

God's Ultimate Design for Humanity

*“Thy kingdom
come. Thy will be
done in earth, as it
is in heaven.”*

—*Matthew 6:10*

THE HEAVENLY FATHER

has justice as the foundation of his throne. Thus, the rule of law will always be applied by him with absolute fairness.

Equally true, however, is that he is a God of mercy. This is reassuring because without God's mercy, any deviation by his intelligent creatures against his laws would result in dire consequences for themselves.—Exod. 34:6,7; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 89:14

The father of the human family, Adam, was created perfect: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Gen. 1:27) While God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden where they could be sustained in perfection forever, the Heavenly Father also prepared a test of Adam's obedience by directing him not to eat the fruit from one of the many trees that grew in this paradise. Had the first pair remained

faithful and obedient to God's instructions, the intimation is that there would have been no death in the human family, but instead a perfect race of mankind would have developed and maintained the image and likeness of the all-glorious Heavenly Father. Additionally, the conditions which existed when man was created would have continued, and joy, peace, love and happiness would have been experienced by the entire human family in accordance with the Creator's original design.—vss. 28-31

THE PENALTY INSTITUTED

Before the creation of mankind, there were angelic hosts in existence who rejoiced to observe the unfolding of God's plan to have intelligent human beings inhabiting the earth—"When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." (Job 38:7) This passage of Scripture is generally understood to mean that heavenly beings joined in praise of the glorious creative works of God which would so honor him. It was a new manifestation of the Almighty Creator's goodness and power that thus enlarged his domain, and such benevolence claimed their gratitude.

One of these angelic "morning stars" which at that time sang such glorious praise to God was the angel Lucifer. He is described in the following manner: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! ... For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." (Isa. 14:12-14) Now, in his fallen

condition, he is called Satan, the arch-enemy of God and all his righteous purposes.—Luke 10:18

God had informed Adam what the penalty for disobedience would be, but Satan, speaking through the serpent, told mother Eve that death would not result from disobeying God's command. Deceived by the devil's lie, Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and offered it to Adam, who ate of it as well. (Gen. 3:1-6) The result of Adam's disobedience was death and, indeed, this penalty has continued upon his offspring for more than six thousand years. Globally, countless billions have suffered and died as a result of this original sin.—Rom. 5:12

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

About two thousand years after man's fall into sin and death, God made a promise to Abram, who was later called Abraham: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3) We note, however, that God's promise was not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime, but it was reaffirmed to Isaac his son and then to Isaac's son Jacob in turn. At his death, Jacob's descendants were denoted the "twelve tribes of Israel."—Gen. 49:28-33

Before Jacob's death, through a unique set of circumstances, all the Israelites dwelt in the land of Egypt. In time, they came under bondage to Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, who afflicted them severely.

Subsequently, God delivered them from their oppressors by raising up Moses, who became their leader. (See Exodus chapters 1-14) Through the Heavenly Father's provisions, various laws and ordinances were given to Israel for their guidance and protection as his chosen people. We also recall their wilderness experience, where they wandered for some forty years, with still no apparent evidence of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. At last, the Israelites did finally enter into Canaan, after which many judges were raised up by God to instruct the people, and to assist in delivering the nation from their oppressors.

Ultimately, Israel rose to national prominence in the days of their kings, especially under David and Solomon. At Solomon's death, however, there was a division of the kingdom into ten northern tribes known as Israel and the remaining two which were called Judah. The ten northern tribes were led into idolatry by wicked kings and, ultimately, they were conquered by the Assyrians. Sometime later, the two-tribe kingdom of Judah also fell. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered their nation and ended their reigning line of kings—the last one being Zedekiah. We are told that this kingly arrangement would exist no more until “he come whose right it is.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

ADDITIONAL RESULTS OF MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE

The foregoing brief account of Israel's experiences is in many ways illustrative of all mankind's struggle with the results of Adamic sin, and its penalty, death. Comparatively few humans throughout the ages have lived privileged lives. As a result of sin, oft-times manifested in the form of pride and greed, the overwhelming majority of the world's populace has been subservient

to the wealthy and powerful. In our present day, with the increase of knowledge and the resulting explosion of communication and information, more and more individuals who have previously been exploited have become aware of the existing inequities in terms of wealth and living standards and are increasingly demanding their rights, whether real or only imagined.

Furthermore, in various polls that have been taken, there are many pressing issues which are shaking today's social, religious, political and economic foundations to the core. A sampling of these include: governmental corruption, moral bankruptcy, global economic turmoil, terrorist activity, invasion of privacy through technology, availability of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, violence, murder, suicide, religious and racial hatred, cyber-bullying, homelessness, a general lack of civility and respect, border and immigration issues, child abuse and trafficking, a decline in formal religious worship, pollution of the environment, and starvation. In addition, there continues to be general instability in many parts of the world, including the nations comprising the Middle East, as well as various other hot-spots in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Indeed, were it not for the Heavenly Father's merciful plans and purposes, there would be no hope for any of these problems to be eradicated. They would continue to plague mankind, and death, man's greatest enemy, would rule over the people unabated. In due course, however, God sent his son to earth for the purpose of becoming the redeemer for humanity and for the eventual removal of all the troubles which have beset the world as a result of sin. "We see Jesus,"

the apostle says, “who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—Heb. 2:9

SCRIPTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE

The implications of Christ’s sacrifice can be summarized in the four statements and accompanying Scriptures below:

1. None of humanity could have attained eternal life before Jesus died. However, God’s purpose and grace, Paul says, “is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”—II Tim. 1:9,10

2. Salvation cannot be obtained except through Christ. “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. ... Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”—Acts 4:10,12

3. It is God’s will that each individual be given an opportunity to benefit from the death of Jesus. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

4. Those who have gone into the grave will be awakened at some future time from the sleep of death.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment.”—John 5:28,29, *Revised Version*

The rendering of John 5:29 in the *King James Version* speaks of the “resurrection of damnation.” However, the Greek word *krisis* properly denotes “judgment” which follows a trial. If the purpose for awakening sinners from the grave was simply to condemn them again, they would have no opportunity to benefit from the death of Christ. How hollow would be the meaning of the text, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

Two thousand years ago a heavenly message was given which still awaits fulfillment: “There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:8-11

These good tidings were for all people of past, present and future generations. Not fully grasping the import of what the Bible teaches, some Christians believe one must obtain salvation before death or forever be lost as part of the wicked. However, the Scriptures indicate that Jesus not only died as a

satisfaction for the sins of those who already have accepted him as their Savior, but also for those who have not. The Apostle John states that “Jesus Christ the righteous ... is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:1,2

HEAVENLY SALVATION

The Bible teaches a heavenly reward is offered to faithful Christians during this age. Human perfection is set forth for the rest of mankind who will lead righteous lives in God’s kingdom here on earth. Let us examine these two aspects of salvation. The following Scriptures make reference to the faithful followers of Christ who are promised a heavenly reward.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Matt. 6:19,20; Heb. 3:1; Rev. 3:21

During his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus, in obedience to his Heavenly Father’s will, humbled himself to the death of the cross. As a result of his death and his subsequent resurrection by the power of God, Jesus provided an opportunity for all mankind to be raised from the death condition which has befallen all humanity because of Adam’s original sin. (Phil. 2:8,9; I Cor. 15:21,22) Furthermore, it was God’s

desire that there be a class of individuals redeemed from among mankind to comprise the church, or bride of Christ, who would be associated with Jesus in blessing all the families of the earth.—Heb. 12:22,23; Rev. 21:2,9; Gal. 3:16,28,29

Those who would be disciples of Christ have been invited to follow a course of righteous living and self-sacrifice. In extending this invitation, we read, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”—Matt. 16:24,25

The rigorous process of devoting one’s life to such a sacrificial course helps to explain why few are chosen from among the many who are called. (Matt. 22:14) There are comparatively so few that they are styled a “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) These saints will be associated with our Lord, the Lamb of God, in vanquishing all unrighteousness and establishing God’s kingdom. They are the “called, and chosen, and faithful” believers.—Rev. 17:14

As the “captain” of all true believers, Jesus led the way to this heavenly salvation for his church by setting an example of self-denial and enduring trials even unto death. (Heb. 2:9,10) The path of discipleship is a difficult one at this time because it requires following in the Master’s footsteps and involves suffering and, at times, persecution. (Matt. 7:14; I Pet. 2:21; John 15:20) A high reward is promised to all who persevere faithfully in doing God’s will despite any opposition received. We read, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified

together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:17,18

GOD’S MERCIFUL PROVISION

God’s mercy is manifested in providing for the church’s redemption. As members of the fallen human race, we were born “in sin” and “shapen in iniquity.” (Ps. 51:5) The Heavenly Father was under no obligation to do anything for mankind, but through his merciful love the demands of divine justice have been satisfied by the sacrificial death of Jesus: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” —I John 4:10

The application of this mercy began to be evidenced by the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the imparting of miraculous gifts to the apostles. On that eventful day, Peter spoke to the multitude: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:38,39) This benevolent provision continues to this day for all those who have been invited to become a part of the body of Christ and to participate in the blessing of the human family during God’s kingdom.

As a confirmation of this new relationship with Christ, Paul wrote: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

(Eph. 1:13) Consecrated believers now receive the benefits of this promise by having the influence and power of God's Holy Spirit working in their hearts and minds to replace the works of the flesh with the fruits of the spirit. As each believer daily strives to develop a more Christlike character, he becomes transformed and, if faithful, will inherit the innumerable promises of God reserved for the saints.—Rom. 12:1,2; Gal. 5:22,23; I Pet. 1:3,4; II Pet. 1:2-8

In another reference to God's mercy in providing redemption for the church, Paul wrote: "Ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body." (I Cor. 6:20) Thus, the apostle reminds us that while Christ laid down his life as the purchase price to recover the entire human family from sin and death, thus far that price has only been applied to the church.

EARTHLY SALVATION

Most of the promises relating to humanity's future involve an earthly salvation. Mankind was made to live on the earth, as we read: "Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else." "The earth hath he given to the children of men."—Isa. 45:18; Ps. 115:16

All that has been lost because of sin is to be restored, and there will be an opportunity provided to all mankind for salvation here on the earth, allowing the righteous to live and the wicked to be destroyed as a result of the work of God's righteous kingdom. The Bible asserts this is a prime objective of Christ's return and second presence. Peter spoke of the time

when God would again send Jesus Christ, “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” —Acts 3:20-23

It will be during the thousand-year reign of Christ and his church that the foretold day, or period, of judgment will be in operation. (Isa. 26:9; Acts 17:31) During this time Satan will be bound, “that he should deceive the nations no more.” (Rev. 20:1-3) It will be a favorable time for mankind as the promised “new covenant” will be in effect, and everyone will come to know God and his righteous laws. (Jer. 31:31-34) The condemnation which fell upon Adam originally and passed to all his posterity will be lifted because of Christ’s sacrifice. Only those who, after receiving complete knowledge of God’s laws willfully choose to disobey him, will be destroyed.—Jer. 31:29,30; Acts 3:22,23

Presently, there are many evils that afflict humanity which God has promised to eradicate. This will be followed by the turning of mankind to the Lord for blessings. (Zeph. 3:8,9; Hab. 2:14) Isaiah 35 speaks of how every imaginable illness, woe and condition of despair will be removed and replaced by rejoicing in the kingdom. God’s ultimate purpose for humanity is to have them worship him in spirit and in truth.

How wonderful it will be when the New Jerusalem—the church in its heavenly glory under Christ’s headship—blesses the human family as God’s instrumentality for eradicating all sorrow, evil and death. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And 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. 21:1-4) This glorious fulfillment will testify to the majestic grandeur of the Heavenly Father’s ultimate design for humanity. ■