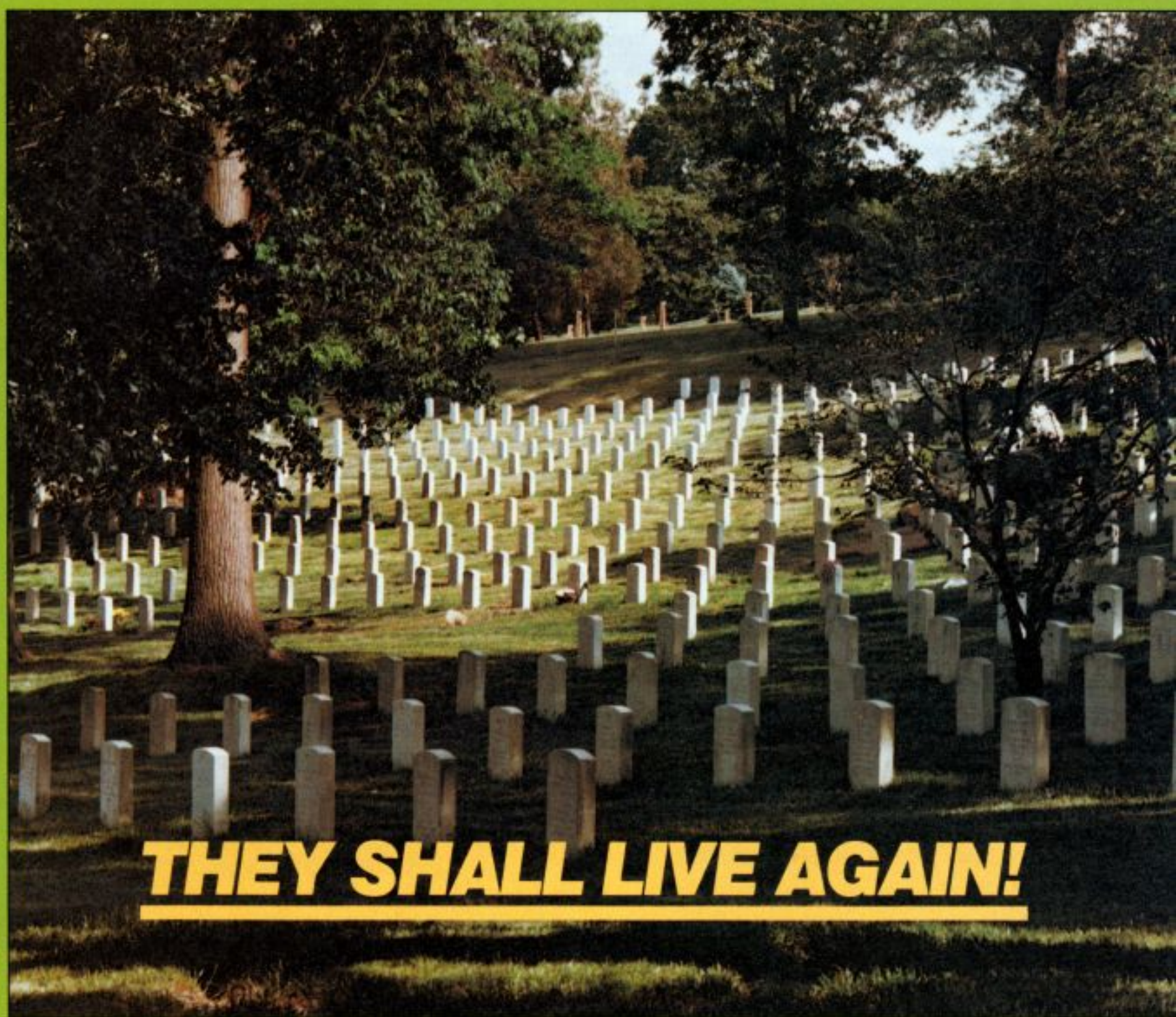




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Bible

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THE AMBASSADOR COLLEGE

Bible CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 31

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About Our Cover . . .

What is the fate of the untold millions who have lived and died throughout history? Most have never known or understood God's truth. Are they lost forever? Or will they yet have an opportunity for salvation? Your Bible reveals that after the Millennium God will resurrect the "unsaved" dead to mortal life. They will then be given their opportunity to understand God's truth and inherit eternal life! The Last Great Day, the last of God's seven annual festivals, pictures this final step in God's Master Plan of salvation!

Hal Finch—AC

LAST GREAT DAY

God's Master Plan Completed!

Untold millions have died without ever having had an opportunity for salvation. God's seventh and final Holy Day reveals when and how they will have their day of salvation.

WHY have countless millions died without ever having had an opportunity to understand the purpose of life and to be saved?

Even today the vast majority of people have not heard Christ's true Gospel 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). Think of it!—even they

have not really had an opportunity to understand or to be saved!

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

Absolutely not!

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

RESURRECTION TO MORTAL LIFE—God has promised to resurrect the “unsaved” dead, an event dramatically depicted by artist's rendering of one of millions spoken of in Ezekiel 37.





David Roberts—R.A.

YET TO BE SAVED—The people of ancient Tyre never heard Christ's Gospel message. They will be resurrected and given their opportunity for salvation during the Great White Throne Judgment period.

at this time, everyone would understand!

God, in that sense, is responsible for having allowed the vast majority of humanity to be blinded by Satan to His truth. It is God's purpose and plan that, until Christ returns, only those He specially *calls* (John 6:44, 65) will understand.

Ancient Peoples Yet to Be Saved

Jesus severely criticized some of the Galilean cities in which He had performed many miracles: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21, *New King James*).

But the people of Tyre and Sidon had not repented of their idolatry. Are they, as some Christian denominations teach, eternally condemned? If God had sent Jesus in earlier ages to them, they would have repented. But God *didn't* send Jesus to them. God allowed them to be punished by the Babylonians and, later, the Persians and Greeks. Why? Wasn't God trying to save them?

Jesus also admonished the city of Capernaum: "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (verse 23).

Because of their grievous sins, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24-25). Some Christian denominations seem anxious to condemn them to eternal punishment. Yet Jesus said that if He had performed miracles in those cities, they would not have been destroyed. The people would have repented.

Is God fair? Yes. God knows that the people of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah had not been sent a prophet to warn them. They will be given a future opportunity to see Jesus' mighty works; they will have an opportunity to repent; and they will have an opportunity to be saved!

God Is Fair

God is a perfect combination of love and justice (I John 4:16; Isa. 11:2-4). He punishes at par-

ticular periods in history the wicked for their sins.

But what of the millions of people for whom Christ died, yet who—through no fault of their own—did not know of God's provision to offer them salvation at a later time? How will they learn of salvation?

The answer is revealed in the final step in God's Master Plan—pictured by the seventh and final Holy Day.

After Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God on earth, He will *then* begin to teach the way of salvation to millions. As we learned in our last lesson, all those born during the Millennium will have their opportunity to understand God's truth and be born into His Family during the Millennium.

But what about the 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 under-

stand God's truth, to be begotten by God's Spirit, to grow in His character, and to become spirit-composed members of His ruling Family.

God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). *Everyone* will ultimately be given an opportunity to receive salvation! God is absolutely fair!

Just as the week is not complete without the seventh-day Sabbath, God's Master Plan is not complete without His seventh and final annual festival—the Last or Final Great Day.

The number *seven* in the Bible indicates completion and perfection. This seventh festival of God reveals the perfection of God's great Master Plan—that God's love and mercy toward mankind will extend *beyond* the Millennium.

In this lesson you will see God's perfect justice and mercy on all those who have not yet had their opportunity for salvation. To understand this final phase of God's plan, let's learn about the last of God's annual Holy Days, symbolizing the Last Great Judgment Day!

LESSON 31

God's Final Harvest Festival

1. Did God command His people to observe an eighth day of worship immediately after the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles? Lev. 23:34-36, 39. Are God's people to keep this eighth day as a separate festival, distinct from the Feast of Tabernacles? Verses 39-42.

COMMENT: The last annual Sabbath or Holy Day is observed immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. It was therefore associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and was called "the eighth day." It is clearly a *separate* festival and Holy Day. Because the eighth day is the final annual Holy Day, it came to be known among Christians as the Last or Final Great Day.

2. How long are God's people to continue keeping this annual festival? Verse 41. In the days of Solomon, did Israel keep the feast of the eighth day? II Chron. 7:8-10.

COMMENT: To celebrate the dedication of the new Temple, King Solomon held a special seven-day feast from the eighth to the 14th of the seventh month. (Of course, their feasting would have been interrupted by the Day of Atonement, the 10th of the month.) The people then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days—the 15th through the 21st. On the 22nd, they observed the

last or eighth day. After that annual Sabbath, the people returned to their homes.

3. After God allowed the children of Israel to be taken into captivity for neglecting His Sabbaths and forgetting His Holy Days, some of the people were permitted to return to Judea. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, did these people learn that God's Holy Days were not complete until the eighth day was observed? Neh. 8:14-18.

COMMENT: Note the words, "according unto the manner." The eighth day was kept according to the manner written in Leviticus 23:36.

Jesus' Example

Jesus taught His disciples to follow His example and to teach others to do likewise. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

1. Did Jesus observe the Feast of Tabernacles? John 7:2, 8-10. Did He know that the Holy Day cycle was not complete until the eighth day of the Feast had been observed? Verse 37. What did Jesus speak about on this final Holy Day? Verses 37-39.

COMMENT: Jesus spoke this on the eve of the Last Great Day, after the traditional water-pour-

ing ceremony, which occurred on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus was not talking about physical thirst. He was revealing that if any man have spiritual thirst, and believes on Him, he can come to the Christ and drink in the Holy Spirit. But, as Jesus made clear in John 6:44, no one can come to or believe on Him unless the Father draws or calls that person. The few whom God calls in this age have access to God's Spirit now. But for the vast majority, the fulfillment of Jesus' words must wait until the spiritual fulfillment of the Last Great Day.

Most of our loved ones who have died "unsaved" did not die eternally lost. They most likely were not called during this age, but their call will come later.

Meaning of Last Great Day

1. Does God eventually want to call and save everyone? II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4. Will everyone be saved at the same time, or is there a definite time-order or sequence? I Cor. 15:22-24. Is it possible to be saved in any way except through Jesus Christ? John 3:16-17; 10:9, 1; Acts 4:12; I Tim. 2:5-6.

COMMENT: Even as all men die, the same *all* will be made alive through Christ (I Cor. 15:22). Everyone who has ever lived and died will be resurrected—first Christ was resurrected, then later the saints who lived before Christ's Second Coming will be resurrected at His return.

But what about the vast majority who were not Christ's? Paul in I Corinthians 15:24 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 irrevocably condemned to eternal death. They have not sinned willfully. They have not had a chance! Even if they lived up to the best they knew while alive, the Bible teaches that there is only one way to salvation—through belief in Christ and spiritual conversion and growth as defined in the Bible.

Most of our loved ones who have died "unsaved" did not die eternally lost. They most likely were not called during this age, but their call will come later. After the Millennium they will be resurrected

to mortal life and given spiritual understanding and the opportunity to become members of God's Family.

2. Did Paul understand that the Israelites, and mankind in general, were spiritually blinded? Rom. 10:16, 18-21. Although these Israelites heard God's truth, 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 will this resurrection be? The book of Revelation reveals the sequence of prophecy. Let's examine it to learn when the unsaved dead will be raised and offered salvation. Let's learn the meaning of the Last Great Day.

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

COMMENT: These are not "the dead in Christ," but simply the dead—those millions who are not Christ's—who have not been converted, who have not heard the Gospel or understood it.

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

But notice the first sentence in verse 5: "But the rest of the dead [those who have not yet 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 will be a resurrection to *mortal* life.

4. All during the Millennium, Satan will be restrained, prevented from deceiving the nations (Rev. 20:1-3). After the 1,000 years are over, will Satan be loosed out of his prison? Verse 7. Will he go out to deceive all the humans who are not then born into God's Kingdom? Verses 8-9. What will then happen to Satan? Verse 10.

COMMENT: This will prove, for anyone who might doubt, that Satan will not repent, even after he sees the wonderful results of 1,000 years of righteous rule. The humans who are so easily deceived into fighting Christ will also be proving that they weren't paying attention to what they were being taught at the close of the 1,000 years.

Satan and the demons will then be cast into the lake of fire. Some Bibles use italics to show that the word *are* in verse 10 was added by the translators. It is not found in the Greek manuscripts.

The phrase should read, "where the beast and the false prophet *were cast*." The unwritten verb in the Greek should be understood to be in the same tense as the verb in the first half of the sentence. The *Amplified Bible* has it correct.

The beast and false prophet will be cast into a lake of fire at the beginning of the Millennium (Rev. 19:20). These two mortal men will be killed and consumed by that fire, and by the time Satan is cast into that fire, the beast and false prophet will have been dead more than 1,000 years.

In the lake of fire, Satan will be able to do nothing. God will have rendered him completely powerless—unable to deceive the rest of the dead, who will then be resurrected to have their opportunity to understand God's Master Plan.

Great White Throne Judgment

1. What will happen after Satan's final rebellion and punishment? Rev. 20:11-12. Who are the people resurrected in this Great White Throne Judgment? Verse 12. Also notice Daniel 7:9-10.

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 Christ returns. Nor are the dead referred to in the above verses those converted during the Millennium, because they will have already inherited God's Kingdom during the 1,000 years, after living a normal life span.

Revelation 20:11-12 refers to the *second* resurrection—a resurrection to mortal life for all those who died in spiritual ignorance in past ages. Their time of salvation will then occur!

2. Who will be resurrected in this Last Great Judgment? Matt. 11:21-24. Will all of these people rise in a time of judgment? Matt. 12:41-42.

COMMENT: Jesus spoke of a time of judgment when those ancient peoples would be given an opportunity to understand what He had been preaching to the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. They, too, will hear the good news!

Christ mentioned the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh in Jonah's time and the Queen of the South. All of these examples of people who lived in different generations are compared to those who lived 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 all 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 brought back to life 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 deaths 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 people who already had their opportunity to receive eternal life, but deliberately rejected it and sinned willfully. Those few will be resurrected in the third and final resurrection, and they will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-15).

3. Did 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.

4. Will God 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.

5. Does the Apostle Paul explain to Gentiles that until they are called to salvation through Christ, they are without hope of eternal life? Eph. 2:11-12. Is God willing to overlook sins done in ignorance? Acts 17:30. But once spiritual under-

Most of humanity will be brought back to life at the same time on this earth They will all rise in the second resurrection.

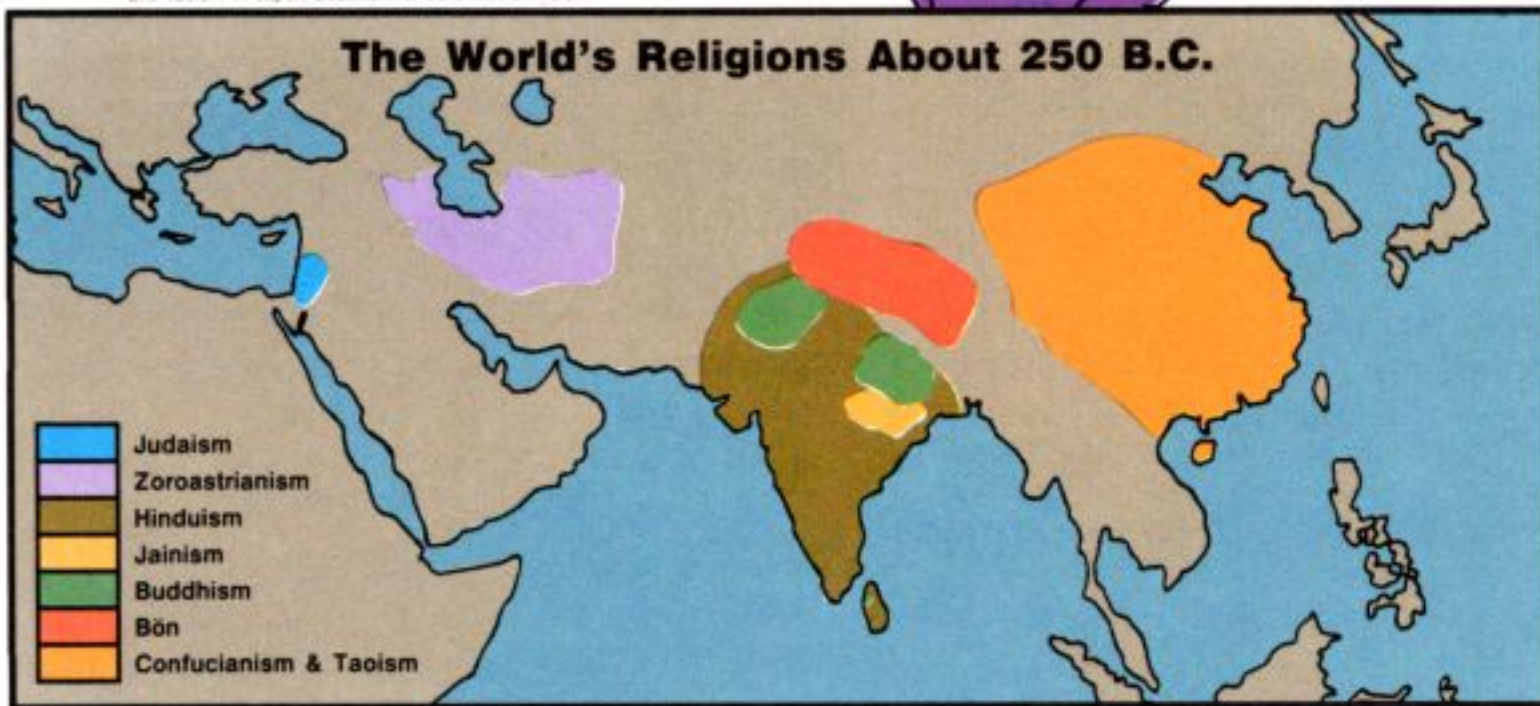
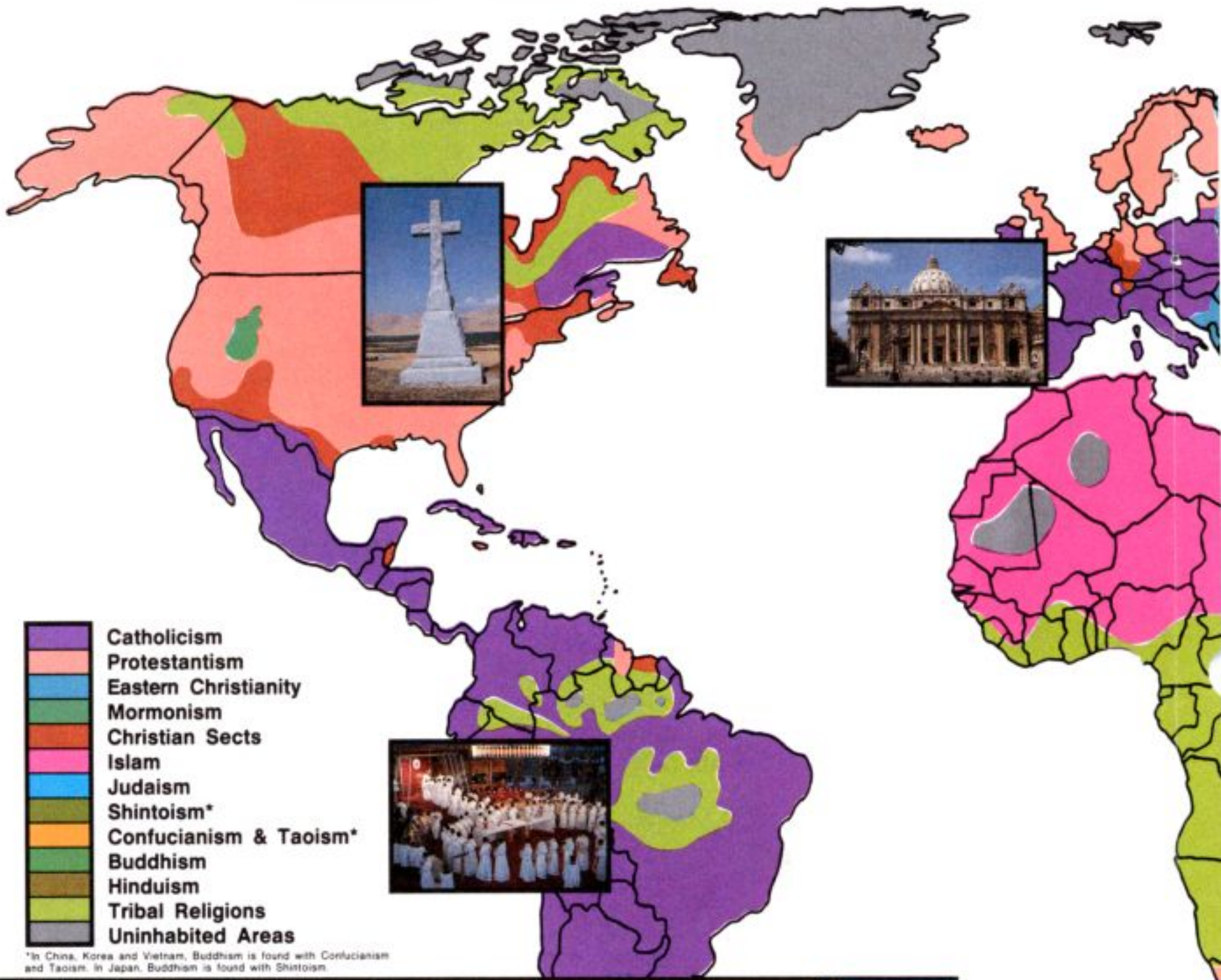
standing of God's Master Plan is made available, what is His command? Same verse.

What Is Judgment?

1. Who will be the Chief Judge in the Last Great Judgment? Dan. 7:9-10; Ps. 9:7; John 5:21-22; Acts 10:42. Will the saints judge with Him? I Cor. 6:2.

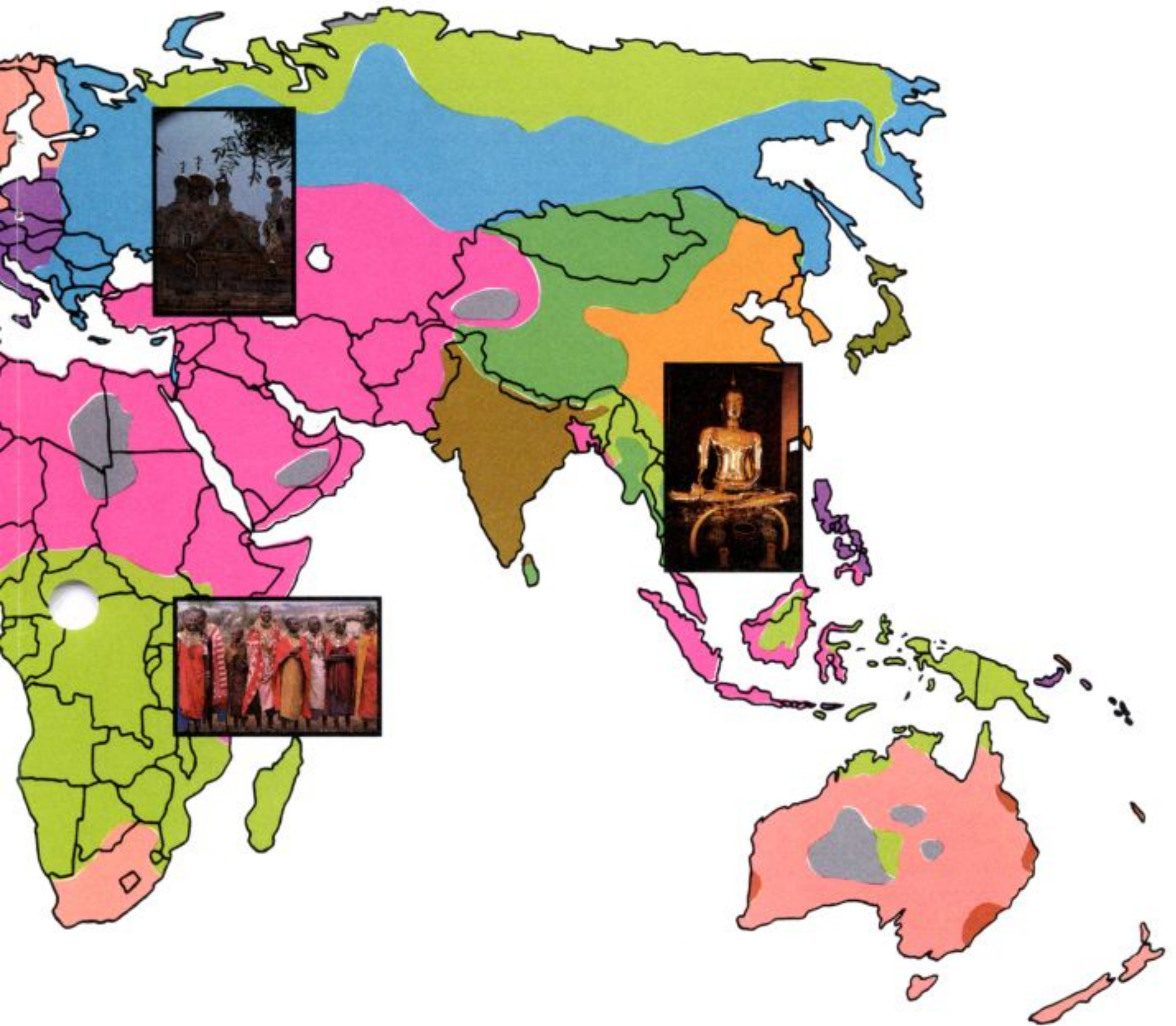
2. How will the judgment of this great multitude

MAJOR RELIGIONS



Map by Bill Wilson. Photos clockwise from upper left:
 Ambassador College, Ambassador College, Ronald Kelly-AC,
 Warren Watson-AC, Greg S. Smith-AC,
 Ambassador College

OF THE WORLD



A World in Religious Confusion

Just one quick glance at a map of the world's major religions—both past and present—shows a world in religious confusion! Conflicting ideas and beliefs abound—especially between the Christian and oriental religions. Despite what many individuals believe, none of these religions know the truth about God's purpose and plan for mankind.

Throughout the ages, thousands of millions have lived and died, believing the traditions and customs of their particular religion. Millions more will

yet die before Christ's Second Coming. What will their fate be?

These countless millions, with their conflicting ideas and beliefs, will be resurrected to mortal life after the 1,000-year rule of Christ on earth. Faced with undeniable evidence that their old teachings and ways were false, they will be willing to start over and be taught God's truth. The vast majority will repent, and finally be born into God's Family at the end of their coming period of judgment!

be accomplished? Rom. 2:6-11; Eccl. 12:13-14; II Cor. 5:10. Will they be judged by the Word of God—the Bible—in accordance with what they will do after they are resurrected to mortal life? Dan. 7:10; Rev. 20:12.

COMMENT: The Hebrew word translated “books” in Daniel 7:10 corresponds to the Greek word translated “books” in Revelation 20:12. This Greek word is *biblia*, and it is from this word that the English word *bible* is derived.

The books that will be opened are the books of the Bible! They will be opened to the understanding of thousands of millions of people—everyone who was unable to know and understand God’s purpose and plan for them during their previous lifetime because they had not 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 behavior, have thought that these people, even if they repented, could do nothing to change their fate. Thankfully, God is merciful, always willing to forgive upon true repentance.

Let’s better understand what the Bible means when it uses the word *judgment*.

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

COMMENT: God judges His children today by evaluating how well they live by His written Word. Their rewards in God’s Kingdom will depend on their character development during their mortal life. It is a process requiring time and opportunity for learning and growth.

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.

In this period of judgment after the 1,000 years,

Those resurrected after the Millennium . . . will be given enough time to prove they are willing to live God’s way through a life of overcoming and obedience to God.

not only will the Bible be opened, 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 an opportunity for salvation, just as He gives to those He calls now.

But, in this last great judgment, people will not be subject to Satan’s influence as we are today, because Satan will have been put away (Rev. 20:10).

With God’s Spirit freely available, and freed from Satan’s spiritual influences, they will be given their one and only opportunity for salvation through repentance, baptism, receiving God’s Spirit and growing in godly character during a second mortal life. They, like Christians today, will be required to act on the knowledge God will give them, to choose righteousness as defined by God’s spiritual law, to quit breaking that law.

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.

Those people who were born to physical life first—many before the First Coming of Jesus Christ and even those born before the Flood—have not yet had the opportunity to participate in God’s plan. Their chance is coming, but they will be called last—in the Last Great Judgment.

Those now being called into God’s Church, although born later, are being given their opportunity as God’s firstfruits (Jas. 1:18). Even people born during the Millennium will be called to participate in God’s plan before the vast majority of mankind, who have lived in this first 6,000 years of human experience. Referring to this age, Jesus said: “The last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matt. 20:16).

The Last Great Day pictures the completion of God’s Master Plan—the Great White Throne Judgment period after the Millennium. Revelation 20:5 shows that a second resurrection will occur after the Millennium, and verses 11-12 reveal that those in this resurrection, who died not having been called to participate in God’s plan of salvation, will then be given their opportunity to become members of God’s divine Family.

Vast Majority to Be Saved

1. Isaiah envisioned the final days of the judgment period when the resurrected billions will receive their call to participate in God’s plan. How does he describe it? Isa. 65:20-25.

2. Are these resurrected multitudes counted among God’s elect—made participants in His Master Plan, and given the opportunity to enter God’s Family? Verses 22-23. Will they then have a close relationship with God the Father? Verse 24.

COMMENT: Imagine, if you can, the astonishment of those resurrected at the beginning of this period of judgment. 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 start over and be taught the truth. Untold millions who have not had any religious teaching whatsoever will start learning from scratch.

Who will teach these 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 to mortal life will then undergo a process of conversion similar to that of Spirit-begotten Christians today. They will be taught God's laws, and will learn they are guilty of sin and deserving of the death penalty.

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 Savior, 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.

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.

3. How long will this period of judgment last? Isa. 65:20.

COMMENT: This verse strongly indicates that those resurrected then will live for 100 years, no matter how old they were when they died. Further, it indicates that the child (of God) will, at the end of this period, be changed—the fleshly cells of the body will die as the person puts on immortality. (This death of the physical cells of the body also occurs to Christians who are alive at Christ's Second Coming. They, too, die—but do not sleep the sleep of death; they are in the "twinkling of an eye" changed to immortality.) The wicked sinner at the end of the 100 years will be under a curse—will die in the lake of fire.

During this time Christ and the resurrected saints will rule. The earth will be as peaceful and productive as during the Millennium. Children who died in the first 6,000 years will live again for 100 years, building character through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Older people who died without knowing God's plan will also be resurrected to live for 100 more years.

The ancient peoples Jesus mentioned in Matthew 11 and 12 would have repented if He had come to

them in their day (Matt. 11:21). And they *will* repent and be given God's 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 all mankind will then be complete.

Then the spirit-composed members of God's great ruling Family can look forward to new heavens and a new earth—and to new and wonderful opportunities in ruling the *universe* under God our Father and Jesus Christ our elder brother!

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.

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

Satan Has His Counterfeit Religious Holidays

Satan has blinded the world to the spiritual truth you have just studied. The natural mind does not like God's laws, nor His Holy Days (Rom. 8:7). Therefore even religious men, invisibly influenced by the god of this world, have created substitutes for God's festivals. They may have been sincere in doing so, but they were deceived!

Let's learn what God says about today's false religious traditions.

1. Did Christ instruct His apostles to observe His birth and resurrection, or just the opposite—to commemorate the date of His death? Luke 22:8, 13-20; I Cor. 11:23-26.

COMMENT: God's commanded days are ignored by most professing Christians. Instead, the biggest religious days of modern Christianity are Christmas and Easter—neither of which is commanded!

2. What does the Bible reveal about weather and farming conditions surrounding the time of year when Christ was born? Luke 2:6-8, especially verse 8.

COMMENT: Many encyclopedias and other historical sources point out that Christ's birth could not have occurred in the month of December. The shepherds in Judea always brought their flocks in from the mountainsides and fields and corralled

them no later than mid-October! They did this to protect the sheep and themselves from the cold rains that followed. The Bible itself shows that winter in Judea is the rainy season (Song of Solomon 2:11; Ezra 10:9, 13).

Encyclopedias and other reference works all show that the exact date of Christ's birth is *unknown*. If Jesus Christ had intended for us to celebrate His birthday, then He would have commanded that it be done and He would have revealed the exact date in the Bible. But He did not.

Since Jesus was not even born in December, what about the various customs and traditions associated with Christmas? Many have assumed that they stem from Christian origins.

But Christmas customs and practices originated long before Christ! According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedate the Christian period—a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition" (article, "Christmas," 15th edition).

3. A common custom during the Christmas holiday season is to cut down an evergreen tree and decorate it. Does the prophet Jeremiah make reference to such a practice occurring during his time—hundreds of years before Christ? Jer. 10:2-5. Whose custom was this? Verses 2-3.

COMMENT: The Bible clearly shows it was an ancient custom to cut down trees, decorate or carve them, and put them in their homes! God clearly commanded His people not to learn that way or follow it.

4. What is found in the Bible regarding the

God plainly commands His people not to adopt the practices of pagan nations. God will not accept this kind of worship, even though intended in His honor!

observance of "Easter"? Acts 12:4.

COMMENT: This is the only verse in the *Authorized or King James Version* of the Bible where the word *Easter* is mentioned. However, as any authority of the Greek language knows, it is a flagrant mistranslation! The original Greek word here is *pascha*, meaning Passover. In every other place in the New Testament where *pascha* is used, it is always translated Passover. Examples of this can be found in Matthew 26:2, 17-19; Mark 14:12 and I Corinthians 5:7. Virtually all other

translations of the Bible correctly render *pascha* as Passover in Acts 12:4.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "There is no indication of the observance of the Easter festival in the New Testament, or in the writings of the apostolic Fathers. . . . The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [that is, God's—Leviticus 23:1-2], though in a new spirit, as commemoration of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" ("Easter," 11th edition).

Another reason why "Easter Sunday" could not have been celebrated by the early Christian Church may be found in the fact that Christ was not resurrected on a Sunday morning.

5. What did Jesus say about the length of time He would be in the grave? Matt. 12:39-40; Mark 8:31. Did He fulfill that sign "as he said"? Matt. 28:6.

COMMENT: The only sign Christ gave to prove He was the Messiah was the length of time, following His death, that He would be buried—a period of three days and three nights, or 72 hours.

But according to the Easter tradition, Christ was crucified Friday afternoon and resurrected Sunday morning—a period of only *a day and a half*, or 36 hours!

Since Christ did fulfill His sign, the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition is just that—a *tradition* and not a fact! If you have not read the facts that prove Jesus was crucified and buried on a Wednesday, and rose from the dead 72 hours later—late Saturday afternoon—write for our free booklet *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday!*

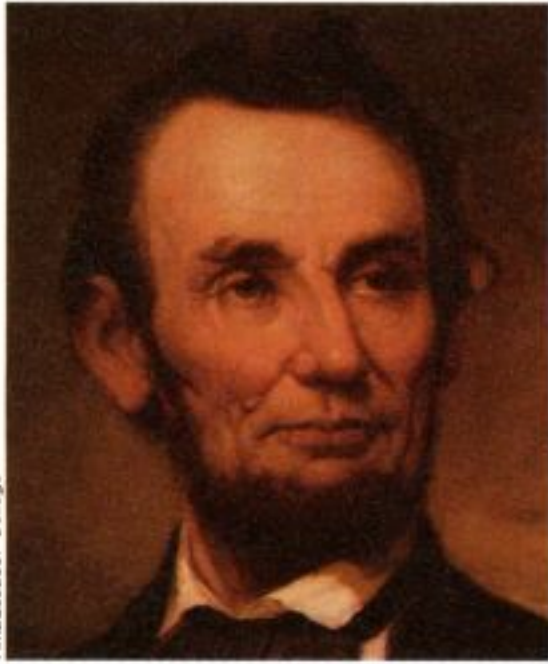
And what about the various customs and traditions associated with Easter? Most assume that the customs of this religious holiday came from "Christian" origins. Easter and its customs date *long before* the resurrection of Jesus. Similar ceremonies were observed nearly 2,000 years before the beginning of the Christian era!

"Easter" is actually a slightly changed English spelling of the name of the ancient Assyrian goddess *Ishtar*. It was pronounced by the Assyrians as we pronounce *Easter* today.

The traditions associated with Easter, such as colored eggs, the Easter bunny and sunrise services, are pre-Christian and *pagan* in origin!

6. A traditional custom of Easter today is to attend an Easter sunrise service. Does the prophet Ezekiel make reference to a similar practice occurring during his time—more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus? Ezek. 8:16. Does God approve of this custom? Verses 15, 17.

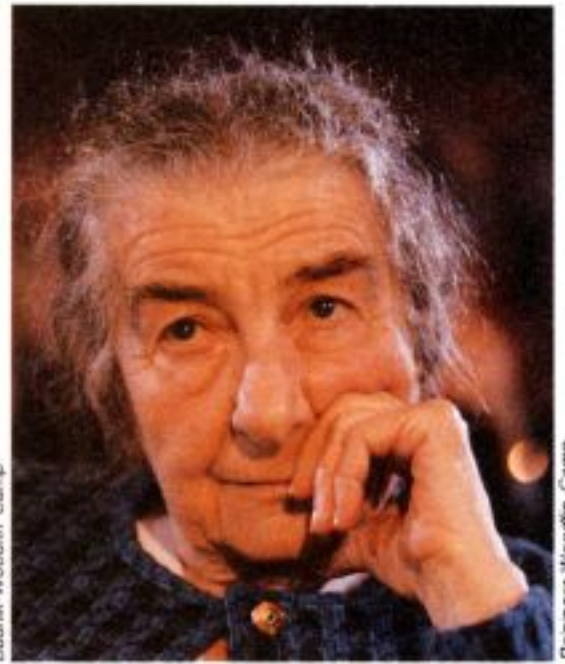
COMMENT: It was an ancient heathen custom to gather at sunrise and worship the rising sun. Such



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WORLD FAMOUS individuals who pondered about the meaning and purpose of life, but did not understand because they were not called of God during their lifetime, include: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Golda Meir. Their opportunity for salvation is yet future!

services were being observed in Ezekiel's day by the nation of Judah. They had "borrowed" some of the heathen customs, in spite of God's command not to follow pagan practices in worshiping Him!

However, many who understand that Christmas and Easter evolved from pagan customs originally honoring pagan gods will say that they observe these days and these customs to "honor" Christ.

7. What does God warn about learning and following the customs and traditions of the heathen? Deut. 12:29-31; Jer. 10:2.

COMMENT: God plainly commands His people not to adopt the practices of pagan nations. God will not accept this kind of worship, even though intended in His honor! God cannot be honored by disobedience.

8. Did Christ say it is possible to worship Him and still do it in vain? Matt. 15:9. What did He tell the scribes and Pharisees about following man's ideas on how to worship God? Mark 7:7-9.

COMMENT: God does not want people trying to honor Christ by following traditions and customs devised by men. Notice again God's command, "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way" (Deut. 12:31, *New King James*).

If you would like to know more about the origins of Christmas and Easter and the customs associated with these holidays, request *The Plain Truth About Christmas* and *The Plain Truth About Easter*. Both booklets are free for the asking.

The Third Resurrection

God Almighty, in His wisdom, has devised the best possible way for men of all times and nations

to receive salvation and inherit eternal life in His Family.

God's Master Plan is so simple and effective that the overwhelming majority of mankind will eventually repent of all sin and turn gratefully to God, submitting to His guidance and government. But salvation is not universally guaranteed.

Out of all the earth's population, a few people will fail in God's plan. They will fail because they stubbornly insist on their own way—the way of death (Prov. 14:12). They persist in living rebellious, sinful lives, making themselves and those around them miserable.

1. Will those whom God has called to receive the knowledge of salvation be given a second chance if they sin *willfully*? 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: 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 70 times seven times (Matt. 18:21-22). God is even more willing to forgive than that!

So what is a *willful* 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 laws, then his 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.

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 talent (Matt. 25:24-30), some failed in God's purpose for them. They became so calloused to their negligence and their sins that no matter what God could do to try to correct them, they will never want to repent.

God gives everyone all the help, encouragement and opportunity for success they need to inherit eternal life. God will never quit helping anyone! But these people have quit on God! They show by their actions that they don't really want eternal life in God's Family—and so God, in love, will not give it to them.

To guarantee peace, prosperity, happiness and success throughout all eternity, God can't allow these selfish people to make life miserable for others around them. Although God certainly has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:31-32), these sinful people must be put out of the way. They must not be allowed to make themselves and others unhappy any longer. Let's understand what will happen to them after the Great White Throne Judgment period.

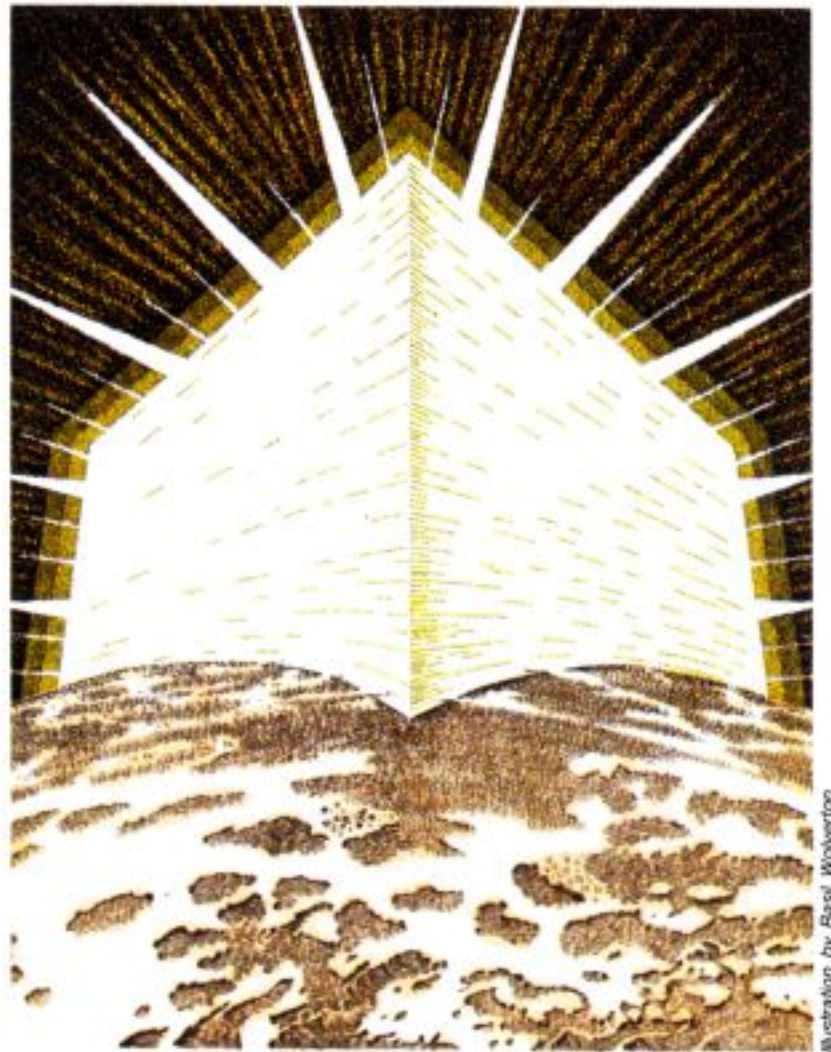
2. After 100 years of testing, will those few who remain stubbornly rebellious be accursed? Isa. 65:20. What does the Apostle John see happening immediately after the final period of testing is over? Rev. 20:13-15.

COMMENT: This is the third resurrection. It will occur after all who can be saved are saved. All of the wicked who have knowingly rejected God's way and died in their sins will be raised to physical life. Their attitudes will be evident. No one will ever claim these people were unjustly condemned. None of them will repent. They will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive their penalty—extinction in the lake of fire. This will be their second death. They will never again be resurrected.

3. Will all who stubbornly refuse to repent and who persist in breaking God's commandments ultimately find themselves in a lake of "fire and brimstone"? Rev. 21:8; Dan. 12:2; Mal. 4:1-3.

COMMENT: Jesus said that the fate of the wicked is *gehenna* fire (Mark 9:43-48). *Gehenna* fire and the lake of fire are the same. This fire will have the appearance of a fiery lake.

Mortals naturally die once, because we just "wear out" (Heb. 9:27). But if anyone dies the *second* death after the 100-year period, he will



THE NEW JERUSALEM—God will establish His universe-ruling headquarters on earth in the new Jerusalem, shown in artist's rendering above.

have been judged by God and Christ to be guilty of persistent disobedience and incorrigible rebellion. The second death will be for all eternity!

After the Great White Throne Judgment period, everyone will have had full opportunity to prove themselves. The vast majority will have yielded themselves to God, and will have received God's gift of eternal life. Hundreds of thousands who qualified for responsibilities in the Kingdom of God before Christ's Second Coming, thousands of millions who qualified for similar responsibilities during His 1,000-year reign on earth, and billions who qualified during the 100-year judgment period will be members of God's spiritual Family.

The much smaller number of unrepentant rebellious will meet their Judge in the third resurrection. Their temporary human life will be terminated. The lake of fire will consume them "body and soul," their wicked works and ultimately the entire surface of the world.

Only those who received spiritual life will escape this global destruction, in which all that is fleshly—corruptible—will perish. All that will remain of the wicked and their world will be ashes under the feet of the Spirit-born children of God.

4. To what historical event does the Apostle

Peter compare this final world-consuming lake of fire? II Pet. 3:5-7, 10-12. Did God destroy the ungodly men and society during the time of Noah? Gen. 6:12-13. But did God save righteous Noah and his family? Verses 9, 18, 22; Gen. 7:1.

5. Did John the Baptist foretell a coming baptism in fire? Matt. 3:11.

COMMENT: Baptism means immersion, and the baptism with fire will be an immersion in fire. Just as the world before Noah was “baptized”—submerged in water—so the end-time world will be “baptized” with fire when God’s Master Plan is complete.

The earth, befouled by sin, will be cleansed of all defilement in the baptism of fire.

New Heavens and New Earth

1. After all of God’s children are born into His spiritual Family, and all sinners have been destroyed, what will God do next? Isa. 65:17-19; Rev. 21:1, 5; II Pet. 3:13.

COMMENT: After the lake of fire, a new heaven and a new earth will appear. The new earth will become the headquarters for all future creating projects of the God Family. Let’s glimpse this new project God has promised to begin.

2. Will the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven to the earth, and become the capital of the universe? Rev. 21:2. Will God the Father join Jesus Christ on earth with His spirit-composed children? Rev. 22:3-5.

COMMENT: God the Father will not come to dwell on earth before the cleansing of the world in the lake of fire. After the earth is purified, God will establish His headquarters and throne on earth, in a new and perfectly built Jerusalem.

3. Will God share this new city with His spiritual children? Isa. 66:22. Who will live in the holy city and have a part with God and Jesus Christ in the refurbishing of the universe? Rev. 22:14.

4. What will the holy city be like? Rev. 21:10-25. How large will it be? Verses 15-17.

COMMENT: The new Jerusalem will be about 1,400 miles (2,200 kilometers) in each direction. It will cover an area equal to the modern nations of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia combined!

5. Will rivers of living waters be available in the new Jerusalem? Rev. 22:1-2.

God’s Days Are Full of Meaning

Let’s briefly summarize the meaning of God’s seven annual festivals. They picture God’s plan of

redemption or salvation—the divine plan by which God is reproducing Himself.

The Passover pictures the death of Christ, the Lamb of God, in payment for the penalty of human sins that are repented of. The seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread picture the Church coming out of sin, even as Israel came out of Egypt. The day of Pentecost, originally called Feast of Firstfruits, pictures the Church as the first to be begotten and born as children of God during the Church age.

The Feast of Trumpets pictures the Second Coming of Christ to take over earth’s throne and to rule all nations. The Day of Atonement pictures the putting away of Satan. The seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles picture the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the Spirit-born children of God. The Last or Final Great Day pictures the final judgment, when salvation will be made available to all those who never had an opportunity in their first life.

God’s festival days, unlike the holidays of man, have tremendous significance.

What we want to remember, we must continually review. As true Christians observe each annual festival and Holy Day in season, we are reminded of God’s Master Plan and our individual part in it.

God’s annual Holy Days give us the opportunity to “act out” God’s plan each year. By doing this, our goal is constantly kept in front of our minds. It is renewed for us because we are symbolically “reliving” it every year.

God Almighty, in His loving mercy, has revealed this wonderful knowledge. To achieve the purpose for which we were born, we must—either now or

God’s annual Holy Days give us the opportunity to “act out” God’s plan each year What we do with this knowledge is up to us.

later—keep the Holy Days that point out that purpose. What we do with this knowledge is up to us.

Those who believe God’s Word will want to meet—in obedience to God’s command found in Hebrews 10:24-25—with brethren of like understanding on God’s annual Holy Days.

If you are yielded to God’s inspired Word and have repented of your old ways, if you sincerely want to keep God’s annual Holy Days where He has placed His name, then you may write to our office nearest you for further information.

The seven annual festivals identified in the chart below depict the steps in God's Master Plan of salvation for mankind. They show just how loving and merciful our Creator God truly is. If you would like to know when God's annual festivals take place this year, request a copy of the calendar we have prepared. It is attractive and informative. You will want to hang your copy on the wall or keep it in a handy location for easy reference. Be sure to send for a copy today.

FESTIVAL	OBSERVED	MEANING	SCRIPTURES
Passover	14th day of first month, after sunset.	A memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "our Passover," which made possible the forgiveness of our sins.	Lev. 23:5 Luke 22:15-20 John 13:1-5, 14-15 1 Cor. 5:7
Feast of Unleavened Bread	15th-21st of first month.	Pictures God's people—the Church—putting away sin and striving to obey God's commandments.	Lev. 23:6-8 Ex. 12:15-20, 42 1 Cor. 5:6-8
Pentecost	"Fiftieth" day, in the third month.	Depicts the Church as the firstfruits of salvation, the first to be spiritually begotten and born into God's Family.	Lev. 23:15-21 Acts 2:1-4 Rom. 8:23
Feast of Trumpets	First day of seventh month.	Celebrates the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to intervene in world affairs, resurrect the firstfruits and establish the Kingdom of God on earth.	Lev. 23:23-25 Matt. 24:30-31 1 Thess. 4:16-17 Rev. 11:15
Day of Atonement	10th day of seventh month.	Portrays the binding and removal of Satan for 1,000 years so that mankind at last may be made at one with God.	Lev. 23:26-32 Lev. 16:7-31 Rev. 20:1-3
Feast of Tabernacles	15th-21st of seventh month.	Represents the 1,000-year rule of Christ and the Spirit-born children of God on earth, when salvation will be offered to all.	Lev. 23:34-35, 39-42 Zech. 14:16-19 Isa. 2:1-4 Rev. 20:4
Last Great Day	22nd day of seventh month.	Pictures the judgment when the vast majority of humanity will be resurrected to mortal life and given their opportunity for salvation.	Lev. 23:36 Ezek. 37:1-14 Matt. 12:41-42 Rev. 20:5, 11-12