of what Christ did by His death and resurrection. Water baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality. Once we have believed God's message, we should

be baptized in obedience to our Savior and new Master, but it is not such baptism that makes us fit for heaven.<sup>246</sup>


So where does water baptism fit in? It symbolizes in a visual way a believer's identification with the Lord Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Water baptism is a way for believers to declare their faith in God's rescue plan. The water represents death. As a person is put under the water, he is showing: "Jesus died for my sins and was buried." And as the person rises out of the water, he is showing: "Jesus overcame death for me. Because of His death, burial, and resurrection on my behalf, I have been cleansed from sin, declared righteous, and given eternal life."

Make no mistake about it. A sinner's acceptance before God is found only in the perfect righteousness and finished work of Jesus Christ. As a forgiven sinner, I know that I will live forever with the Lord, not because I am good, but because I am "*found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*" (Philippians 3:9)

Religions of men teach you to look to yourself and your own efforts. The Gospel of God teaches you to look to Christ and His impeccable righteousness.

## NO JUDGMENT FOR BELIEVERS?

The fact that Christ has done everything necessary to save sinners from eternal condemnation raises another question in many minds. One e-mail correspondent asked:

 <b>Subject:</b>	Email Feedback
If Jesus shed his blood on the cross to save people from their sins, does this nullify the purpose of the day of judgment?	

No, Jesus' death on the cross for our sins does not nullify the fact that believers must give account of themselves to God. The Scripture says: "*It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*" (1 Peter 4:17 NIV)

## TWO JUDGMENT DAYS

The Scriptures describe two distinctly different future Days of Judgment. First, there will be *the resurrection and judgment of the righteous* and lastly, *the resurrection and judgment of the unrighteous*.<sup>247</sup>

• **Judgment of the Righteous:** You *want* to be a part of this Day of Judgment. At this *Judgment Seat of Christ* there will be no question whether those present will be sent to heaven or hell. They will already be in heaven based on the fact that they received God's gift of righteousness while they lived on earth. However, based on God's estimation of the motives and value of their work as believers, they will be rewarded or suffer loss. A believer who lived according to God's will, humbly served others, trusted God in trials, loved and spread His Word, and waited expectantly for the Lord's return will be rewarded, while a self-centered believer "*will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*" (See 1 Corinthians 3:11-15) The Bible mentions five different "*crowns*" believers can receive, which they will gratefully cast at the Lord's feet in worship.<sup>248</sup> "*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... Each of us shall give account of himself to God.*" (Romans 14:10,12)

• **Judgment of the Unrighteous:** You do *not* want to be a part of this fearful *Great White Throne Judgment*, as it is called. This terrible event will be for all who died in their sins without trusting in God's provision of salvation while they were on earth. There will be no question whether they will go to heaven or hell. All will be condemned to the lake of fire, though each will receive different degrees of punishment according to what they did with the truth they had. "*They were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*" (See Revelation 20:11-15)

The good news is that no one reading these words need perish, since the Lord Jesus offers to all freedom from sin's penalty.

## CHILDREN OF GOD

As already noted, the moment you place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He did for you, you will become a member of God's family.

God will no longer seem far away.

He will become your *Father*.

*"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become **children of God**, to those who believe in His name, who were **born... of God**." (John 1:12) "Because **you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, [Papa] Father!'**" (Galatians 4:6)*

The world is filled with religions that depict a far-away, ritual-demanding God who does not offer people a personal relationship with Himself. Contrastingly, the God who sent His Son to earth has revealed Himself as a heavenly Father who loves sinners. For all who receive His Son Jesus Christ, He promises to cleanse them, clothe them in the perfection of Christ, and send His Holy Spirit into their hearts.

In her book, *I Dared to Call Him Father*, Bilquis Sheikh of Pakistan tells of her search to discover the message of the one true God. After many months of comparing the Bible with the book of her religious upbringing, she tells of an experience she had while crying out to God to show her the truth:

"I picked up both books and lifted them, one in each hand. 'Which, Father?' I said. 'Which one is Your book?' Then a remarkable thing happened. Nothing like it had ever occurred in my life quite this way. For I heard a voice inside my being, a voice that spoke to me as clearly as if I were repeating words in my inner mind. They were fresh, full of kindness, yet at the same time full of authority.

**'In which book do you meet me as Father?'**

I found myself answering: 'In the Bible.' That's all it took."<sup>249</sup>

As with this Pakistani woman, God is my Father too. The day I believed God's message, I was born again spiritually. Nothing can cause me to lose my position as a member of God's family. Jesus said, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them **eternal life**, and **they shall never perish**; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*" (John 10:27-28)

## RELATIONSHIP & FELLOWSHIP

So what happens when I sin? Does that cause me to be separated once again from God?

If a son disobeys his earthly father, does he cease to be a part of the family? No. A son's disobedience does not cause him to be un-born. His physical tie to his parents cannot be undone. So it is with your spiritual tie to God. Nothing can cause you to lose your position as a born-again child of God. All who believe have "***been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.***" (1 Peter 1:23) God is your heavenly Father. The righteousness of Christ in which you have been clothed will never be taken away. The Holy Spirit will never leave you.

You are eternally safe.

*"I am persuaded that neither death nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

No action on my part can reverse the *eternal relationship* God has established within me. However, sin will affect my *daily fellowship* with God.

## POSITION & CONDITION

Suppose a father tells his son to go work in the garden, but instead the boy runs off to play football with his friends. The child's *position* as a son of his father would be unaffected, but the *condition* of the son's fellowship *with* his father would surely be affected! When the son gets home he will be questioned; there will

be some firm words and some appropriate disciplinary action. The son must confess his disobedience so he can once again *enjoy a close relationship* with his father.

It is the same way with those who belong to God. He disciplines His children when they sin.

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, **just as a father** the son in whom he delights.”*  
(Proverbs 3:11-12)

Concerning our daily fellowship with God, the Bible says:

*“If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth....If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**”* (1 John 1:6,8-9)

The indwelling Holy Spirit wants to teach all of God’s children to abhor every form of sin, no matter how “small.” He wants to make us sensitive to sins in our lives that others may not even label as sin.

For example, if I speak in an unkind manner to my wife, or if I have an unloving attitude towards someone who wronged me, or say something that is less than completely true, the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin. The remedy is to “*confess [my] sins*” to the Lord and ask forgiveness from any I have offended. Once I have done this, I can once again enjoy close, sweet *fellowship* with my Lord.

Do you see the difference?

In Christ, my *position* before God is one of perfection, but in my daily life, my *condition* is less than perfect.

His work of salvation *for me* is forever finished, but His work *in me* will continue until I meet Him in Paradise.

## REDEEMED FOR A PURPOSE

The Holy Spirit of Christ wants to transform the way God's people think, speak, and act. He says:

***“Be holy, for I am holy.”*** (1 Peter 1:16)

He also tells His people: *“Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, **be filled with** [yielded to; controlled by] **the Spirit.**”* (Ephesians 5:17-18 NIV)

The Holy Spirit doesn't suppress our personalities; rather, He frees us to live, on a daily basis, the righteous and victorious lives God intends for us to live. God has saved us for a purpose. We are called to exalt Him in all we think, say, and do.

*“Do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

What a life-changing truth this should be for all who have believed the gospel! The personal presence of God is living in us! It is as we submit to Him that our lives will glorify His name and bring blessing to others.

Much more could be said about the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of His people.

He comforts, strengthens, guides, enlightens, and instructs.

He helps believers understand the Scriptures.<sup>250</sup>

He enables them to pray in a way that connects with God.<sup>251</sup>

He gives His people special gifts and abilities so they can help and build up others.<sup>252</sup>

He empowers Christ's followers to work and witness for Him no matter how great the opposition. Jesus told His disciples:

*“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But*



*beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you... But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; **for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.***” (Matthew 10:16-20)

## CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE

In short, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for the people of God to fulfill God’s original purpose for humankind, which is to reflect the image of the one true God and to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him forever.

*“The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. ...And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* (Romans 8:26,28-29)

God desires to use each event and trial in the lives of His people to conform them back into “*the image of His Son.*”

The first chapter of God’s Book declares that the first man and woman were created “*in the image and likeness of God.*” Man’s choice to sin against His Creator radically marred that image. However, when the time was right, God sent His perfect, glorious Son into the world.

Jesus’ righteous life, death, and resurrection were stage one of God’s program to undo the damage caused by sin. But, as we have seen in this chapter, there’s more, much more, to His plan.

The moment helpless sinners like you and me believe God’s good news of salvation, He gives us His Holy Spirit who begins the process of *conforming us back into His image and likeness* in our thoughts, motives, words, and deeds. This is stage two of God’s program to reverse sin’s curse.

God wants His children to reflect *the character and conduct of Christ*. That is what the term “*Christian*” is intended to imply.





Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit's work of *conforming us to the image of Christ* is an ongoing process that will only be completed once we see Him face to face.<sup>253</sup>

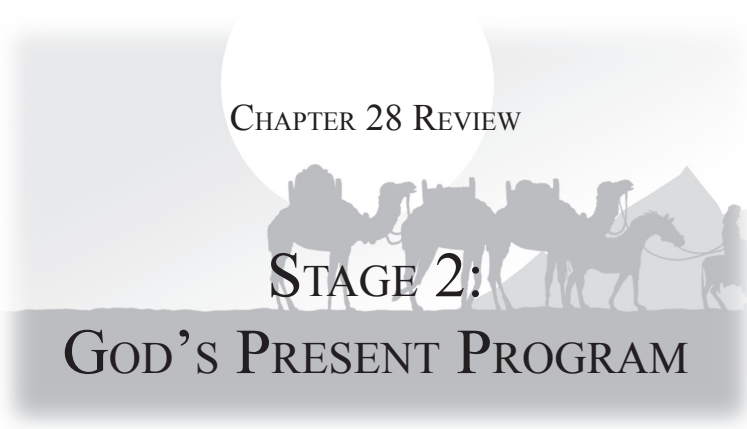


*“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:1-2 NIV)

Due to the Son of God's work of redemption *for* all who believe in Him, and the Spirit of God's work of transformation *in* all who yield to Him, the power of Satan is being rendered ineffective and God's righteous kingdom of love, joy, and peace is being restored.



With purpose-filled lives and eager anticipation we await the final stage of God's program when He will forever put away Satan, sin, and death.

Jesus is coming back.



## CHAPTER 28 REVIEW

# STAGE 2: GOD'S PRESENT PROGRAM

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1. Why do most people today live in the grip of fear?
  2. According to the Scriptures, who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do for those who have placed their trust in Christ?
  3. Will someone who has been born again by the Spirit of God want to continue to sin and displease God? Using the “Lists or Love” illustration, explain the difference between a person who merely follows a religion and a person who truly enjoys a genuine relationship with God.
  4. What is the true meaning of water baptism?
  5. There is an important difference between a believer’s *position* and a believer’s *condition*. Using the father/son example, describe the difference.
  6. In your own words, explain 1 Peter 1:16. “*Be holy, for I am holy.*”

# 29

## STAGE 3: GOD'S FUTURE PROGRAM

*“The God of peace **will crush Satan**  
under your feet **shortly**.”*

(Romans 16:20)

**T**his promise to believers flows from that mysterious, initial prophecy God announced the day sin corrupted the human race: *the Seed of a woman would crush the head of the Serpent.*

The Creator-Owner of the universe would perform all that He promised. But He would do it according to His own agenda and timetable.

### REVERSING THE CURSE: STAGE THREE

At His first coming, the promised Messiah defeated Satan by paying sin's penalty in full. For the believer, hell is no longer a prospect and heaven is sure. As a result, Satan's favorite weapon, death, has lost its sting. ***Sin's penalty*** has been reversed.

After the Lord Jesus returned to heaven, He sent down His Holy Spirit, *“the Helper,”* to empower His people to overcome the influence of Satan and sin in their daily lives, molding them back into His own image. ***Sin's power*** is being reversed.

However, it is only when Jesus returns to earth that He will fully crush Satan and deliver His people from ***sin's presence***.

## THINGS TO COME

Just as God's prophets predicted the Messiah's first coming, so they also predict His second coming.<sup>254</sup> And just as His first visit happened exactly as foretold, so will His return.

The day is approaching when this announcement will resonate from heaven:

***“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*** (Revelation 11:15)

When Jesus returns to earth, the sons of Adam will not crown Him with thorns and nail Him to a cross. Nor will they pronounce His name in vain or say that He is no more than a prophet.

Such discourteous treatment of the King will no longer be an option.

The Scripture is clear. When Jesus comes again, *“every knee shall bow.”* (Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11) But before that happens, a chain of other prophecies must be fulfilled.

## JOY IN HEAVEN

One of the events that must take place before the nations of the world bow the knee to their Creator-Owner is that Jesus will descend into earth's atmosphere to take His redeemed people up to heaven.

*“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

This secret, stunning event could take place at any moment. When it does, the dead bodies of believers whose souls live in heaven, along with believers still living on earth, will be *“caught up together...to meet the Lord in the air.”*<sup>255</sup> Believers in Christ

will be instantly transformed into the likeness of Christ. They will receive new bodies fit for eternity, unfettered by time and space.

Some time after being “*caught up together*,” individual believers will receive rewards for the things they selflessly did on earth for the glory of God and for the blessing of others.<sup>256</sup> Next, the people of God, forevermore “*holy and without blemish*,” will be officially presented to their eternal “*Bridegroom*,”<sup>257</sup> the Champion who gave His life to save them from eternal judgment.

*“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’”* (Revelation 19:7-9)

The relationships enjoyed in eternity will be infinitely superior to anything we have ever known on earth.

## TRIBULATION ON EARTH

Meanwhile down on planet earth, the Scriptures describe a time of “*great tribulation*”<sup>258</sup> as God pours out His wrath on an obstinate world and prepares the way for His Son’s second coming. This period is also referred to as “*the time of Jacob’s trouble*” (Jeremiah 30:7), since it is designed to bring the nation of Israel to repentance.

During this time, an impressive, powerful world ruler referred to in Scripture as “*the Anti-Christ*” and “*the Beast*” (1 John 2:18; Revelation 13) will ascend to power. Multitudes will blindly follow him and his wonder-working false prophet. Every person on earth will be required “*to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast.*” (Revelation 13:16)

Those who refuse to submit will be beheaded. This false messiah will promise peace and prosperity, but instead he will lead people down a path of deception, destruction, and death.

## ARMAGEDDON

In the Bible, many of God's prophets have written about the final World War that will be in progress when the Lord Jesus descends from heaven to earth. This dramatic conflict will be fought on the plains of Esdraelon, a vast area that stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The Scripture also refers to this ancient and future battleground as *Armageddon*, meaning, "Mountain of slaughter."

*"Spirits of demons, performing signs, [will] go out to the kings of the earth...to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 'Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."* (Revelation 16:14-16)

The prophet Zechariah also wrote a dramatic description of the events that will accompany the Messiah's return.

*"Behold, the day of the LORD is coming... For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city."* (Zechariah 14:1-2)

"All the nations" will surround Jerusalem. It will be a holocaust of epic proportions.

## THE RETURN OF MESSIAH

When all hope is lost and the surviving inhabitants of the city have nowhere to look for help but up, they will call out to LORD for deliverance. Then the One whose name means "*the LORD saves*" will descend from heaven. And to their shock and surprise, their Deliverer will be none other than *Jesus*, whom they

crucified! But this time, in a spirit of deep repentance and anguish of soul, they will receive their King.

*“I will pour on...the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then **they will look on Me whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”* (Zechariah 12:10)

At last the spiritually blind eyes of the Jewish nation will be opened and they will know and believe that Jesus was and is the one and only Messiah.<sup>259</sup>

What takes place next will be the most efficient demonstration of warfare in world history as Jesus, *the Word*, simply speaks and the enemy dissolves.

*“Then the **LORD** will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley....*

*This shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall **dissolve** while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall **dissolve** in their sockets, and their tongues shall **dissolve** in their mouths.*

*It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.*

*And the **LORD** shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—‘**The LORD is one,**’ And His name **one**. ”* (Zechariah 14:3-4, 12, 7, 9)

At last the one true God will be rightly honored and praised.

## DOMINION RECLAIMED

Several decades before Zechariah wrote the prophecy we just read, God gave a parallel vision to the prophet Daniel:

*“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like **the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!** He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given **dominion** and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His **dominion** is an everlasting **dominion**, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”* (Daniel 7:13-14)

The word *dominion* is repeated three times.

When God first created man and woman, He gave them *“**dominion**...over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* (Genesis 1:26,28) When Adam rebelled against his Creator, he surrendered that dominion to Satan. But the reign, authority, and control over this planet which Adam, *“the first man,”* relinquished, Jesus, *“the Second Man,”*<sup>260</sup> will reclaim.

God gave Jesus’ disciple, John, a complementary vision in perfect harmony with the prophecies of Zechariah and Daniel:

*“I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and **His name is called The Word of God**. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**.”* (Revelation 19:11-16)



When *the King of kings* returns, He will be accompanied by “*the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen,*” consisting of heaven’s myriad of angels and Adam’s redeemed offspring.<sup>261</sup> The gracious displays of power and glory Jesus demonstrated at His first coming will pale in comparison to the unbridled power and awe-inspiring glory He will display at His second coming.

## HEAVEN’S RULE IN HEARTS

Tell me, if you are walking alone through a forest, which would you rather encounter—a lion or a lamb?

When the Messiah came to earth the first time, He came as “*the Lamb*” to save sinners, but when He returns, He will come as “*the Lion*” to judge sinners.<sup>262</sup>

At Jesus’ first visit to earth, He preached, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” (Matthew 4:17) But instead of repenting of their wrong ideas and receiving their King, the Jews and Gentiles joined forces to crucify their King. Thus, they unwittingly fulfilled God’s age-old plan that the Messiah should shed His blood to pay off the sin-debt of the world.

The good news is that whenever sinners place their trust in the Lord Jesus and what He did for them, God will set up His rule in their hearts and make them His subjects forever.

Do you know that every true believer in Christ is already a registered citizen of heaven?

*“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body....”* (Philippians 3:20-21)

## HEAVEN’S RULE ON EARTH

When Jesus returns to earth He will set up His kingdom in Jerusalem from where He will rule over the earth for a thousand years. At last, His kingdom will come and His will shall “*be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:10) Evil will no longer be tolerated in any nation, for “*He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.*” (Revelation 19:15)

Many people do not believe that God's Son will return physically to earth. Nonetheless the Scriptures speak clearly on this point. Just as the Son of God took on a physical body at His first coming and then ascended back to heaven in His resurrected, physical, and limitless body, so He shall return *physically*. That is what the angels told Jesus' disciples the day He returned to heaven:

*“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11)

## SATAN BOUND

God's Book has much to say about the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. We can only summarize the main events.

After Jesus returns to earth, one of His first initiatives has to do with Satan, that old “serpent” who first led the human race down the path of self-destruction.

*“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. **He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.**”* (Revelation 20:1-3)

Satan will be bound and quarantined for the entire thousand-year period. With the Evil One locked away and the Righteous One Himself reigning, at last there will be *“peace on earth and goodwill toward men.”* (Luke 2:14)

God's righteous government, for which the world yearns, will become a reality.

*“The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...and **it shall stand forever.**”* (Daniel 2:44)

## TRUE SUBMISSION

Nearly three thousand years ago, King Solomon<sup>263</sup> wrote about the Messiah's future reign when every nation and person on earth will bow to Him in true submission. Many today claim to be submitted to the one true God, but in that day, all people will truly know Him and submit to Him.

***"In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more.***

***He shall have dominion** also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish [European nations] and of the isles [distant continents] will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba [Africa and Arabia] will offer gifts. **Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him.***

***All nations shall serve Him. For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight. And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised.***

***There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever!***

***And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.***" (Psalm 72:7-19)

This Psalm provides clear insight into Christ's future kingdom in which *"He shall have **dominion**... to the ends of the earth."*

## PERFECT GOVERNMENT

*“He will spare the poor and needy.”* The Messiah’s reign will be in total contrast to the corrupt, turbulent world of today. For the first time since the Fall, there will be liberty and justice for all. The life of every infant, child, woman, and man will be respected as infinitely valuable. *“He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and **precious** shall be their blood in His sight.”*

The news media recurrently reports of political and religious leaders who appeal for peace and negotiate for arms reduction. However, due to their limited authority and power, these leaders are unable to produce the peace they claim to seek. But when *He* returns—the One to whom wind and waves submit—the earth will finally enjoy true justice and *“an abundance of **peace**.”*

Over the centuries, all kings and rulers of this world have lived *and **died***. But of Jesus, the King of kings, the Scripture declares: *“His name shall endure **forever**.”* The earth will flourish in a millennium of unparalleled peace and prosperity under the administration of the Son of Man who triumphed over sin and death.

*“Yes, all kings shall bow before **Him**. ...and men shall be blessed in **Him**; All nations shall call **Him** blessed.”*

(Psalm 72:11, 17)

The Lord Himself will provide this weary world with the only righteous government it will ever know. The redeemed children of Adam, eternal possessors of glorified bodies and holy natures, will reign with Him.

His kingdom will be free from corruption.

*“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and **shall reign with Him a thousand years**.”* (Revelation 20:6)

While all forms of government have failed—monarchal, totalitarian, democratic, religious—His shall not fail.

It will be as perfect as He is.

## PRINCE OF PEACE

Earlier, we reflected on several prophecies about Christ's first coming. For example, the prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But did you notice that Micah's prophecy also predicted that the Messiah will one day rule over the whole earth?

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me **the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. ... He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And this One shall be peace.**"* (Micah 5:2,4-5)

Isaiah, a contemporary of Micah, also prophesied about the male child who was to be born and the eternal Son who was to be given. Isaiah's prophecy also pointed ahead to the Son's worldwide government.

*"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and **the government will be upon His shoulder.** And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of **His government and peace there will be no end,** upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever."* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

At last, the entire world will address the Son of God by His rightful titles. **"His name will be called:**

*Wonderful,  
Counselor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace."*

The nations will enjoy justice and peace *"from that time forward, **even forever.**"*

God's desire to be with man will be reality. Forever.

*“Many nations shall be **joined to the LORD** in that day, and they shall become **My people**. And **I will dwell in your midst**.” (Zechariah 2:11)*

The good news for today is that all who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in their hearts can enjoy God's presence and peace *right now*.

### NO MORE IGNORANCE

When the Lord first lived on earth among humans, most people failed to recognize who He was. To this day, most refuse to recognize Jesus as their King. Nevertheless, a golden age is coming when every soul on earth will acknowledge Him to be the One He claimed to be.

*“‘And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another; and from one Sabbath to another; all flesh shall come to worship before **Me**,’ says **the LORD**.” (Isaiah 66:23)*

No longer will thousands of religions, denominations, and sects fill the earth. Nor will anyone dare deny the historical reality that Jesus, the Son of God, died on a cross and rose from the dead. Though not all will trust in Him, all will know the truth about Him and His message.

*“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14)*

### NO MORE WAR

With the Lord ruling over the earth, strife between North and South, East and West will be a thing of the past. Conflict between Israel and surrounding nations will cease. The horrific sufferings of the African continent will be forever over. That goes for the other continents too. Civil war and oppression will be ended. True peace, prosperity, and purpose will permeate the earth.

***“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’***

*He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, **neither shall they learn war anymore.**” (Isaiah 2:3-4)*

Peace and unity will be universal as people know and worship the one true God.

The confusion of Babel will be reversed. Once again, the world will speak one language:

***“Then I will restore to the peoples a pure language that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.” (Zephaniah 3:9)***

## **CURSE LIFTED**

To add to the prosperity of this thousand-year period, the Lord will lift the curse that came upon the earth because of sin.

When Jesus first lived on earth, He demonstrated His power to reverse the curse. He cast out demons, reversed deformities, cured diseases, raised the dead, fed the multitudes, and demonstrated perfect control over nature. By such acts He provided irrefutable evidence that He was the promised Messiah and King.

What Jesus provided in sample form at His first coming, He will provide universally at His second coming.

He will bind Satan and his demons. He will eradicate deformity, disease, and death from natural causes. The ground will no longer produce weeds and thorns. Farmers will harvest abundant crops as never before. “Poverty” and “hunger” will become archaic terms.

Every nation will experience this golden age of world history.

The kingdom of heaven rejected by earth’s citizens at Jesus’ first coming will be established globally at His second coming.

*“The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.... ‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, **and dust shall be the serpent’s food.** They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,’ says the LORD.” (Isaiah 35:5-6; 65:25)*

Even the animal kingdom will coexist in peace, reverting to the vegetarian design and Edenic conditions before sin entered.

Nonetheless, the root of sin will still be found in the hearts of those born during Christ’s thousand-year reign. As in every age, the descendants of Adam will need to receive God’s gift of forgiveness by simply trusting in His provision of salvation.

Did you notice what the last verse we read foretells about the serpent? *“Dust shall be the serpent’s food.”* During the millennium, snakes will continue to crawl on their bellies. Their slithering on the ground will serve as a reminder that there remains yet one more dramatic event in the third and final stage of God’s plan to forever reverse the curse.

## EVIL’S FINAL FLING

Earlier, we learned that the *“serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”* will be bound and held in a bottomless pit during the millennial reign of Christ, *“so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. **But after these things he must be released for a little while.**”* (Revelation 20:2-3)

Why would God release Satan again? Why not just keep him locked up?

The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, will allow man’s sinful, depraved heart to be exposed one final time before evil is forever put away. As humanity transitions from time to eternity, this truth will become patently clear: Adam’s descendants are helpless to rise above their fallen nature. Only the LORD God can make sinners righteous and transform their wayward hearts.



***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”*** (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

Just how “*desperately wicked*” is the heart of man? Even after a thousand years of living in a perfect environment, under a perfect government with a perfect King, the moment Satan is released, a great horde of those born on earth during the millennium will believe Satan’s lies and side with him! They will join forces with God’s adversary and rebel against their Creator, just as their ancestors did in Eden.

It will be evil’s final fling.

### SATAN’S LAST STAND

***“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth... to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”*** (Revelation 20:7-9)

The Lord will allow Satan’s legion of rebellious humans to surround Jerusalem, but as soon as they are assembled, fire will descend from heaven and consume them. Satan and all who sided with him will have reached the end of the road.

### THE SERPENT CRUSHED

What takes place next is the most solemn event in history:

***“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”***

***Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.***

***Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.***"

(Revelation 20:10-15)

The conflict of the ages will be forever over.

Following the Great White Throne Judgment, the curse of sin will be history. But the lessons gleaned from God's judgment of evil will never be forgotten. All creation will have witnessed the repulsiveness of sin and the righteousness of God.

At last, the head of *the serpent* will be crushed.

Satan and all who followed him will be forever encapsulated in "*the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*" (Matthew 25:41) From that everlasting prison the condemned will never escape. Nor will they be able to blame God for their punishment, for even when blessed with a thousand years on a perfect earth with a perfect King, they still opted to rebel against their Creator-Owner.

Man will be without excuse.

The reputation and message of the one true God will be forever vindicated.

All who have their names written in *the Book of Life* will be eternally with the Lord, "*but the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (Revelation 21:8)<sup>264</sup>

Never again will evil raise its ugly head. All creation will be forevermore in submission to the one true God.

## WITH HIM!

What happens next is almost too wonderful to imagine.

*"I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"*

(Revelation 21:3-5)

Just as the first two chapters of the Old Testament describe God's original creation, so the last two chapters of the New Testament describe His new creation. With Satan, sin, and death banished, all will once again be in perfect harmony with the Creator's holy nature. Never again will humans or angels fall prey to sin. The needed lessons will have been learned and *"God Himself will be with them and be their God."*

God's program embraces much more than merely removing the effects of Adam's sin. It includes making *"all things new."* The Lord's people will enjoy glorious heavenly bodies fit for His dazzling presence. Throughout eternity, redeemed souls from every nation and era will take part in His awesome and timeless plans. As believers, it will be our joy to be forever with Him and it will be His joy that we are there.

The *"God with us"* theme will be a full-time reality.

## LIKE HIM!

Sweet fellowship between the Redeemer and His people will never cease. What Adam lost in the earthly paradise will be restored and surpassed in the heavenly Paradise. When God was about to create the first man and woman, He said,

*"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." (Genesis 1:26)*

Everything will turn out just the way He planned it.

Heaven will be filled with men and women who bear **His image and likeness** in their character and conduct. Sin will no longer be even a possibility. God's people will be sealed in righteousness. The prophet David foresaw this when he wrote: "*As for me, I will see Your face **in righteousness**; I shall be satisfied when I awake **in Your likeness**.*" (Psalm 17:15)

Ransomed men, women, and children will be forever secure as God's new creation, "*conformed to **the image of His Son**.*" (Romans 8:29)

*"It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is."* (1 John 3:2)

## FOR HIM!

From the beginning, the Creator's purpose was to establish His kingdom among mankind in such a way that we might know and appreciate His glory, purity, love, justice, mercy, and grace.

All through the long war with Satan, it was always God's plan to "*visit... the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.*" (Acts 15:14) The Lord will have what He came to earth to win: a redeemed people in His own image who, from thankful and adoring hearts, will love, enjoy, and praise Him forever.

The third and final stage of God's plan to reverse the curse could begin at any moment.

Are you ready?

Does the thought of Jesus' return fill you with joy or terror?

The Bible gives us many more insights into the end times which we don't have time to view on this journey through the Scriptures. For now, it is enough to know that our trustworthy Creator will make good on a little prophecy buried in the last chapter of His Book:

*"There shall be **no more curse!**"* (Revelation 22:3)

## CHAPTER 29 REVIEW

### STAGE 3: GOD'S FUTURE PROGRAM



1. Describe the three stages of God's plan to crush Satan and put away sin.
2. Tell how the Messiah's second coming to earth will be strikingly different from His first coming.
3. Reread Psalm 72:7-19, then list some ways the world's rulers and peoples will show their submission to Jesus the Messiah-King.
4. During the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ, the curse brought on by Adam's sin will be mostly lifted. What positive effects will this have on planet earth?
5. Do you agree that Revelation 20:10-15 describes the most solemn event in history? Explain your response.
6. In your own words, explain what you see in 1 John 3:2.  
*"It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."*

# 30

## A PREVIEW OF PARADISE

Much of the world's population holds a *yin-yang* view of evil. Yin means “shady” and yang means “sunny.” Perhaps you’ve seen the yin-yang symbol—a circle with a unique blend of black and white. While this ancient Chinese philosophy contains truth, it blurs the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, life and death. It views good and evil as a natural and never-ending feature of man’s existence.

As we have seen, the Bible provides a different analysis of good and evil. It does not support the idea that suffering and sadness have always been and will always be an integral part of our universe. The Scriptures are clear. A day is coming when Evil, Pain and Death will take their final bow and vanish from the stage of history.

This graph depicts God’s unalterable program:

← ETERNITY      [ TIME ]      ETERNITY →  
PERFECTLY GOOD    [ Good / Evil ]    PERFECTLY GOOD

The current mix of evil and good is bracketed. It will not be around forever.<sup>265</sup>

The first two and the final two chapters of God’s Book portray a sin-free world, a world in which God is rightly loved and exalted. It is between those first and last chapters that we see God

working out His plan to deal with sin and its curse, and to redeem for Himself a people who know Him, love Him, and *want* to spend eternity with Him.

Like any good story, God's history of redemption has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

**BEGINNING:** Genesis 1 & 2:

*A perfect world*—before evil entered.

**MIDDLE:** Genesis 3 to Revelation 20:

*A corrupted world*—God's intervention.

**END:** Revelation 21 & 22:

*A perfect world*—after evil is eradicated.

## THE BOOK OF ENDINGS

Just as the first book of the Bible is the *book of beginnings*, so the last book of the Bible is the *book of endings*.

### Genesis

- ◇ Beginning of all things
- ◇ Creation of heaven & earth
- ◇ God creates the sun for earth
- ◇ Satan's first temptation of man
- ◇ God's first judgments
- ◇ Entrance of sin & death
- ◇ "First Adam" loses dominion
- ◇ God promises to crush Satan
- ◇ First lamb sacrificed
- ◇ Man shut out of earthly paradise
- ◇ Man cut off from the Tree of Life
- ◇ Mankind separated from God

### Revelation

- √ Consummation of all things
- √ Creation of new heaven & earth
- √ God is the Light of heaven
- √ Satan's final temptation of man
- √ God's final judgments
- √ Abolishment of sin & death
- √ "Last Adam" restores dominion
- √ Satan cast into the Lake of Fire
- √ God's Lamb glorified
- √ Man in heavenly Paradise
- √ Man eating from the Tree of Life
- √ Rescued mankind forever with God

The list could go on and on, but you get the idea.

## THE REVELATION

As we complete our journey together, we want to reflect on the "end" of God's story, which is really the inauguration of a whole new beginning.

The Bible's closing book begins with these words:

*“**The Revelation** of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near... **To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood... to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega** [first and final letters of Greek alphabet], **the Beginning and the End,**’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”* (Revelation 1:1-3, 5-8)<sup>266</sup>

God gave these words “to His servant John.” John was one of the twelve disciples who accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry.<sup>267</sup> Six decades after Jesus returned to heaven, His Holy Spirit inspired John to write this final book of God’s library.

*Revelation* means “unveiling.” This fascinating book unveils events no human could conceive. It outlines how the Lord will vindicate His name and restore the dominion that man lost through sin. This book also gives us a preview of Paradise.

## THE THRONE

A select few of God’s prophets and apostles were given a glimpse of God’s dwelling place, but none more clearly than John the apostle. John wrote:

*“After this I looked, and there before me was **a door standing open in heaven.** And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’ At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was **a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat***



*there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian [two precious stones<sup>268</sup>]. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.*” (Revelation 4:1-3 NIV)

John struggled to describe heaven’s throne room. It was unspeakably glorious. Soaring around the throne of God were angelic beings that declared incessantly: “**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!**” (Revelation 4:8)

John could only report that what he saw slightly resembled things he had seen on earth, but everything was infinitely more beautiful and spectacular. He gazed on a place of sparkling light and intense, supernatural colors. He heard deep thundering sounds and myriads of joyful, praise-filled voices, but what captivated John most was *the One* seated on the throne.<sup>269</sup>

## THE THRILL

The religions of the world portray Paradise in many ways.

Some descriptions are positively boring. Perhaps you’ve seen the cartoons: people sitting around on clouds, dutifully plucking harps. That is not how the Bible describes God’s majestic abode.

Others describe paradise as a male-centered garden of non-stop sensuality. That concept is also wrong. When the Lord was on earth, He taught that—in His Father’s house—His redeemed people “*neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.*” (Matthew 22:30)

Heaven is a God-centered realm where the joy, wonder, and thrill of being in the presence of infinite wisdom and love will never fade. Heaven is a place where relationships are on a higher plane than anything known on earth. God designed earthly marriage to give us a faint idea of the glorious relationship that will exist between the Lord and His redeemed people throughout eternity. Even the best earthly marriages fall short of illustrating the intense joy and holy companionship that people united to Christ will enjoy with Him. The Scripture calls this “*a great mystery*” (Ephesians 5:32) and goes on to say, “*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!*” (Revelation 19:9)

Paradise is all about being with HIM.

The angels that were created untold millennia ago are more awed today by God's presence than ever. So it will be for the redeemed children of Adam. We will need all eternity to take in the splendor, wisdom, and perfection of the Lord our God!

*"How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still **with You**."* (Psalm 139:17-18)

The thrill and joy of being with the Lord will never grow old. The question is not whether we will ever get bored, but rather, will we ever be able to take our eyes off Him?

*"**In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**"* (Psalm 16:11)

## THE THRONG

The apostle John not only got a glimpse of the Lord on the throne—he also saw the throng of the redeemed.

*"After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes... and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* (Revelation 7:9-10)

Do you remember how God promised to offer His *blessings to all nations and peoples on earth* through the Savior born in the family line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?<sup>270</sup> God allowed John to look into the future and witness the fulfillment of His promise.

Every people group on earth, every nation, and every language will be represented around God's throne. With grateful and joyful voice, this innumerable throng of redeemed sinners will forever praise and worship *the Lamb* who shed His blood to deliver them from eternal death and give them eternal life.

*“They sang a new song, saying: ‘**You are worthy... for You were slain, and have redeemed us** to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.’*

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘**Worthy is the Lamb who was slain** to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation 5:9-12)*

## MY REDEEMER!

Four thousand years ago, the prophet Job exulted:

*“**I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!**” (Job 19:25-27)*

Does your heart *yearn*, like Job’s, to “see God”? Do you know Him as **your** Redeemer?

All true believers share Job’s sure hope. My friend, I cannot speak for you, but I know that **I** shall see **my** Redeemer face to face! I am going to walk and talk with “*the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me!*” (Galatians 2:20)

Yes, I look forward to wonderful times of fellowship with the people of God from every era, along with family and friends who are already with the Lord, and with all my heart, I hope *you* will be among them too. But, above all, I want to see *Jesus!*

He took my hell for me.

Without question, one of the most amazing truths my mind can attempt to contemplate is this:

**HE** wants *me* to spend eternity with **HIM!**

On the night that Jesus was arrested to be condemned and crucified, He prayed:

*“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”* (John 17:24)

This is the heart of God’s message. He designed humans to be with Him, but He won’t force you to accept His offer.

He leaves the choice with you.

*“To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. ...Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* (Revelation 2:7; 1 John 5:5)

## THE PERFECT HOME

The last two chapters of the Bible record John’s glimpse of the eternal home-base where believers from every era will live together with their Creator-Redeemer and participate in all that He has prepared for His people.

*“Now I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”* (Revelation 21:1-2)

This glorious city will come “down out of heaven from God” to unite with our recreated planet. The new earth will have “no more sea.” There will be no more separating continents.

*“And God will **wipe away every tear** from their eyes; there shall be **no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying**. There shall be **no more pain**, for the former things have passed away.”* (Revelation 21:4)

All will be perfect. The celestial city will be glorious beyond imagination. John had difficulty describing it.

*“The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs [2200 kilometers]. Its length, breadth, and height are equal...*

*The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones...*

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each individual gate was of one pearl. And **the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.** But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, **for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.** And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light...*

*But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, **but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.**” (Revelation 21:16-24,27)*

This colossal city will be glorious in every detail; even its streets are of “*pure gold, like transparent glass.*” Every component is designed to reflect the glory of the Lord.

The city has no temple or sun, since the Lord Himself is the city’s worship center and Light Source. “*The Lamb is its light.*”

Heaven will be illuminated by the same One who, on the first day of creation, said, “*Let there be light.*” The Light of that city will be the same dazzling splendor that dwelt in the Holiest Place of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and in Jesus Himself who said,

**“I am the light of the world.”** (John 8:12)

This heavenly city will have the form of a perfect cube – as did the Holiest Place in the Tabernacle which symbolized Heaven.

The length and width of the city are 2200 kilometers (1500 miles) in each direction. The same is true of its height. Apparently, the city will tower up through the new earth's stratosphere and out into space.

This glorious home will have ample room for every person who was ever born. However, not all people will be there, "*but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*" Only those who, while on earth, placed their trust in the one true God and His Salvation will be there.

The final chapter describes the garden found within the city.

*"He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was **the tree of life**...and there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of **the Lamb** shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see **His face**, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ...And they shall **reign forever and ever.**"* (Revelation 22:1-5)

## THE PERFECT STORY

God's story has come full circle.

*"In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was **the tree of life.**"*

What began in a lovely garden ends in a magnificent city with an exquisite garden. In contrast to Eden, the heavenly Paradise will not include *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, but it will feature *the tree of life* from which Adam and Eve were cut off when they sinned. Perfect holiness and everlasting life will be the only option in the heavenly city.

The time of testing and living by faith will be history.

*"The throne of **God** and of **the Lamb** shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall **see His face**... And they shall **reign forever and ever.**"*

Never in eternity will God's people forget the great price paid by "*God and...the Lamb*" to redeem their helpless souls from judgment and qualify them to live forever with Him.

Sweet, unbreakable fellowship between the Lord and His people will be a constant feature. That God should be with us and that we should be with Him will be even more wonderful than anything Adam and Eve could have known had they never sinned.

Why will it be *even more* wonderful?

The answer is found in the word **redemption**.

*"He has **rescued us from** the dominion of darkness and **brought us into** the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have **redemption**, the forgiveness of sins."*  
(Colossians 1:13-14 NIV)

What could be more wonderful than being **rescued from** the worst possible fate as condemned law-breakers in the dark dungeon of sin and death, and then being **brought into** the best possible state as favored citizens in God's kingdom of light and love?

That is what our Creator-Redeemer has done for all who trust Him alone for salvation. Out of His great love, with His infinitely-valuable blood, He has delivered helpless sinners from hell and qualified them for heaven.

It is the Perfect Story – the Story of Redemption to be reviewed and appreciated throughout eternity.

*"I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... crying out with a loud voice, saying, '**Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!**'"* (Revelation 7:9-10)

## HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Around the globe, people of every age love stories of romance and rescue – stories with happy endings.<sup>271</sup>

Whether an ancient legend dramatized by a village storyteller to a group huddled around a flickering fire under the night sky, or a fairy tale read by a parent to a child at bedtime, the stories share a similar plot. It goes something like this:

*A young maiden in distress, enslaved by some evil character; is delivered from her hopeless predicament by some combination of supernatural intervention and brave warrior or handsome prince. Having rescued his beloved, the hero takes her to be his bride, to live with him in his magnificent home.*

And how does the tale end?

***And they lived happily ever after.***

Why do people tell such stories?

They tell them because God has built into the human soul a desire to be delivered from evil, to be loved, and to live happily ever after. That is why children and adults alike love such tales.

But God's story is no imaginary tale.

A figment of the imagination is not rooted in history, nor is it confirmed by archaeology. An invented story is not written by dozens of people over fifteen centuries, nor is it heralded by hundreds of detailed prophecies. A make-believe hero could not speak with the heavenly wisdom of Jesus, nor would he tell those he has come to rescue,



*“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be...mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” (Luke 18:31-33)*

Fiction cannot provide hell-bound sinners with a cleansed conscience and assurance of eternal life.

Fantasy cannot give us a personal relationship with our Creator and transform our sinful and selfish hearts into those with a passion to glorify God and serve others.

Only God's story can do this.

It's the real thing.



To sum it up:

The story and message of the one true God is about His eternal Son who became a man, lived a perfect life, shed His perfect blood, and rose from the dead to rescue helpless sinners from Satan, sin, death, and hell, so that He might share, with all who believe, the endless delights of His wisdom and love in the glory of His Father's home.

*That is God's good news for a world in distress.*

It is because of what He has done for us that we can live *happily ever after*.

*"I know that whatever God does, it shall be **forever**."*

(Ecclesiastes 3:14)

## INVITATION AND WARNING

God's Book concludes with these words:

*"**I, Jesus**, have sent My angel to testify to you these things... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.'*

***And the Spirit and the bride** [rescued sinners] **say, 'Come!'** And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.***

*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **If anyone adds** to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and **if anyone takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says,*

***'Surely I am coming quickly.'***

***'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'***

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. **Amen.**"* (Revelation 22:16,13,17-21)

Thus, with a final “*Amen*” (meaning, *It is trustworthy and true*), the Author who exists outside of time concludes His story and message.

## GOD AND MAN TOGETHER

Do you remember Adam’s response when the LORD came into the garden calling out, “*Where are you?*”

Adam shamefully replied:

***“I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid.”***

(Genesis 3:10)

The man and the woman attempted to hide from their Creator-Owner because they had sinned.

But now, at the end of history, how do believing men, women, and children react to their Creator-Redeemer’s promise to come back to take them to live forever with Him?

They joyfully respond:

***“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”*** (Revelation 22:20)

What brought about such transformation? Why do some of Adam’s descendants no longer want to hide from their Lord? Why instead are they passionate about the prospect of seeing Him face to face?

The answer is found in the message of the one true God:

*“God... has saved us and called us to a holy life –  
not because of anything we have done  
but because of his own purpose and grace.  
This grace was given us in Christ Jesus  
before the beginning of time,  
but it has now been revealed  
through the appearing of our Savior,  
Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death  
and has brought life and immortality to light  
through the gospel.”* (2 Timothy 1:9-10 NIV)

## ONE RULE

Just as God made His one rule clear to Adam in the earthly garden of paradise, so He has made His one rule clear to Adam's descendants regarding the heavenly city of Paradise:

*“There shall by **no means** enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but **only** those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”* (Revelation 21:27)

Is *your* name written in the Lamb's Book of Life? If it is, then here is a personal message from Him to *you*:

*“Let not **your** heart be troubled;  
**You** believe in God, believe also in Me.  
In My Father's house are many mansions;  
If it were not so, I would have told **you**.  
I go to prepare a place for **you**.  
And if I go and prepare a place for **you**,  
I will come again and receive **you** to Myself;  
that where I am, there **you** may be also....  
**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**  
No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

— Jesus (John 14:1-3,6)

## CHAPTER 30 REVIEW

### A PREVIEW OF PARADISE

1. In what way does a “yin-yang” worldview contradict the Bible?
2. Name two mistaken views people have about Paradise. What is the true focus of God’s heavenly home?
3. The awesome story of redemption that began in Genesis concludes in Revelation. Taking no more than a minute or two (or, if written, 300 words max), summarize the story about how God has rescued helpless, believing sinners from Satan, sin, and eternal death.
4. Why do you think people enjoy telling “happily-ever-after” stories? Will you live happily ever after? What is the basis for your answer?
5. How has this unhurried journey through the Scriptures been beneficial to you?
6. In your own words, tell where you fit into the picture described in Revelation 21:27. *“There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”*

# EPILOGUE

Writing these 30 chapters has been an exhilarating journey for me. I have been blessed beyond description in musing on my glorious Creator-Redeemer, His story, and message. His presence and guidance have been evident throughout this project.

To Him alone be all the praise.

## THANK YOU

Though I have refrained from including a long list of names, let there be no doubt: this overview series of the greatest story ever told would not be what it is apart from the patient support of my wife Carol and the invaluable input from family and gifted friends around the world. The drawings are the work of my brother Dave in California. Dividing up the original book to create this eight-part study series is a direct result of the encouragement and help of Walter Eric in Kenya. Zariel of Egypt reformatted the text and covers into the eight booklets that make up this correspondence course. From my heart I thank you all.

*“God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name.” (Hebrews 6:10)*

I am also grateful to the countless Muslim inquirers whose e-mails motivated me to write.

Above all, I want to thank *you* for joining me on this brief journey. I say *brief* because it could have been much longer. The Scriptures we have read along the way comprise less than 4% of the total verses in the Bible. So even though we have come to the end of our journey, we’ve really just begun.

## THE CONTINUING JOURNEY

While the one true God has made His message plain for all who want to understand it, He Himself is complex, profound, and infinite. Neither man nor angel will ever comprehend everything there is to know about Him.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of writing ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE was selecting which Scriptures to include and which to leave out. Truly, the Word of God is inexhaustible. It is delicious and satisfying to the soul. As our friend in Lebanon discovered (Chapter 7), “I realize that it’s not enough to say, ‘I’ve read the Bible.’ It’s a book that needs to be *perpetually read*.”

Now that you have completed this journey, you may want to go back through ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE and look up in a Bible the many verses cited, reading the section in which each quotation is found. Better yet, read through your Creator’s entire library as you breathe this prayer to Him:

***“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from  
Your law.”*** (Psalm 119:18)

If you feel the need for further documentation or clarification, look over the endnotes. And do not hesitate to write to me with your comments or questions. I will be happy to hear from you, even if your e-mails compel me to write another book!

With this 3,500 year-old blessing I bid you farewell:

*“The LORD bless you and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
and give you peace.”* (Numbers 6:24-26)

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# ENDNOTES

## CHAPTER 27: STAGE 1: GOD'S PAST PROGRAM

<sup>235</sup> In one way or another, every section of the Bible relates to one of three themes:

- I. What God has done
- II. What God is doing
- III. What God will yet do

In theological terms, these three themes of Scripture are classified as:

1) *Justification* = When you believe the Gospel, God declares you perfectly righteous in your **position**. (Romans 3–5)

2) *Sanctification* = As a believer, God is at work in your life to help you live righteously in your **practice**. (Romans 6–8 and 12–15)

3) *Glorification* = In heaven, you will be **perfectly righteous** in both your position and practice. (Revelation 21–22)

<sup>236</sup> Richardson, Don. *Lords of the Earth*. Oxnard, CA: Regal Books; 1977, pp. 354. (For another classic cannibal-conversion story by Don Richardson read: *Peace Child*. Oxnard, CA: Regal Books, 1975.)

<sup>237</sup> Acts 26:9-11; 7:58-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2

<sup>238</sup> Acts 9:1-31; also Acts, chapters 11; 13-14; 16-28. In Acts, chapters 22 and 26, Paul tells his conversion story. See also Galatians 1:13,23; Philippians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:9; etc.

<sup>239</sup> A “saint” in biblical terms is one who is *set apart* for God; one who has been *declared holy* by God through faith in His way of forgiveness and righteousness. The man-made tradition of “canonizing” certain deceased people and thereby making them “saints” is completely contrary to what the Bible teaches (see Deuteronomy 33:2-3; Psalm 30:4; Proverbs 2:8; Daniel 7:21-27; Matthew 27:52; Acts 26:10; Ephesians 1:1, 2:19, etc.).

## CHAPTER 28: STAGE 2: GOD'S PRESENT PROGRAM

<sup>240</sup> What most do not realize is that they are siding with the enemy when they use such methods for protection. Deuteronomy 18:10-14; Isaiah 47:13; Acts 19:19; Galatians 5:19-21

<sup>241</sup> 1 John 2:1; John 14–16

<sup>242</sup> In chapter 1, we quoted an e-mail from Ahmed in which he wrote: “...there are predictions in your Bible, the original one, and in the Old

Testament as well, to the coming of Muhammad (pbuh), even now....” One of the key passages to which Ahmed was referring is John 14 to 16.

<sup>243</sup> Pentecost means *fiftieth*. It was an Old Testament celebration in which the Israelites thanked God for His blessings (Leviticus 23:16). From the beginning, God planned to send down the ultimate blessing on this day: His Holy Spirit.

<sup>244</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:21; 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7-9; 22:17; John 3:29

<sup>245</sup> 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2; Romans 6–8

<sup>246</sup> The moment you repent of your wrong thinking and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sins and rose again, you are “*baptized into Christ*” (Romans 6:3), not with water (that happens later), but by the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:1-5; Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). “*Baptized into*” means “united with, identified with.” When you believe, you become a part of God’s own family—made up of all who “*have been united together*” with His sinless Son (Romans 6:5). Your new, eternal position is “*in Christ*.”

<sup>247</sup> Acts 24:15; Luke 14:14; John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:6, 11-15; Revelation 22:12

<sup>248</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:10. The Scripture speaks of no fewer than five special crowns (trophies/awards) believers can receive: 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 5:4; James 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 2 Timothy 4:8. These crowns will not be for our own glory, but for His (Revelation 4:10). The Lord will not forget any good work that His redeemed people have done in His name and for His glory (Matthew 10:41-42; Hebrews 6:10).

<sup>249</sup> Sheikh, Bilquis. *I Dared to Call Him Father*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1978; p. 53.

<sup>250</sup> 1 John 2:27; John 4:14; 14:26; 16:13; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ephesians 4:21

<sup>251</sup> There is a critical difference between mechanically reciting a prayer and truly connecting with God and receiving God’s answers to our prayers. Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18; 1 John 5:14-15; John 14:13-14; 15:7; Philippians 4:6-9

<sup>252</sup> Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4

<sup>253</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6; 3:20-21

## CHAPTER 29: STAGE 3: GOD’S FUTURE PROGRAM

<sup>254</sup> A few pages from now we will read several verses from the Old Testament in which the prophets foretell the Messiah’s second coming to earth and describe the events that will accompany His return. Some of the passages we will consider are Zechariah, chapter 14, Daniel 7:13-14, Psalm 72, and Isaiah 9:6-7.



<sup>255</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

<sup>256</sup> See chapter 28, under subtitle: TWO JUDGMENT DAYS.

<sup>257</sup> Read Ephesians 5:27 and surrounding verses. This astounding theme is touched on in chapter 10 of ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE. The Scriptures consistently picture the Lord as the “*Bridegroom*” and His people as His “*Bride*.” Marriage, in its ideal form, was designed to give us a faint idea of the close, spiritual relationship the Lord God plans to enjoy with His people throughout eternity (Isaiah 54:5; 62:5; Psalm 45; Song of Solomon; Hosea 2:16,19,20; Matthew 9:15; 25:1-13; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:2,9; 22:17).

<sup>258</sup> Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14; The most complete description of the Tribulation is found in Revelation, chapters 6 to 19.

<sup>259</sup> Romans 11:26-27. **Note:** This event is prefigured in the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-45. Amazing parallels!

<sup>260</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45-47; Romans 5:12-21. Terms such as “*First Adam*” and “*Last Adam*” are also mentioned in chapter 16 of ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE. Just as Adam’s sin caused all men to die, so Jesus’ righteousness and shed blood restores eternal life to all who believe.

<sup>261</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 19:6-14; Jude 14; Zechariah 14:5

<sup>262</sup> Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; Revelation 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; John 3:17-18; 12:47; Daniel 9:24-27; Compare Isaiah 53 with Zechariah 14. Also consider the contrasts between “*suffering*” and “*glory*” in these passages: Luke 24:25-26; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 2:9; Philippians 2:5-11; Psalm 22; etc.

<sup>263</sup> Psalm 72 is titled: “*A Psalm of Solomon*.” It appears that Solomon wrote this Psalm, although it concludes with this statement: “*The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended*.” (Psalms 72:20) This verse signals the end of the second of the five-book division found in the Psalms. David was the primary writer of the second section of the Psalms.

<sup>264</sup> Who will be forever condemned? “*The cowardly [and the] unbelieving*,” that is, those who never believed God’s message because they were afraid of what their family and friends might say or do. When Jesus was on earth, He warned His listeners plainly, “*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ... Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father; a daughter against her mother; and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*” (Matthew 10:28,34-37)

### CHAPTER 30: A PREVIEW OF PARADISE

<sup>265</sup> Matthew 13:24-30. This parable of Jesus declares that the mix of good and evil will only be around for a limited time.

<sup>266</sup> The remainder of the first chapter of Revelation provides an awe-inspiring description of the Lord Jesus—a stunningly different portrayal of Him than seen in most books, movies, and religions.

<sup>267</sup> Mark 3:14-19; John 19:26-27; John penned the following books of the Bible: *the Gospel of John*; *1 John*; *2 John*; *3 John* and *The Revelation*.

<sup>268</sup> The Jasper stone comes in many colors. The Carnelian stone is generally of a translucent red color. Its color is deepened and enhanced when exposed to light.

<sup>269</sup> Look who is on the throne. Compare Isaiah 6 (Isaiah's vision, also presented in chapter 15 of ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE) with John 12:36-41.

<sup>270</sup> Genesis 12:2-3; Matthew 1. (For more on God's promises to Abraham, review chapter 20 in ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE.)

<sup>271</sup> For example, the classic fairy tale of Cinderella, first told in China, also comes in versions for Europe, America, Persia, Iraq, Egypt, Korea, India, etc. Each country has its version, but the themes are similar. A longing for redemption and eternal life is embedded in the hearts of people worldwide. Solomon wrote: "[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done *from beginning to end*." (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV)

