



God's Great Plan of Salvation

**Berean Series
Bible Studies**

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GOD'S GREAT PLAN OF SALVATION

IN the Bible we have revealed to us a God perfect in Wisdom, in Justice, in Love, and All-Powerful. In the first three chapters we have a very concise account of creation—first of this earth, and of its being gradually brought (no doubt throughout thousands of years) into a condition suitable for the habitation of mankind. Then at the end of the last long period, man was created, male and female, and placed in perfect surroundings. They were informed that if they were disobedient to God, they should die. This shows that, so long as they were obedient, they would have access to the grove of the trees of life, and might live forever.

This does not, however, mean that they had an immortal soul, or possessed immortality; there is no such teaching in the Bible. On the contrary, we read, "God only hath immortality" — 1 Tim. 6:16 — and "The soul that sinneth it shall die"—Ezek. 18:4. There is quite a difference between being able to live forever under certain

conditions and being immortal. To be immortal means to have life in oneself—John 5:26.

God is the fountain of life. He lives quite independently of food or drink, air, climate or environment. Man was made a mortal being (or mortal soul); that is, unless he has food, drink, air, and proper environment, he will cease to live. Our first parent, Adam, sinned, and was sentenced to death—"dying thou shalt surely die"—and in order that this penalty of death should go into force, he was prevented from eating of the life-sustaining fruits in Eden, which would have kept him alive. Thus it was that Adam, and all the human race represented in him, were condemned to death—Rom. 5:12-21.

Does it not seem strange and unjust that we should all come under the sentence of death, through no fault of our own, but through another's sin? Yes, if that were all that was going to happen, and God had no other purpose in view, it would certainly seem quite unfair. However, the Bible shows that it is all a part of a great wise and kind plan.

All intelligent people will agree that there could be no satisfactory lasting arrangement, which did not have justice as its first principle, and "Justice is the foundation of God's throne."

So, then, this earth could never be a happy place unless all the inhabitants should learn righteousness—Isa. 26:9. But how could all the inhabitants be taught to love righteousness?

The Lord evidently saw that it was well to allow mankind to have an experience with evil, then to arrange for all to have an opportunity of turning from sin unto righteousness, and thus of enjoying everlasting life. How could this be done, seeing that God had said they must die? "The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God could not set aside His own decree; He must enforce His own law. But Divine Love and Wisdom had foreseen a way whereby God could still be just, and yet provide the means of justifying them that believe—Rom. 3:21-26.

Had all been created perfect, all would have been personally responsible in case of disobedience, and it is reasonable to suppose that the great majority would have

failed as did our first parent. In order to satisfy justice there would have been the necessity of providing life for life, each sinner would have needed a separate saviour to ransom him from death and provide opportunity for another trial.

How wise it was that all were represented in Adam, so that all could be redeemed by Christ (1 Cor. 15:21, 22; Hosea 13:14). By this means all come into the world and have the experience of the baneful results of sin before they have the responsibility of choosing between sin and death, or righteousness and life eternal.

The whole world is "dead in trespasses and sin"—Eph. 2:1, 5—"condemned already," as the Master said. It is only as we receive the knowledge of salvation in Christ Jesus that we come to be on trial for life or for death; knowledge brings responsibility. So the Apostle says—"God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"—1 Tim. 2:4.

Some have received this opportunity and knowledge in Christ during this age, but the great majority have not. It may be asked: Why is it, seeing Christ died for

our sins, so many years ago, that so few have as yet heard of the "only name given among men whereby they must be saved"? Evil still abounds, godlessness and misery still prevail.

To answer this reasonable question, we need to consider the divine purpose and plan as revealed in the Bible, and note how it is gradually working out; we shall then see that the message of the angels at the Saviour's birth is yet to be fully realized—"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." This message is in perfect accord with God's promise to Abraham, long, long before—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." No doubt, our Saviour referred to this promise when He said—"The Gospel was preached to Abraham."

Ages and Dispensations

We find three distinct long periods in human history mentioned in 2 Peter, chapter 3. The first is called "the old world," or "the world that was," before the great deluge. The second is called "The present evil world," which dates from the flood and reaches to the second coming of Christ,

and the establishment of His kingdom in the third great period, called "The world to come wherein dwelleth righteousness."

We enquire, what purpose has been served in these past dispensations, and what will be accomplished in the new age that is so soon to begin? The whole of the past nearly six thousand years of human history has been, as we have already mentioned, for the purpose of allowing all mankind to learn by experience the terrible consequences of disobedience to God's laws.

When Adam and Eve were thrust out from the Garden of Eden, the Lord's providential care and protection were no longer over them. They had to earn their bread by the sweat of face, and became subject to accident, sickness and death.

Angels who had been created prior to the creation of man appear to have been allowed to assist mankind, if they would. It would seem that in this way the angels could learn by observation the dreadful results of sin, while men were learning the same lesson by experience. These angels had been interested in the creation and quite likely assisted in the preparation of the earth for man—Job 38:7.

It was indeed a sad experience beginning with the murder of a brother. Cain, through jealousy, slew Abel. The two brothers had brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought of the fruits of the ground by his work, Abel brought a slain lamb. Cain's offering could not be accepted because there was nothing to indicate that atonement for sin was necessary, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Abel's sacrifice of a lamb pointed to or recognized this necessity, and prefigured "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." There have always been, and still are, many people who think they can gain the Lord's approval by their good works.

God appreciates good works by those who are at one with Him, but we all first need the blood of Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—to cleanse us from all sin. Then, being justified and at peace with God, we must show our faith by our works, and add to faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love—2 Pet. 1:5-7.

While there were a few during that period—the old world—of 1656 years, who pleased God, such as Abel, Seth, Enoch,

Methuselah, Noah, etc., yet the majority became wicked, and the angels, who should have helped, also became wicked, and hindered men. They materialized, and assuming the human form, married the daughters of men. We read (Gen. 6:1-7) that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth...and said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth." Noah and his family, of whom it is written "were perfect in their generations," were instructed to build the large Ark, so that when the Flood came they were saved.

That ended the first world (age or dispensation). It had demonstrated how quickly men slide into more wickedness, and bring more trouble upon themselves, if they get away from God.

When the Flood subsided Noah's family came forth from the Ark, and the new age commenced. Peter says, "The heavens were of old, and the earth standing in the water and out of the water, whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."

Of course, all know that it was not the earth on which we stand, nor the heavens we gaze upon that perished. It was simply the order of things that then existed—the “heavens” referring to spiritual or religious arrangements and the “earth” to social arrangements—that passed away.

That world or age having ended, the “present evil world” began. The wicked spirits (angels) were no longer allowed to materialize and appear as human beings, as they had done. They were restrained in chains of darkness (Jude 6; 1 Pet. 3:20). They have, however, operated in darkness, in seances of spiritualists and in various other ways in such lands as India, China, Africa, and in the pagan religions of Rome, Greece, Iran, etc. They have everywhere caused confusion and trouble, blinding the minds of the people, and thus hindering the spread of the true knowledge of God.

It is not that God could not further restrain them or even stamp them out of existence, but He has a good purpose in permitting evil to still exist, so that man will eventually have learned how hard and sorrowful the way of the transgressor is, and how much better it would be to live in obedience to God’s righteous laws.

This is the lesson God wants everyone to learn, to hate sin and to love righteousness. The wages of sin is sorrow, trouble, disaster, and death; the gift of God for the righteous is life, peace, and joy. However, it is evidently the Divine purpose to allow the world to have 6000 years of the experience of sin, so Satan is permitted to be "prince of this world." This means that he rules in the affairs of men during this evil age. St. Paul, in 2 Cor. 4:4 refers to him as the "god of this world who hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them." It is because Satan is the present ruler of the world, that we see how the wicked prosper. The prophet said—"Now we call the proud happy, yea, they that work wickedness are set up, yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

When mankind has learned the needed lessons under these hard conditions, under Satan's rule, God will establish His Kingdom and bind Satan, and prevent sin and evil. He will enforce righteousness, that is why the new age is called—"The world to come wherein dwelleth righteousness"—2 Pet. 3:13. So this present evil world

which began just after the Flood in Noah's day, reaches right down to the second coming of Christ. As the "old world" that was before the Flood ended with the great Deluge, in which all perished, except Noah and his family, so this "present evil world" will end with "a great time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation." We have long been praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as in heaven," and after this great time of trouble this prayer will be answered.

As this long period from the creation of man has been full of sorrow, calamity, sickness, pain and death, because God had allowed all men to go their own ways, this new age, so soon to begin, will give to every man, "all the families of the earth," an opportunity of turning to the Lord, of living righteously, and of receiving the reward of lasting life.

The prophet has said that no one shall die because of their father's sin, but each shall be personally responsible. If they do what is right they shall live; but if they do evil, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"—Ezek. 18:20.

In those days they shall no more say the fathers have eaten the sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge, but everyone shall die for his own iniquity, every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge—Jer. 31:29-34.

During the time Satan has been "prince of this world" evil has prevailed, the wicked have prospered, it has been hard to do what is right and to avoid sin, for so many snares lie in the path. "Satan like a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour"—or cause to stumble. All sorts of temptations to do wrong are abroad. It is surely a slippery path, it is a broad road that leadeth to destruction, and it has been a "narrow way that leadeth to life and few there be that find it"—Matt. 7:13, 14.

It would indeed be a sad thing if only those few were to be saved; and all the rest, the millions of men, women and children of all races, were for ever lost.

In this coming new age, there is to be another way to life opened up, "for a highway shall be there, and a way: it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for all those, the wayfaring men, though fools,

shall not err therein. (The way shall be made so plain that all will understand what is right, what is true, and what is God's will). No lion shall be there (Satan is to be bound that he shall deceive the nations no more), nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon. (No selfish, cruel, greedy men or nations or corporations will be allowed to afflict or oppress mankind). It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord ("He gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time."—1 Tim. 2:3-6) shall return (from the land of the enemy, the grave—Jer. 31:16; Hosea 13:14), and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness (in the resurrection day), and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"—Isa. 35:8-10. "And there shall be no more curse, for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away"—Rev. 22:3; 21:4.

We may wonder why the Lord has so long delayed to set up His Kingdom, and we find a wonderful reason as we turn

again to His Word for instruction. In Acts 15:14, James informs us that before this time of blessing all the world it pleased God first to select a church "people for His name." There has then been a very special work proceeding during this Gospel Age, a necessary work in preparation for the coming Kingdom Age.

Divine Purposes in Ages Past

As we look back over God's dealings with man, we find He has dealt differently at different times. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son"—Heb. 1:1, 2. Prior to the Flood we have seen that in a general way God had let the world take its own course and receive experiences under the administration of angels, and how few there were who kept faithful to God during that time.

Following the time of the deluge, God dealt with certain patriarchs, such as Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but still allowed those who would to go their own ways; and they mostly went into idolatry and depravity. During the Patriarchal Age, God specially chose Abra-

ham because of his faith, so that He could reveal to him something of His purpose. Because Abraham left his own land in obedience to God, not knowing whither he was to go, God led him into Canaan (Israel), and gave him a sure promise, saying—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"—Gen. 12:3.

Many years rolled away, and yet Abraham had no son, but then even when he was a hundred years old, Sarah bare him a son, whom he called Isaac. Later, God very severely tested Abraham's faith by telling him to offer up his son as a burnt sacrifice. Abraham was ready even to do this, believing that God was able to raise up Isaac again from the dead, and so fulfil His promise that "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." God thus gave a picture of how God Himself would give His only begotten Son as a sacrifice to pay the price of sin for all the world, so that all could be redeemed from death; that "as in Adam all die, so all in Christ could be made alive again"—1 Cor. 15:21, 22. Because of Abraham's great faith, God repeated His blessing, and enlarged the promise, saying—"In blessing I will bless

thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore and in thee and thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"—Gen. 22:16, 18.

This great promise is still to be fulfilled, for while God did bless Abraham's seed, the Israelites, in so far as they would remain obedient, yet in no sense have all the families or all the nations of earth been blessed. Yet the Apostle in Heb. 6: 13-20 reminds us of it, and that God hath confirmed it with an oath, so that it is sure of fulfilment.

God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than our ways and thoughts—Isa. 55:8, 9—so much so that "A thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday when it is past"—Psa. 90:4—therefore, what seems so long to us is only a little while to the Lord. He has all power and has His own time for the fulfilment of His Word.

Abraham continued to believe, for he had learned that there was "nothing too hard for the Lord"—Gen. 18:14. He knew that God could raise Isaac up from the

dead so as to give him the land and make him a blessing along with his seed, to all the nations of the earth. This great promise was passed on to Isaac and Jacob, and then to the twelve tribes of Israel. But God dealt differently with Israel as a nation during what we call the Jewish Age. God had allowed the Israelites to become slaves to the Egyptians, and this looked as though He had forgotten His promise to Abraham, but the experience was to do them good. Then the wonderful way that He delivered them by Moses was to be a picture of how the "Prophet like unto Moses," the real Messiah or Christ, would deliver the whole world from slavery to sin and Satan in due time. So we learn to wait for God's due time to relieve us from oppression and wrong, while we just do our best to please God and to remember His gracious promises.

God gave Israel the Law, which taught them what the Divine will is, and it has also helped all civilized nations to form laws somewhat along the same lines. If Israel had kept the Law they would have inherited the promise given to Abraham, but not one could fully keep it. This demonstrated the fact that no one could so

live as to gain by his own righteousness the reward of eternal life. It showed that only by someone paying the price of sin, and thus removing the death sentence, and then taking man's hand and helping him to do right, gradually leading him up the highway of holiness, could there be any hope for the human race. So the Apostle says—"The law was our school-master to lead us to Christ"—Gal. 3:24.

While by the deeds of the Law no one was justified, there were many who proved faithful to God and suffered persecution and death; these are to be rewarded by "a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35. They are evidently chosen to be "princes in all the earth"—Psa. 45:16.

When our Saviour came to earth, He was born an Israelite, under the Law. He kept the Law perfectly, and thus gained a further right to life. He made an end of the Law, nailing it to the Cross—Col. 2:14—and opened up "a new and living way"—Heb. 10:20—and a new arrangement began. "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of heaven is preached"—Luke 16:16. There began the selection of a very

favoured class, to be associated with Christ in the heavenly kingdom. Our Lord said that in all the past ages there had been no one greater than John the Baptist, but he who would be even least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he—Matt. 11:11. Again, He said, speaking to His disciples as representatives of the Church—"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"—Luke 12:32.

The Scripture is very clear that the selection of this class is the chief purpose of this Gospel Age. (Ephesians 1:4-11). God has been choosing the members of this class, and only such as "take up their cross and follow Christ" can hope to become "joint-heirs" with Him in heavenly glory—Rom. 8:17.

The Apostle informs us that, if we would make our calling and election sure, we must be "transformed by the renewing of our minds"—Rom. 12:2—and gain the virtues and graces of God's holy spirit, and so become like Christ in character. It is predestinated that only such as be thus conformed to the image or likeness of His Son, will God number among those "called according to His purpose."

What Is Necessary In Order To Be A Christian?

The steps necessary in order to obtain an inheritance in Christ are clearly shown, and only such as take those steps can entertain a true hope of a heavenly home hereafter. It is by God's holy spirit operating through His Word and in the hearts of believers that the Christian pathway may be begun, continued and finished. "No man cometh unto the Son except the Father draw him"—John 6:44. First there is the realization of sin which separates from God, along with a desire to know and be at peace with God, and there is joy and peace in thus appreciating that even when we were sinners Christ died for us, and so God commendeth His love to us.—Rom. 5:8.

"Oh, 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love
The love of God to me;
It brought my Saviour from above
To die on Calvary."

But we must not stop there, for if we fully appreciate such love, that Christ died for our sins, surely we should desire to show our love in return. We say, like Paul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to

do?" and the Lord sends His message through His Word—"My son, give me thine heart." "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me," or, again, as the Apostle has said—Rom. 12:1—"Present your bodies a living sacrifice to God"—it is but our reasonable service. It is, indeed, the only reasonable thing to do, for we were under sentence of death and were redeemed by the Cross of Christ. We are then not our own, we are bought with a price—so we gladly say, "Have Thine own way with me, dear Lord." Like our Master, we say—"Thy will, not mine, be done." Then it is that we commence the narrow way to life—to walk in the steps of Christ, the way of sacrifice. We promise to drink of His cup, and to be baptized with His baptism; for the promise is, "If we suffer with Him we shall be also glorified together"—Rom. 8:14-18. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am sat down with My Father in His throne—Rev. 3:21.

Soon the full number of this elect Church will be completed. Then the Church with Christ will be the "stars

of heaven" class of the promised Abrahamic seed, which is to bless all the families of the earth—Gal. 3:9, 16, 27, 29.

Then Acts 15:14-17 tells us that when God has taken out this people for His name, He will return and build again the Tabernacle of David, and set it up—(Israel has returned to their own land, and once more are favoured of God)—that all the rest of mankind may be saved. The same thoughts are given in Romans 11:25-27. Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness (the full number) of the Gentiles be come in, then all Israel shall be saved, as it is written—"There shall come out of Zion a deliverer that shall turn away ungodliness from Israel, etc." The 31st of Jeremiah speaks of the joys of that happy time when God will bless them. Also Ezekiel 37:12-14, speaks not only of those who happen then to be alive, but "Oh, my people, I will open your graves and bring you into the land of Israel, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." But the prophecies are so full of that happy theme that there is difficulty in making a selection of citations. Micah 4:1-7, tells of how all nations will come to see that the God of Israel is the true

God, and will say—"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid."

This is what the Bible tells us of God's gracious purpose. How much more could be said and quoted showing the good times that are to come at the second presence of Christ. Times of restoration of all things which God hath spoken by the mouths of all His holy prophets since the world began—Acts 3:20-22.

It is surely right that all should realize the goodness of God as revealed in His great plan for the redemption and restitution of all the willing and obedient. To think soberly upon it will surely lead to a desire to reciprocate the love which is so manifested. It will lead to a reverence

toward God and a desire to speak to others about it, so that the truth may be known among men. God has been so much misrepresented. No wonder that men did not love Him when they were taught that He was fierce and dreadful, but when we see Him to be Wise and Kind and Just and True, we must tell others that they may also rejoice in His goodness and the happy prospects of His Kingdom.

**“Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
As it is in heaven.”**

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