

BIBLE COURSE LESSON 21

IS IT REALLY “THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION?”

Modern Christianity teaches that there are only two classes of people - the LOST and the SAVED. But what about those who die never having heard the name of Christ? Would God be fair to condemn them?

It is commonly believed that God is desperately trying to save the world now. That He is struggling with Satan to save all mankind now, while the devil is feverishly trying to keep as many as he can "lost" forever. If this is true, who do you think is winning? If God and Satan are in a titanic battle for human lives, and if God is as all-powerful as the Bible reveals, then why is five-sixths of the world non-Christian today? And why have thousands of millions already died without ever having had a chance to be saved?

FALSE ASSUMPTIONS!

Many sermons have been preached based on the premise that "there is no middle ground. Either you are this minute saved, or you're a lost soul!" Many people have grieved over dead loved ones who had never made a profession of Christ. Perhaps over one who was a terrible sinner; perhaps over one who lived a "good" life, but never became an active church member. Still others grieve because they are not sure whether some loved one died "saved". The teaching that a person is either saved or lost comes from the assumption that God is out to save the world now-that the mission of the Church is to save mankind now-that this is the "only day of salvation," and that this time is just about over.

These assumptions are all absolutely false!

WHY MOST HAVE NOT UNDERSTOOD

The vast majority of people have never heard the true Gospel-the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. And of those who have heard it, most have not understood that message because Satan has deceived them (Rev. 12:9). Therefore, they never had a chance to understand and be saved!

Are they all, through no fault of their own, "lost" forever, condemned to the lake of fire?

Shocking as it may sound, God does not intend for everyone to understand His truth at this time! If He did, they would understand!

Many think that Jesus spoke in parables to make His meaning clearer. This was not the reason. He spoke in parables to hide His real meaning so most of His hearers would not understand. After Jesus had spoken the parable of the sower, He plainly told His disciples, "It is not given" to the rest (those who had not then been called by God) to understand the truth about the Kingdom of God. They were not permitted to understand! (Mark 4:10-12; Matt. 13:10-13).

God has allowed the vast majority of humanity to be blind to His truth. He has allowed Satan to deceive the whole world. It is God's purpose and plan that, until Christ returns, only those whom He specially calls (John 6:44, 65) can understand the true way of salvation. As we learned in the previous **lesson, the future members of God's Family will be the kings, priests, teachers and administrators in His soon-coming world-ruling government.** Only a comparatively few are now being called to fill these positions. They are receiving the training necessary to prepare them to teach all mankind when God's Kingdom is set up, with world-ruling headquarters in Jerusalem.

EVERYONE TO BE CALLED

God reveals in His inspired Word-the Holy Bible-that those He has not yet called have not lost their opportunity for salvation. God is not in the process of saving everyone now. After Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God on earth, He will then begin to teach the way of salvation to millions. They will have their calling and opportunity to understand God's truth and be born into His Family during the Millennium. But what about the multiple thousands of millions who have already died without ever hearing or understanding the way of salvation? After the Millennium, they will be resurrected to mortal life and given their opportunity to understand God's truth, to be begotten by God's Spirit, to grow in His character, and to become Spirit-born members of His ruling Family. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Everyone will ultimately be called and given an opportunity to receive salvation! God is absolutely fair! The truth about this important subject is plainly revealed in the pages of your Bible. So be sure to look up and read each verse given in answer to the questions. Don't just read this lesson-prove the truth from the Bible. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians. 5:21).

Let's begin this eye-opening and encouraging study of God's Word.

WHY THIS WORLD IS BLINDED

In previous studies we learned that Satan subtly deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan did not tell Eve: "Choose my government and my way of vanity and self-centeredness, and reject God." He tempted her with the beauty of the forbidden tree, appealed to her intellectual vanity, implied that God wasn't fair to withhold certain knowledge, and told her she wouldn't die (Gen. 3:1-6), assuring her she was already an immortal soul dwelling in a material body. Eve was thoroughly deceived into believing Satan and disbelieving God. She ate the forbidden fruit and gave some of it to her husband to eat also. Thus Adam willingly, but not wilfully, disobeyed God. When Adam took the forbidden fruit, he took to himself the authority to determine the spiritual knowledge of good and evil. He appropriated the prerogative of deciding what is good and evil-what is right and wrong-what is righteousness and what is sin. But Adam did not have this ability of himself. Thus the first human disbelieved and disobeyed God,

choosing to go his own way and do his own thing. When Adam chose to reject God's authority, he rejected revealed spiritual knowledge from God. He chose instead to follow Satan's self-oriented way of life-his way of "get" as opposed to God's way of "give." Consequently, all mankind, except for a few God has specially chosen to call out of Satan's world, has been deceived by Satan for almost 6,000 years.

Stated another way, our first parents were "kidnapped" by Satan, and followed the way of life of the kidnapper rather than their potential spiritual Father, whom they disbelieved and disobeyed.

By following Satan's way and rejecting God, Adam in effect chose Satan as the "god" of mankind. And the Bible shows that God has allowed Satan to influence and deceive mankind ever since Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Let's review a few of the scriptures proving these facts.

1. Is Satan the god of this world? 2 Corinthians. 4:4. Has he blinded people to God's truth? Same verse. Is Satan also the prince of the power of the air? Eph. 2:2. Does he influence, or "work in," the disobedient? Same verse. Has he indeed deceived the world? Rev. 12:9.

Comment: Satan, the "prince of the power of the air," influences mankind by "broadcasting" his moods and attitudes of vanity and selfishness to the human spirit in each individual. Humans unwittingly accept and express these attitudes as their own. "Human nature" is actually Satan's nature expressed in humans. Because they have been deceived, they are unaware of this spiritual broadcasting by Satan, and do not even know that they have been deceived.

2. Do true Christians belong to Christ and God? Mark 9:41; 1 Corinthians. 3:23; 6:20. Is that because God, through Christ, had to "buy" them back? Matt. 20:28; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19.

Comment: "Redeem" (from which the word "redemption" comes) means to recover ownership of something that had been lost. If we are Christians, Christ has redeemed us "bought us back," so to speak. His sacrifice allows us, with God's help, to cease being the kidnapped children of Satan, and become the Spirit- begotten children of God! The fact that Christ had to pay a ransom (His life) to buy back those who are now His proves that we all have belonged to Satan! (See John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 6:16).

3. What did God warn Adam that the penalty of sin would be? Gen. 2:17.

Comment: Adam and Eve sinned when they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had foreseen that possibility. But He could not suspend the penalty He had plainly said would follow disobedience. So how would God rescue His potential spiritual children from the kidnapper-Satan the devil? By decreeing at the very "foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8)-this present civilization based on Satan's way, which began when Adam sinned-that He would send His future Son, Jesus Christ, to live without sin and pay the penalty of man's sins. It was also determined by God at that time that all of Adam's children should die: "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the

judgment" (Heb. 9:27). But how could a man be judged after he had died? We'll learn the answer as we continue studying the Bible with this lesson!

4. Did Satan offer to give Christ ruler-ship of all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him? Matt. 4:8-9. Did Christ acknowledge that Satan is the ruler of this world? John 14:30.

Comment: This and the other verses we have read clearly show that Satan is the ruler of this present evil world. But he retains that power only by God's express permission. God has assigned Satan 6,000 years in which to rule over mankind. When that time expires, Christ will forcibly intervene in world affairs and re-establish the government of God on earth. He will then rule the world for the next 1,000 years. Thus God's plan spans a period of one prophetic "week," since a day is as a thousand years with God, and a thousand years as a day (2 Pet. 3:8). God has said to Satan, in effect: "Six 'days' shall thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh 'day' is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:9-10). The first six days of this prophetic week God has turned over to Satan, and given him free reign to influence and deceive.

Satan's work is a labour of deception-of deceiving mankind-of turning God's truth upside down-causing honest, sincere people to accept a counterfeit for the genuine-deceiving people to sin. And how successfully he has worked at his occupation for nearly 6,000 years! We are now nearing the end of Satan's six millennial days of work. And the coming seventh millennial day shall be the Sabbath of the Lord God. That "day" will not belong to Satan. It belongs to God. In it, Satan shall not do any work. He will be chained, restrained, and thrown into the symbolic "bottomless pit" (Rev. 20:1-3). He will not be allowed to deceive anyone during the Millennium. When Christ returns to earth, He will seize ruler-ship from the arch-deceiver who has deceived and swayed humanity. Christ will restrain the builder and ruler of this world's civilization and bind him for 1,000 years!

JESUS HID THE TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION!

When Jesus Christ came to earth nearly 2,000 years ago, it was not to set up His Kingdom (John 18:36). Christ did not, at that time, come to restrain Satan from deceiving the world. Contrary to what many have been taught, neither did Christ come to earth the first time to call everyone to salvation. Rather, He came to deliver His Father's message-the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. That message included salvation through Christ. But Jesus did not try to get everyone to believe this wonderful message!

Notice the New Testament proof that Christ did not try to convert everyone.

1. Did Jesus speak to the multitudes in parables to make His meaning clearer, or to hide it so the public would not understand? Matt. 13:10-15; Mark 4:11-12. Did He speak to the general public only in parables? Matt. 13:34. Was this because it was not the time for most to be forgiven their sins and be converted? Mark 4:12.

2. Did Jesus explain the meaning of His parables only to His disciples? Mark 4:1-2; 10-11; Matt.

13:10-11, 16.

Comment: Christ preached the Father's Gospel to the public as a witness. But He worked with only a few specially called and chosen disciples. They were the ones whom He really wanted to understand the truth about salvation and His coming government on earth.

3. Did Jesus often try to avoid crowds of people? Matt. 5:1; 8:18; 13:36; Mark 3:13; John 5:13; 7:10. Did He often tell those whom He had healed not to tell anyone who healed them? Matt. 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; Mark 5:35, 41-43; 7:35-36. Did He want everyone to know who He really was? Matt. 16:20; Mark 3:12.

Comment: For most of His ministry, Jesus avoided publicity. It was not God's will for everyone to understand who Jesus was. Spiritual understanding will not be granted to the world until Christ removes Satan from earth's throne!

4. After three-and-one-half years of Christ's preaching, and after His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, how many disciples remained with Him? Acts 1:2-4, 15.

Comment: The New Testament Church was started with only about 120 disciples. Only after they had been trained could they teach and train others. Christ at first needed only a few teachers to teach others to become teachers, so He called only a few at that time. Remember, one can come to Christ only if God the Father specially selects and calls him (John 6:44, 65). But some will ask: "What about one who really wants salvation-wants to believe in Christ-is willing to truly repent and come out of this world and be led by God's Spirit in a true commandment-keeping Christian life? Do you mean this individual cannot come to Christ unless God calls him? Answer: Such a person is being drawn by God, otherwise he or she would have no such desire. However, most who think they are in that category have followed a false gospel, a false teaching and are deceived. They have a false idea of what salvation is, a false concept of repentance and a false idea of what God's way of life is all about.

5. Did God, in the Bible, tell us in advance that He would call only a few into His Church, and that His Church would continue to be small, and even persecuted? Luke 12:32; Matt. 10:16-17; 7:13-14; John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12.

Comment: From Christ's human ministry until His soon return to earth, God has called only a small minority of people. God's Church through the centuries has continued to be small -an "embryo" of God's new civilization yet to come. That Church, as we learned in Lesson 20, is in training to rule and teach the world with and under Christ in the World Tomorrow.

WHAT PREDESTINATION REALLY IS

Does God know ahead of time whether an individual will be saved or lost? Has God foreordained that some would be saved, while others are destined to be lost? Does one have any choice at all regarding his or her own salvation?

"If God knows beforehand how I am going to decide," reasoned a man who was worried about the

subject of predestination, "then it is all predetermined. If He knows in advance that I am to be lost, then that's the way I'll have to decide in the end. And since I'll lose out anyway, why try? "On the other hand, if God knows I'm going to repent, accept Christ and be saved, I'll have to do it in the end anyway, whether I try or not. My ultimate fate was already predetermined - destined, or determined, in advance. And if that is so, then we simply are not free moral agents-we have nothing to say about it."

The subject of predestination has often puzzled and worried many people simply because they have accepted, without question, the teachings of their religion. Let's understand exactly what the Word of God teaches about "predestination."

1. Does the Bible say that some are "predestinated" ("predestined" is the modern term) to be called now? Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:11-12. Are others predestined, appointed or foreordained to be blinded in this age? 1 Pet. 2:8.

Comment: Predestination has nothing to do with any particular decision you will make, or your fate-it has only to do with the time of your calling-whether God calls you now or later. There is not one word in the entire Bible about anyone being predestined to be lost. God has not predestined or foreordained anyone either to accept or reject Christ -to be saved or lost. The decision we make regarding our salvation is not predetermined. God has ordained that we make our own decisions. God's purpose is that we develop His character, and character cannot be created by divine will. It must be developed through experience. And experience requires time. Although God tells us which decision we ought to make (Deut. 30:19), the final decision to choose life or death for eternity is still ours!

The only decision that is predetermined is God's. God has predestined some to be called at certain times for a specific purpose. The rest will be called by God to understand the way of salvation later. Predestination simply has to do with when one is called. Jesus Christ established His Church to train the future kings and priests of God's Kingdom -to have a part in teaching the way of salvation to the masses during the Millennium. God knew far in advance that leaders, teachers and governmental administrators would be needed for His Kingdom, so He planned ahead- predestined-that He would call some to this training, especially in this age.

2. Was it before the foundation of this present world order that God decided to call certain ones at certain times? 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:4-5.

Comment: If you are one now called, God "foreknew" you. And "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate"-to be lost? No, "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called..." (Rom. 8:29-30). Not will call in the future-but called now in this age. If you are called-if God has revealed this wonderful truth to your understanding and you are begotten by His Spirit-you are having your opportunity now-your one and only opportunity to prepare yourself to be used by Christ in the loving labour of helping to save the vast majority of mankind in the World Tomorrow!

[MOST NEITHER FINALLY LOST NOR SAVED](#)

1. Have all sinned and therefore earned the penalty for sin-eternal death? Rom. 3:23; 6:23. But did Christ, the Creator of all mankind, give His sinless life to pay that penalty in our stead? Rom. 5:8-10. Can salvation come only through Christ? Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5.

Comment: No one can come to God except through Jesus Christ. No one can have the death penalty he has incurred paid in any other way. But neither can anyone receive the benefit of Christ's payment unless he has an opportunity to accept it. No one can build God's character without His Spirit, and that Spirit is given only after repentance, belief and baptism. And God will not give immortality to anyone who has not already proven he or she will live God's way. Millions have lived and died without any opportunity to fulfil any of these essentials. They cannot be given eternal life-they cannot yet be trusted with the awesome powers of the God Family. They are not "saved," yet neither are they finally condemned. They will have their opportunity later. But if they haven't finally lost salvation, then who has? Actually, only a very small minority. The Bible describes two ways a person can lose salvation.

2. Will those whom God has already called to receive the knowledge of salvation be given a "second chance" if they sin wilfully? Heb. 10:26-29; 6:4-6. To receive this punishment, was it first necessary for them to have known God's truth? Heb. 10:26.

Comment: It is only those to whom God has revealed the knowledge of His truth who have been given a chance to understand spiritual salvation and receive eternal life. If they sin wilfully after receiving that knowledge, they will not have a second chance for salvation! There is a big difference between sinning willingly and wilfully. Adam sinned willingly, but that does not mean he is condemned to perish in the lake of fire because of it. There are only a few who have sinned wilfully, and they are condemned to the lake of fire! God will forgive any sin that is repented of-even if, through weakness, temptation or habit, the sin is repeated. As long as a person's intention, attitude and desire is to obey God, he will repent, and God will forgive him (I John 1:9). Jesus said we ought to forgive seventy times seven times (Matt. 18:21-22). God is even more willing to forgive than that! So what is a wilful or an unforgivable sin?

If a person has been given spiritual understanding of God's way and has experienced the blessings of that way, but decides he no longer wants it, changes his attitude, deliberately chooses a life of rebellion, despising God's Law, then this sin is unforgivable because he will not repent of it! God will not give eternal life to anyone who insists on living Satan's way. "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance" (Heb. 6:4-6, NIV). Such people have been specially called by God and given His Spirit, yet at some point in time they purposely, knowingly, rejected it! Perhaps through bitterness, refusal to forgive others, or neglect of prayer and Bible study, they stopped allowing God to build His character in them. Like the servant who did nothing with his pound or talent, they failed in God's purpose for them. They have become so calloused to their sins that they, no matter what God could do to try to correct them, will never want to repent.

3. Did Jesus speak of another sin that will not be forgiven by God? Mark 3:28-29; Matt.12:31-32. What

grave accusation did the scribes and Pharisees hurl at Jesus? Mark 3:22; Matt.12:22-24.

Comment: To intentionally speak abusively (the meaning of the Greek word translated "blasphemy") against the Holy Spirit and attribute works of God's Spirit to the devil is to deliberately reject the only power by which one can be converted and given salvation. It is a deliberate, premeditated, wilful rejection of God and His power!

4. Now what does 2 Corinthians 6:2 have to say about a "day" of salvation? How does Isaiah 49:8, from which 2 Corinthians 6:2 is quoted, correctly state it?

Comment: The proper translation of the Greek of 2 Corinthians 6:2 (and the Hebrew of Isaiah 49:8) is "now is a day of salvation." If it were true that this is the only time when one may be saved, God would not be fair, for He is now calling only a few! This age is indeed "the" day of salvation for the few God is now calling. But all others will have their "day" of salvation later!

God is indeed calling some people in this age, but the vast majority are blinded. God has purposely allowed them to be deceived by Satan. Therefore, most people simply have not had a chance to understand the truth about salvation. They have not yet had an opportunity to be saved!

"FIRSTFRUITS" CALLED TO SALVATION NOW

1. When Jesus came to earth about 4,000 years after Adam had cut mankind off from God, did He say that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God would be preached to all nations during this age for the purpose of converting them? Matt. 24:14.

Comment: The Gospel Jesus proclaimed is to be preached in all the world only for a witness to all nations before the end of the present age-not to convert them! Most who hear the true Gospel do not really understand it or the way to salvation. God's truth is spiritual knowledge, and spiritual knowledge cannot be transmitted naturally to a mortal human mind (1 Corinthians. 2:11-14). Spiritual truth is revealed by God! None can receive it, though their ears hear the words, or their eyes see them (Matt. 13:14), except as God opens their understanding and reveals the truth to them by His Holy Spirit.

2. Even though most of mankind has not yet been called to understand God's plan of salvation, some DO understand and come to Christ. Are these people specially called by God the Father? John 6:44, 65. How are they referred to by the Apostle James? James. 1: 18.

Comment: Those now called are merely the "first-fruits" of God's plan of salvation. God has called only a few in this age-not for special favours, but for special responsibilities. They have been called to grow in God's character so they, when born into His Family, can rule righteously in the World Tomorrow. Then they will help bring salvation to every mortal during the Millennium.

3. When was the Holy Spirit first given to those called to be first-fruits? Acts 2:1-4. To whom was the Holy Spirit promised? Verse 39.

Comment: The promise was made only to those God had predestined to call. It was God, not the

apostles, who added new converts to the Church (Acts 2:47). The Holy Spirit, which every human needs, unites with the human spirit that is in us. It is the impregnation of God-life which makes us the begotten but not yet born children of God's Family-heirs, but not yet inheritors. It is the spirit of understanding, imparting to the physical brain spiritual comprehension the ability to really understand spiritual knowledge. It is the divine love of God placed within us. It is the faith of Christ-the same faith Jesus had-now given to us. It is also the spiritual power we need to help us turn from, resist and overcome Satan's "get" way and turn to God's "give" way. It is the power by which the few first-fruits now called may develop God's holy, righteous and perfect character, which is God's purpose for having put humanity on the earth-that God may thus reproduce Himself. When Adam chose to disobey God, he was cast out of the Garden of Eden and denied access to the Holy Spirit and eternal life. He was spiritually kidnapped by Satan! Although the world would then be ruled by Satan for 6,000 years, God knew that this was the best way for humans to learn their lesson. Those who are called before Christ's return must, through the power of God's Spirit, overcome Satan while he is still ruling. That is not easy, but it helps them to qualify for greater positions of responsibility in the World Tomorrow. Greater character is built when one has obstacles, such as the devil's influence, to overcome. Living in a world filled with sin also helps us learn to thoroughly hate sin (Ps.97:10; 119:104). The results of selfishness and competition are painfully obvious to those God calls out of Satan's world. After Christ returns and restrains Satan, a utopia will finally result that will reflect the benefits of God's way. The comparison with Satan's 6,000 years of rule will be spectacular!

ALL IN THE MILLENNIUM WILL BE CALLED

The 6,000-year sentence on Adam's world-being cut off from God-is due to end soon. This world, still Satan's world except for God's Church, is fast plunging into a period of great tribulation just before Christ's return. Suddenly, when most needed, but least expected by a world cut off from God, Jesus Christ will come in supreme supernatural power and glory as King of kings. He will then marry His bride-the first-fruits of His Church, who have made themselves ready-and together they will rule the world from Jerusalem during the Millennium. Then, after this world has been freed from Satan's rule, freed from his deceptions and spiritual influences- when this is God's world-Christ will begin to convert everyone and bring them into His eternal Family! Many will then remember the warning given them by God's Church before the Great Tribulation began. Others will have been warned during the Tribulation by two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-12). They will be willing to admit that their old way of life, based on the ways of the old civilization founded by Satan, was wrong. And they will gladly accept God's way. By the millions, humans will be spiritually begotten, will grow in God's character, and be born into the Family of God all during the thousand years.

1. When Isaiah the prophet was told by God that the vast majority of Israel was blinded (Isaiah 6:10), what did he ask? Verse 11. How long did God say this spiritual blindness would last? Verses 11 - 12.

2. Will all Israel eventually be saved after the Deliverer-Christ at His Second Coming- comes out of Zion to call them to salvation? Rom. 11:26-27.

3. Will the nations of this earth, who have never heard about the true God and His way of life that leads

to salvation, learn God's ways and walk in His paths? Micah. 4:2; Isaiah. 66:18-23;11:10.

Comment: Not only Israelites, but also Gentiles will come to be taught by Christ, the returned Deliverer and "root of Jesse," at the time when He sets His hand to remove the spiritual blindness from Israel and Judah.

4. When Christ is King over all the earth during the Millennium, will the Holy Spirit (represented by "living waters") go out from Jerusalem? Zech. 14:8-9. Will God pour out His Spirit on all people? Joel 2:28-29.

Comment: The Holy Spirit will be made available to all and will open their minds to understand God's way of salvation. First, the modern-day descendants of the ancient 12 tribes of Israel will learn to obey, and then, following their example, also all of the other nations. Just think what a time of great rejoicing it will be as each new member of the God Family is born into the Kingdom of God during the Millennium! They will then join the ruling saints in preparing for the time when thousands of millions will be resurrected and taught the way of salvation after the thousand years.

THE REST CALLED AFTER THE MILLENNIUM

All who live during the Millennium will have their chance to participate in the salvation process. They will have their opportunity to grow spiritually toward spiritual birth into the God Family. But what about those who have already died without having heard or understood God's truth?

1. Did Paul clearly understand that the people of Israel, and mankind in general, were spiritually blinded? Rom. 10: 1 6; 18-21. Although these Israelites heard the Gospel, they did not obey it. Was this because God had purposely allowed their blindness? Rom. 11:8, 25, 32. Yet, did Paul know that they would have a future opportunity to receive salvation? Verse 26.

Comment: When Paul said "all Israel shall be saved," he meant ALL Israel, including those of his day. But when will they be given their opportunity to come to the spiritual knowledge of salvation?

2. Does the prophet Ezekiel describe a resurrection of dead Israelites back to mortal life? Ezek.37:11-

13. Is this clearly a resurrection to physical life -do the bodies have flesh, skin and bones, and require air to live? Verses 5-9.

3. Will God also give His Spirit to these millions of people? Verse 14. Will the Gentiles also be resurrected and return to their "former estate"? Ezek. 16:55.

Comment: Israel is a type of all nations. Ezekiel's prophecies describe a time when both Israelites and Gentiles who died in spiritual ignorance will be given an opportunity to receive salvation.

All the inhabitants of Sodom died centuries before Ezekiel wrote this (Gen. 19:24-25). God can "bring back their captives" (RAV translation of Ezek. 16:53) or "restore their fortunes" (Moffatt, RSV and NIV) only by resurrecting them! All unconverted Israelites will be resurrected at the same time as those Gentiles, and all will be given their first opportunity for salvation! (Verse 62). The prophet Ezekiel does

not explain when this resurrection will occur, but Christ did reveal it in His revelation to the Apostle John.

4. Does God want to eventually call and save everyone? 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4. Is everyone saved at the same time, or is there a definite time-order or sequence? I Corinthians. 15:22-24.

Comment: Even as all men die, the same all will be made alive (verse 22). Everyone who has ever lived and died will be resurrected—first Christ was resurrected, then later the saints who lived and died before Christ's Second Coming will be resurrected. But what about the vast majority who never were Christ's? Verse 24 includes them all in "the end"—when Christ completes His job of conquering every enemy (verse 25). That will happen after the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10). Those who have not heard or understood God's truth have not been consigned to eternal death. They have not sinned wilfully. They never had a chance! Even if some have lived up to the best they knew while alive, the Bible teaches only one way to salvation—through belief in Christ (Acts 4:12) and spiritual conversion and growth as defined in the Bible. Most of our loved ones who have died "unsaved" in all probability did not die lost. They most likely were not called during this age, but their call is coming later. They shall be resurrected to mortal life and given spiritual understanding and the opportunity to become members of God's Family. Revelation 20 tells us when this great resurrection will occur.

5. Does the Bible speak of a "first" resurrection, thus implying that there is more than one resurrection? Rev. 20:5, last part. When will the second resurrection occur? Same verse, first part.

Comment: The first part of verse 5 is a parenthetical comment. The verse should read: "(But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection."

The sentence, "This is the first resurrection," refers to the resurrection to immortal life of the first-fruits of God's plan, which will occur at Christ's return, just before the 1,000-year period begins (verses 4, 6).

But notice further the first sentence in verse 5: "But the rest of the dead [those who never had an opportunity to understand God's truth] lived not again [would not come up in a resurrection] until the thousand years were finished." This resurrection, which will occur after the 1,000 years, is the second resurrection. It is a resurrection to mortal life!

6. How is the second resurrection further elaborated on? Verses 11-12. How will these people be "judged"? Verse 12.

Comment: The dead who stand before God couldn't include true Christians today, because they will appear before Christ and receive their rewards at the first resurrection when He returns. It couldn't refer to those converted during the Millennium, because they will have already inherited the Kingdom during the thousand years, after living a normal life span. Those in this second resurrection are those who died in spiritual ignorance in past ages. Their time of salvation will occur after the second resurrection, The Greek word translated "books" in verse 12 is *Biblia*. It is from this word that the English word "bible" is derived. The books that are opened are the books of the Bible! They will be opened to the understanding of the thousands of millions of people who had not been able to know and

understand God's purpose and plan for them during their previous lifetime, never having been called by the Father and given His Spirit of understanding. Some, assuming that "judgment" means only the pronouncing of a sentence based on past behaviour, having thought that these people, even if they repented, could do nothing to alter their fate. Thankfully, God is merciful, always willing to forgive upon true repentance. In this period of judgment, not only will the Bible be opened to their understanding, but the Book of Life will also be opened. These people will be given an opportunity to receive eternal life! God, in perfect fairness, will give them the same opportunity for salvation He now gives to those He calls in this present age. However, they will not be subject to Satan's influence as we are today, because Satan will have been finally sent to his punishment (Rev. 20:10). Let's be sure we understand the meaning of God's judgment referred to in Revelation 20:12.

7. Are true Christians today already being judged by God? I Pet. 4:17. Is this judgment so that they might avoid condemnation? I Corinthians. 11:32.

Comment: God judges His Spirit-begotten children by evaluating how well they live by His written Word. Their rewards in God's Kingdom, as we learned in Lesson 20, will depend on their character development during their mortal life. Those resurrected after the Millennium will be judged the same way. They, like Spirit begotten Christians today, will be given enough time to prove they are willing to live God's way through a life of overcoming and obedience to God. With God's Spirit freely available, and freed from Satan's spiritual influences, they will be given their first and only opportunity for salvation through repentance, baptism and growing in godly character during a second mortal life. Those who continue to live God's way of life will be changed from mortality to immortality at the end of this period of judgment.

VAST MAJORITY TO BE BORN OF GOD!

Imagine, if you can, the astonishment of those resurrected at the beginning of the period just described. Each person will be in his first moment of consciousness since death. At first, some may think they are in "heaven," "hell," or "purgatory." Most will simply be confused bewildered. Nothing that many had been taught about an afterlife will turn out to be true. Faced with undeniable evidence that their old teachings and ways were false, they will be more willing to admit this, start over and be taught the truth. Untold millions who never had any religious teaching whatsoever will start learning from scratch. Who will teach these untold thousands of millions? Millions of teachers who will have been born into God's Family in the first resurrection and during the Millennium. Those resurrected back to mortal life will then undergo a process of conversion similar to that of Spirit-begotten Christians today. They will be taught God's Law, and will learn they are guilty of sin and deserving of the death penalty for all eternity as a result of their sins. They will learn of God's mercy, and that Christ paid the penalty for them, if they will accept His payment. The vast majority will repent. Upon repentance and faith in Christ as their personal Saviour, they will be forgiven and God's Spirit will be given to them. Then they, as Spirit-begotten children of God, can begin growing spiritually-developing God's holy, righteous and perfect character within them. For many, unlearning all the falsehoods learned in their first life and learning God's true ways will take time. And building character will take time, because character can be developed only through time and experience.

1 .How long will their period of judgment last? Isaiah. 65:20.

Comment: This verse in Isaiah apparently refers to this judgment period, suggesting that those resurrected then will live for 100 years, no matter how old they were when they died.

God is great, merciful, loving, not willing that any should perish. He wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth and to true repentance. But He knows it is best that most people come to understand His truth in a better world than this present evil world. That is why they will be raised up in the second resurrection a resurrection into a world free of Satan's deceptions, and lovingly ruled by the God Family.

They will be able to compare the results of 6,000 years of Satan's "get" way with the 1,000 years of God's "give" way under Christ. With 7,000 years of humanity now history, these mortals will face up to what their previous experience in sin really proved. The vast majority will choose God's way.

2. How did Jesus refer to this special "day" or period of judgment for people who have yet to hear and understand the wonderful message of salvation? Matt. 11:20-24; 12:41-42.

Comment: Christ mentioned the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh in Jonah's time and finally the Queen of the South. All of these examples of people who lived in different generations are compared to the citizens living in the cities and towns of Jesus' day, the vast majority of whom did not understand or believe His message. Jesus tells us that they will be resurrected with the generation that lived during His time! Jesus gave enough examples of people living at widespread times to prove that most of humanity will be alive at the same time on this earth. There will be pre-Flood men and women, all 12 tribes of Israel, those who lived during the Middle Ages and the vast majority living now. Even babies and children who died untimely death will be resurrected then. They will all rise in the second resurrection because they had not been called by God during their first lifetime. This group includes all people of all times except those who will have already been born of God, and those relatively few individuals who already had their opportunity to receive eternal life, but deliberately rejected it, having sinned willfully. Those few will be resurrected and will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-15). The ancient peoples Jesus mentioned in Matthew 11 and 12 would have repented if He had personally come to them in their day. And they will repent and receive the Holy Spirit when resurrected into a world that has been personally ruled by Jesus Christ for 1,000 years! Your Bible shows that the vast majority of those who have ever lived will finally be born into God's Family at the end of their coming period of judgment. God's Master Plan of salvation for mankind will then be complete.

How wonderful and reassuring is the truth of our all-wise, loving and merciful Creator God!