

THE END TIMES

Bible Report Quarterly

Fall 2006: Issue Number 38

Popular View of Salvation Limits God's Love

"God... is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."— 1 Timothy 4:10

The dramatic events happening in the Middle East, are causing many Christians to proclaim the *time of the end* spoken of by Daniel the Prophet. (Daniel 12:4) This has brought an air of expectancy for their claim of final judgment upon non-Christians and *salvation* for a surprising few. This popular Christian view of salvation proposes that unbelievers, the great majority of mankind, will be lost forever. But, this view falls seriously short of the truth of God's merciful provision for salvation—it condemns billions who, for no other reason than their lack of opportunity, have never heard of the name of Jesus Christ.

NARROW INTERPRETATION NOT WHAT PROPHETS TAUGHT

This narrow interpretation of salvation does not harmonize with the prophetic teaching of the Apostles and Old Testament Prophets, who all pointed to God's merciful plan of salvation: a plan which would one day bring all who have ever lived back into harmony with Him. The Prophets pointed forward to an age of blessing, when the Messiah would bring about the reconciliation of Adam and all of his posterity back into favor with God. (Genesis 22:17, 18) They taught that the present Gospel age—the time period between the first and second advents of Christ—would be the time for the gathering out from the world an elect Church to be associates with Messiah—his *royal priesthood*. (1 Peter 2:5, 9) This elect *little flock* would then cooperate with him in the work of resurrection, restoration and regeneration secured for the rest of the world of mankind through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary. Matthew 5:5; Revelation 22:17

Unfortunately, this merciful concept is generally lost in Christian teaching today. Contrary to these prophetic expectations of the Apostles and Prophets, popular Christian dogma proposes that *now* is the only time for salvation. This erroneous view puts limits on the

merciful plan of God which is to bring the majority of mankind back into harmony with Him again. This is the hope of the *atonement*—at-one-ment—between God and man promised

in 1 Timothy 2;4-6: God *"...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."* God is not the author of an insufficient plan which leaves the vast majority of His *creation* condemned. No, the real insufficiency lies in the *narrow interpretation* of His will, which is clearly stated in His holy Word.

Mark the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:12—By one man's disobedience *"sin entered into the world, and death by [as a result] of sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* Mark the hope which Paul points out as the very essence of the Gospel of salvation, saying: *"God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:8, 9) Here is a specific declaration that Adam and his children were all under divine wrath and that the saving power was the blood of Christ—shed on behalf of *every* sinner. The Apostle proceeds to show the work of Atonement and the restitution which will follow as



a result, saying: “*As through one offense [Adam’s disobedience] sentence came upon all men to condemnation [the death sentence]; so also through one righteous act the free gift [the reversal of the sentence] came on **all men** unto justification of life. For as through the disobedience of one man [Adam] many were made sinners [all who were in him], so by the obedience of one [Jesus] many [all who ultimately shall avail themselves of the privileges and opportunities of the New Covenant] shall be constituted righteous.*” Romans 5:12, 18, 19

THE DAY OF SALVATION

Must all receive Jesus now in order to be saved? It is true that this Gospel Age offers the only opportunity to be part of *the elect, the little flock*, for these must prove worthy of life eternal under trying circumstances in a world opposed to righteousness. These faithful few are promised a reward in heaven to live and reign with Christ. “*Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory... if we suffer, we shall also reign with him...*” (2 Timothy 2:10-12) This is the *day of salvation* spoken of in Isaiah 49:8 and 9: “*...in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoner, Go forth...*” Here Isaiah informs us that this special salvation *now* of the *elect* has a special purpose—to establish God’s covenant, to inherit those whose heritage was void of God’s promises, and then, to share God’s mercy with the prisoners in death who have never had a real opportunity to learn of Christ.

God promised through Isaiah the Prophet that the day of salvation for the *non-elect* will be a time when “*the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*” (Isaiah 26:9) Again, as stated by our theme text, by God’s bountiful grace there will be a *special salvation* for an elect group of faithful now, as well as a *general salvation for all men*. God “*is the saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.*” (1 Timothy 4:10) That *special salvation* has been in progress for over 2000 years now. During this time, Jehovah has been selecting and saving a class of the meek among Jews and Gentiles who will be part of the heavenly class that will bring instruction and blessing to the remainder of men on earth. “*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name [the elect]. ... After this I will return [the second coming of Christ], and will build again the tabernacle of David [Israel will be restored first] ...that the residue of men [the rest of mankind] might seek after the Lord...*” Acts 15:14-17

The remainder or *residue* of men are resurrected to a time of judgment in the Kingdom. “*Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear*

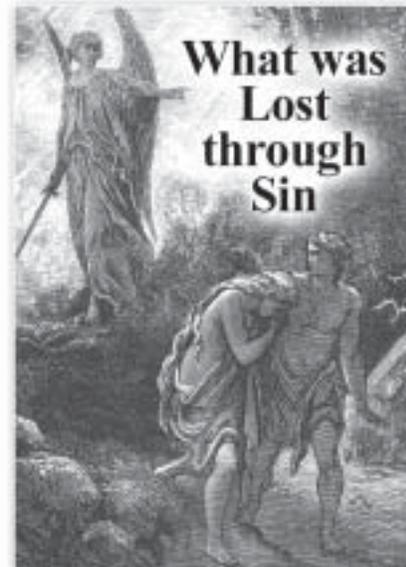
his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil [mankind still in darkness], unto the resurrection of judgment [a 1000 year period of trial].” (John 5:28, 29; 2 Peter 3:8, 9) This will be *the first real opportunity* for the majority of the world to believe and obey—with the inherited sin from Adam, and the blinding influence of Satan removed. (Jeremiah 31:29-34; Revelation 20:1-4) The merit of Jesus’ blood will then have been applied to the whole world so that all will be provided a resurrection from the grave and an opportunity to learn righteousness. “*And he is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins [believers now]; and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*” 1 John 2:2

“THE SON OF MAN IS COME... TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST.”

— LUKE 19:10

The words reconciliation, refreshing and restoration imply that something is to be gained back or *saved* from that which was once lost. All that Adam possessed was lost through disobedience—both for himself and his posterity—a perfect garden home, happiness, communion with God, health, and life itself.

Jesus came to *save* and restore that which was *lost*—to restore the earth and to restore man to his original state of human perfection and communion with God. All this is implied in the word *saved*. For this reason, the Apostle Peter stated to the early Church: “*...the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord... Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began.*” Acts 3:19-21



What was Lost through Sin

Perfection of Life

Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:3; Ezekiel 18:4

Dominion over the Earth

Genesis 1:26-28

Peace of Mind without Fear

Genesis 3:10; Luke 21:25, 26

Health & the Vitality of Youth

Genesis 3:19; Job 33:19-22; Psalms 90:8-10

Paradise Home

Genesis 2:8, 15; Genesis 3:23, 24

Communion with God

Genesis 3:24; Habakuk 1:13

Happiness

Ecclesiastes 2:22, 23; Proverbs 14:12, 13

Sustained Life from Every Tree of the Garden

Genesis 1:29; Genesis 2:9

Communion with the Animal Kingdom

Genesis 2:19

Yes, *the restitution of all things* that were lost begins when Jesus Christ returns to gather the Christian faithful, *the elect*, and then to establish God's Kingdom on earth as it is now in Heaven. (Matthew 6:10) At that time, *the due time* in God's Kingdom, non-Christians will realize their

opportunity to gain life: "...the man Christ Jesus... gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:6) This time of learning and growing in righteousness will then show the astounding mercy and justice of Jehovah's plan, for He "...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) Of that time, Jeremiah states: "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) By the end of the thousand-year Kingdom of God on earth, those who willfully choose not to follow Christ, under what then would be most favorable circumstances, will be destroyed. "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:23

"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." This is the condition on which we are offered salvation now in this Gospel Age. We must bear in mind, however, that the word *believe* is not just a simple recognition of Jesus, for "the demons also believe." The true meaning of *believe* must also contain a heart reliance on his atoning sacrifice and a willingness to sacrifice the things of this world on his

behalf. Indeed, it is a privilege granted to only a few now to "...not only believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake..." Philippians 1:29; James 2:19, 20 NAS

Consider Jesus' own words to the question of the rich young nobleman, who asked: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied: "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he [the nobleman] was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:17-22) Our Lord clarified to the young nobleman that to gain the *heavenly reward* it was necessary for him to do more than just make a verbal statement of his belief—he must also *prove* his supreme love for God by a covenant of sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5) The special, heavenly reward for those who accept God's offer of salvation now will come as a result of a lifetime of faithfulness, as is indicated in Revelation 2:10: "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life."

SPECIAL PRIVILEGE FOR BELIEVERS NOW

But what advantage is there to be gained by seeking salvation now? The special privilege of those justified [saved] by faith during this Gospel Age, has been their opportunity to become joint-sacrificers with Jesus Christ, and thereby to become joint-heirs with him of all things. (Romans 8:16-18; Revelation 20:4) Once this door of opportunity has closed, there will be no further opportunity to gain a *crown of life* in the first resurrection as spiritual beings—joint-heirs in the heavenly Kingdom. Matthew 25:10

There is a grand work to be done by the glorified Church with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom. This work will consist of instructing the world of mankind so that they might walk up the highway of holiness to *at-onement* with their Creator—back into the full harmony with Him that had been lost in Eden. This is the glorious prospect which inspires the *little flock* to faithfulness in spite of the suffering and persecution they receive in *this present evil world*.

The completion of the Church of Christ, his glorified body, will bring to the remainder of mankind, "the poor groaning creation," deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (See Romans 8:19-23) Then all will appreciate the full wisdom, justice, loving mercy and power of God. What a magnificent plan of salvation! "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; **and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**" Luke 3:5, 6

What is Restored through the Cross

Perfection of Life

Revelation 22:17;
Romans 6:23; I Corinthians 15:22

Dominion over the Earth

Psalms 8:5-8; Psalms 37:9, 11

Peace of Mind without Fear

Psalms 72:7; Isaiah 2:4; 14:3; 35:4

Health & the Vitality of Youth

Isaiah 35:5, 6, 10; Job 33:25

Paradise Home

Isaiah 35:1, 6; Ezekiel 36:35

Communion with God

Jeremiah 31:34; Ephesians 1:10

Happiness

Isaiah 35:10; Revelation 21:4

Sustained Life from Every Tree of the Garden

Psalms 85:12; Micah 4:4; Revelation 22:2

Communion with the Animal Kingdom

Isaiah 11:6-8; Job 5:22, 23