

The Secret Meaning of Pentecost

The Importance of Understanding Pentecost

Most Christians understand *part* of the meaning of Pentecost. They know that Pentecost represents the gift of the Holy Spirit and the start of the New Testament Church.

But a full understanding of Pentecost reveals much more. The meaning of Pentecost helps explain why our loved ones, who died without ever accepting Christ or the true gospel, are not lost and still have a chance for salvation and entrance into God's kingdom. The meaning of Pentecost helps to open the door to the meaning of the other holy days, which in turn help explain *why* God will soon punish the United States and other western nations for their sins with the worst time of calamity and disaster that has ever befallen any nation since the beginning of the world, a disaster in which about 90% or more of our people will die and the rest will suffer horribly, and why most "religious" people will not escape. The meaning of Pentecost helps explain why God allows so much suffering in this world at this time.

The meaning of Pentecost helps explain the solution to this world's problems.

God intends true Christians to understand the full meaning of Pentecost, as revealed in the Bible.

Pentecost Is Unique

Among Christian annual celebrations, Pentecost is unique!

Most mainstream traditional churches observe Christmas, Easter, and several other annual holidays in addition to Pentecost. Jews observe days originally given by God to ancient Israel in the Old Testament such as Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, the day of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), etc. But the day that Christians observe as Pentecost is also one of the days given by God to Old Testament Israel. In the Old Testament, it is called "Feast of Weeks" (Deuteronomy 16:16, Leviticus 23:15-21). In the New Testament it is called "Pentecost" (Acts 2:1-4, 20:16, 1 Corinthians 16:8). It is an annual day shared by both ancient Israel and Christians.

And it has tremendous meaning for both Christians and Israel, as I will show you.

There is a great secret associated with Pentecost. Few people and few churches understand its full meaning.

God gave seven annual holy days and festivals to ancient Israel, and each has a meaning that explains some aspect of God's plan for the salvation of mankind. For example, the Passover observance in Old Testament Israel represented the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay for the sins of mankind. The death of the Passover lamb foreshadowed the death of Christ. As God "passed over" and spared the houses of the Israelites that had the blood of the lamb, so God passes over our sins and spares us from the death penalty when we are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who died to pay the penalty for our sins in our place. The Passover lamb represents Jesus Christ (Exodus 11:4-5, 12:1-14, 12:21-30, John 1:29, 35-36, 1 Peter 1:17-21, Revelation 5:5-10, 7:9-10, 12:11, 13:8, 17:14, 19:7-9, 21:9, 21:22-23, 22:1-3). But ancient Israel never understood the full meaning of Passover, nor do Jews today.

But Passover was not the only annual holy day or feast given to Israel by God that has meaning for Christians. There are seven, and each represents a step in the salvation of mankind.

Few understand what most of those days represent. The Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost as it is called in the New Testament) was one of those days. The first century New Testament Church understood what it represents, but today, neither the Jews nor most mainstream Christian churches understand the full meaning of Pentecost.

Christians today know that Pentecost represents the gift of God's Holy Spirit to the Church. In a sense, Pentecost represents the birth of the New Testament Church, for it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes one a Christian and a member of the Church (Acts 2:1-4, Romans 8:9-11).

Yet, there is more to Pentecost than that. When fully understood, Pentecost helps to reveal the entire plan of God for mankind.

This article will explain.

And when you understand what Pentecost means in God's overall plan for mankind, and when you really understand God's plan for mankind, you will know the answers to questions that have troubled millions of religious people and have caused some to turn totally against religion altogether. These questions include:

Why are have so few in the world been saved through all history? The Bible is clear that only through Christ can we be saved (Acts 4:8-11, 16:29-31, Romans 10:8-15). To be saved you must repent of your sins, believe the true gospel, and accept Christ as your personal savior (Mark 1:14-15, Acts 2:36-39, 16:29-31). Yet the majority of the billions of people who have lived in all human history, including all those who lived and died before Christ was born, have never had the opportunity to hear the true gospel and learn about Christ. People have been born, have lived, and have died in countries and at times in history when Christianity was simply not taught. Will the majority of mankind be lost forever because of circumstances of birth over which they have no control?

Why are so relatively few being saved even today? There are over seven billion people on earth, and most have never had the opportunity to hear the true gospel. John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Jesus said, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). If God is all love, then He must want the greatest number of people to hear the true gospel and be saved. If He is all powerful, then He must be stronger than Satan and He must be able to make sure everyone has an opportunity. So why are not the majority of the seven billion people on earth today being saved?

Are most human beings doomed to damnation because of time and place of birth over which they have had no control? If God is good and all powerful, why doesn't He make sure that ALL human beings hear the true gospel and have the opportunity for salvation?

Traditional Christianity teaches that those who are lost will be tormented forever in hellfire. If God is good and all-powerful, why would he condemn the majority of mankind to that fate?

Why does God allow so much suffering and injustice in the world today? If He is good, a God of love as the Bible teaches, then He would not want people to suffer. And if He is all-powerful, He would be able to prevent it. So why doesn't He?

These questions trouble some people so much that they refuse to believe that God even exists. They give up on religion altogether. These are questions that traditional Christianity has failed to answer. Yet the true meaning of Pentecost helps to reveal the answers.

This article will explain the hidden meaning of Pentecost, the secret that most churches do not know, and will answer all of these questions, from the Bible.

Why Do So Few Understand?

When it comes to religion, why do people believe what they believe? Why do you believe what you believe?

Many people, maybe even most people, believe what they are taught growing up. They accept what their parents and religious teachers have told them. In this way, the beliefs and practices of the major religions and churches are passed on from generation to generation. Once someone has been taught a certain set of values and religious beliefs when he or she is young, it is hard for that person to change.

Some people have no religious beliefs. Some are atheists. They believe the natural world is all there is. Others are agnostics. They do not know if God exists or not.

Modern secularism is based on knowledge obtained through the scientific method. Many atheists and agnostics feel confident that the scientific method is the best and surest way to discover truth. The scientific method is based on observation of the natural world, the building of theories to explain what we can see, then the testing of those theories by experimentation and further observation. The results of the experiments are then studied and interpreted. But only natural explanations are considered. The possibility of God's actions as a cause of events we see is rejected. Likewise, God's revelation through the Bible is rejected.

But God is able to reveal truth to those whose minds are open to the truth. The way He reveals truth is entirely different from the scientific method. It is the method of divine revelation. You could also call it, the "faith method," because it requires faith to believe what is revealed. But it is not the kind of "blind faith" most religious people try to have, faith in their traditions, faith in their church, faith in their ministers, and even faith in their opinions and assumptions about God. The faith that is required to learn and know truth revealed by God is the commitment and

willingness to believe what God actually *says* and to back up that belief with obedient action. God reveals truth to those willing to believe, trust, and obey what He says. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalm 111:10). "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). As a person chooses to believe and obey God, God works with that person's mind to increase his understanding, but when a person rejects God's word, that person's mind becomes deceived.

You can prove God exists. Anyone can. The creation is proof of a creator God of immense power and intelligence. If you look at the universe, at natural scientific law, at the fundamental forces, the fundamental particles, the laws of physics, the characteristics of time and space, you can clearly see that design choices have been made. Someone had to decide what forces would exist. Someone had to decide how strong the gravitational force would be, what the electromagnetic force that holds atoms together would be like, how the strong force would hold the centers of atoms together, and so forth. Someone had to make a design choice that space would be three dimensional, not two dimensional or four dimensional. Everything points to a great creator who designed the universe to be the kind of universe that would make human life possible.

Moreover, someone had to create your conscious mind. Human consciousness is something science cannot explain.

This is why God says that atheists are without excuse (Romans 1:19-22). The evidence is there for anyone willing to face the truth.

You can also prove, by fulfilled prophecy, that the Bible was inspired by a creator God who was able to predict thousands of years in advance the course of nations and what conditions would be like with an accuracy that cannot be reasonably explained as coincidence.

Suppose you take the time and trouble to prove these things. Suppose you are free from the bias against God that so many people have and look at these things with an open mind. If so, you can know that the Bible is God speaking. And God, in the Bible, reveals the answers to the greatest mysteries of life. You can find the greatest questions of life answered by God in the Bible.

But there is one more vital step you must take to know the truth.

Many people will say they believe in God and believe the Bible is God's word. Most major Christian denominations say they believe in the inspiration of the Bible. Yet, these very denominations believe different things. While they affirm belief in the Bible, most church members are unable to break free of the traditions they were raised in. When they read the Bible, they unconsciously fit the Bible into what they already believe or want to believe. They

let their traditions interpret the Bible rather than let the Bible interpret the Bible by using easy scriptures to interpret difficult ones. That is why, from generation to generation, different churches believe different things, all while claiming to get their beliefs from the Bible.

If you want truth, you must be willing to really believe what God says. You have to let the Bible interpret the Bible. You can do that by letting clear scriptures interpret unclear ones. You have to be willing to believe what God says in the Bible even when He shows you that your traditional beliefs are wrong. And that is so hard for most people to do. Most church members, whether they admit it to themselves or not, are unwilling to do that.

This article will explain, from the Bible, what Pentecost means. It all has to do with the concept of "first fruits". And once you understand the full meaning of Pentecost, you will know the fate of those who have lived and died without hearing the true gospel. You will know why God allows so much suffering. You will know why so few are being saved among the seven billion people on earth today.

But there is a price to pay before you can really understand.

The price is, you have to be willing to believe what God says in the Bible more than your traditions, your church, your ministers, and your opinions, and then you must strive to obey Him. You have to be willing to prove your beliefs from the Bible. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21, see also Acts 17:11). And I already know that only a few will pay that price to know the truth. Will you be one of those few?

The full reason most churches do not understand the hidden meaning of Pentecost is itself part of the mystery of Pentecost, and will be made clear by the end of this article.

Pentecost has to do with Christians being "firstfruits" to God (Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:15-17, 20, Romans 8:23, James 1:18, Revelation 14:1-4). But if the Church is the first fruits, who are the "second fruits", the main harvest?

The Church as First Fruits

After God led Israel out of Egypt, He revealed and gave them, in addition to the weekly Sabbath day, seven annual holy days and festivals, each of which has important meaning in Christianity, each of which represents an important step in God's plan for the salvation of mankind (Leviticus 23:1-44). These days had some meaning for the Israelites as they represented Old Testament events. But their full meaning can only be understood in terms of Christianity, and God did not reveal their full meaning to ancient Israel. There was much knowledge about God's overall plan

of salvation that was not yet revealed at that time, and most of the Bible was not yet written. But the Bible is now complete, and we can understand today.

Collectively, these days illustrate God's plan for the salvation of mankind. Each individual feast or holy day represents a step in that plan.

Passover is an example that illustrates the point. As the first of the seven feast days, Passover has tremendous meaning. It represents and illustrates the first step in the salvation of the human race, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As Israel observed Passover on its appointed day year by year, they understood that it represents God "passing over" the houses of the Israelites that had the blood of the lamb when God killed all the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 11:4-5, 12:1-14, 12:21-30). But Passover represents much more than that.

Passover represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His shed blood to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, which alone makes forgiveness of sins possible. Ancient Israel did not understand this meaning, but Christians understand it today.

All humans have sinned. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The penalty of sin is death. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Our salvation required that Christ pay the death penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). That is the starting point. Without the sacrifice of Christ, the salvation of the human race would not be possible.

Passover is an example of how the days God gave Israel have meaning for Christians today that goes beyond what was revealed to Israel in Old Testament times. To Israel, Passover only represented God "passing over" their houses when all the firstborn of Egypt were killed. But Christians today can understand that Passover represents the death of Jesus Christ. Christ died on Passover day (Matthew 26:1). He is also called the lamb of God (John 1:29, 35-36, 1 Peter 1:17-21, Revelation 5:5-10, 7:9-10, 12:11, 13:8, 17:14, 19:7-9, 21:9, 21:22-23, 22:1-3). The lamb that was slaughtered on Passover represented Christ. As Passover is the first of the seven feast and holy days, so the sacrifice of Christ is the first step in the salvation of the human race.

Likewise, each of the other annual days God has ordained has particular meaning, not only the meaning that ancient Israel understood, but greater meaning for Christians. These days represent steps or stages in the salvation of mankind.

One of those days is the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:9-10). This is the same day called "Pentecost" in the New Testament (Acts 2:1-4). "Pentecost" in the Greek means "fifty" or "count fifty" or "fiftieth day". It was called that because, in giving Moses

instructions for Israel to keep the Feast of Weeks, God told Moses to count fifty days from the day after the Sabbath when they offered the wave sheaf offering (Leviticus 23:15-21).

The Old Testament Feast of Weeks represented "first fruits" to ancient Israel, not the first of the first fruits (which was the wave sheaf offering - see Leviticus 23:9-11), but the early summer harvest. This was a smaller, earlier harvest than the main harvest in the fall several months later. The Feast of Weeks is also called the day of firstfruits in Numbers 28:26.

In the New Testament, we read in Acts of the coming of Holy Spirit upon the Church on Pentecost. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). This was the real beginning of the New Testament Church because it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the mind of a man or woman that makes that person a Christian and thus a member of the true Church. "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

The Church has always been small compared with the population of the earth. God calls the true Church a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Christ said that comparatively *few* in this life find the way to life, while the majority follows the way that leads to destruction. "Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereto: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Likewise, the early summer harvest in Israel was small compared with the later fall harvest, which was the main harvest.

This is why the Church and true Christians are called "first fruits". The first of the first fruits is Jesus Christ, and He is called the "first fruits" (Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23). He was the first to be born to God by a resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3-5, Colossians 1:18). But the Church is also called "firstfruits" (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4-5).

The concept of first fruits, of a small early harvest, is what connects the meaning of the Old Testament observance of the Feast of Weeks with the Church's observance of Pentecost. God often uses agricultural analogies to illustrate the kingdom of God, salvation, and the gospel. Notice how He used the parable of the sower, and many similar illustrations, comparing the growth and harvesting of a crop with the salvation of men (Matthew 13:3-23, 24-30, 36-43, John 4:35-38).

But here is something important. The early harvest is not the WHOLE harvest. The fall harvest is greater. It is a larger harvest. The Church in this age is only the first fruits, the pioneer group, the early harvest of souls, just as the Feast of Weeks represented the smaller, early harvest in ancient Israel, NOT the greater harvest to come. The whole world will have its chance later. The few who are called now are having their chance for salvation now. But the rest of mankind will have its chance for salvation later. I will show this in more detail later in this article.

But why? Why is God only calling a few now? And how will God offer salvation to the billions who have lived and died without ever hearing even the name of Christ?

And why does God allow so much suffering in this age? Why does he not save all mankind now?

To understand the world today and why it is filled with suffering and injustice, we must go back to the beginning to understand how everything started.

The Sin of Lucifer

Today's world is filled with suffering and violence, and the majority of mankind has never had the opportunity to hear the true gospel and be saved.

To understand why the world is the way it is, we have to start at the beginning.

Before God created mankind, He made angels, one of which was Lucifer (the name "Lucifer" means light bearer). Apparently, the angels were made before the earth (Job 38:4-7). Angels are immortal spirit beings. They cannot die (Luke 20:36), so they may have existed for millions of years.

Lucifer, who became Satan, is described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 as a mighty angel, a cherub. God gave Lucifer a great mind, but He also gave him free moral agency. Lucifer started out the right way, but had the power to choose wrong (Ezekiel 28:15).

There are two ways of life, and Lucifer had to make a choice which way he would live. There is the "give" way of life, the way of love, of outgoing concern for the good of others, the way of humility, peace, truth, cooperation, and harmony, and the way of obedience to God. This is the right way of life, the way that leads to happiness and good. This is the way of life that God lives, that He teaches, and that He commands. It is a way of life defined by God's law and commandments, summarized by the two great commandments of love towards God and

neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). God commands His creation to live that way of life for our good.

This is the way of life God must have taught Lucifer in the beginning, for that is the way of life Lucifer originally followed. God describes Lucifer's way as perfect. "You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you" (Ezekiel 28:15).

But the opposite way of life is the "get" way of life, the way of selfishness, the way of pride and vanity and self-exaltation, the way of self-glorification, the way of taking from others, of hostile competition, and of murder and lying. It is a way of life that leads to conflict, war, destruction, and misery. It is the way of sin, and sin is the violation of God's law of love (1 John 3:4). Sin brings penalties and results in suffering.

God must have taught Lucifer and the other angels the right way of life, for God states that Lucifer was perfect in his ways, until he sinned. Also, God must have warned Lucifer what the consequences would be before Lucifer sinned. The Bible shows through many examples that God warns those who are in danger of sin and the suffering that results. God warned Adam of the consequences of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). God warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience (Deuteronomy 4:23-27, 11:26-28, 28:15-68). God warned Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-2, 3:1-4). God even ends the Bible with a warning in Revelation not to add or take away words in the book (Revelation 22:18-19). The Bible is full of warnings from beginning to end. It is God's way, motivated by love, to give warnings when needed (1 Thessalonians 5:14, Proverbs 24:11-12).

So Lucifer, while he was living a perfect way of life, must have been taught the right way of life and warned of the consequences of following the wrong way of life, the way of vanity and sin. And as long as Lucifer was perfect in his ways, there was peace and joy in the universe.

Yet, Lucifer, with all his ability and power of mind, even after being told by God that sin would lead to his ruin, chose to sin. He exalted himself in his mind. He chose the way of vanity and pride, and he glorified himself. Once he started on that path, his mind became perverted and evil. God says of him, "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness" (Ezekiel 28:17). He sinned more and more. His name was changed to "Satan", meaning enemy, adversary.

Lucifer became Satan, an evil spirit being. Apparently, he led one-third of God's angels into following him in his sin and his rebellion against God, and they became demons (Revelation 12:4).

Satan can never again think clearly to straighten out his own mind. He has brought a disaster upon himself from which he cannot recover. He is doomed to suffer for eternity for what he has done.

Why did he do it? There is no indication in the Bible that any being sinned before Lucifer sinned. His sin was apparently the first in the universe. If he committed the first sin, that means there was no other evil being or outside evil force to tempt him. If he was perfect in his ways before he sinned, then there was no evil nature within him to tempt him. God would not have created an evil nature in Lucifer, nor would God Himself tempt Lucifer into sin (James 1:13).

Why, if Lucifer was taught by God that if he chose the way of vanity and sin he would bring eternal misery upon himself, did he choose to sin anyway?

But did Lucifer really believe what God said?

From Lucifer's point of view, there could be only two ways of acquiring knowledge. One way was to believe what God told him, trusting God that He would only tell him the truth and would never lie to him (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). The other way was NOT to trust and believe God, but rather to discover truth for himself by experimenting and evaluating the results.

Lucifer must not have believed God.

I don't think Lucifer would deliberately choose the way that would lead to misery for himself.

Lucifer must have thought he might obtain greater pleasure for himself through vanity, selfishness, and self-exaltation. He may have chosen this way to see if it gave him greater happiness. And in doing this, which perhaps was the first "scientific experiment", the real start of the "scientific method", he sinned and started on the path of acquiring an evil nature leading to greater and greater sin. His mind became perverted and evil. He became the author of the *get* way of life, the way of sin, the way of selfishness, the exact opposite of God's way of love and God's law. He became a murderer and a liar, and the author of it (John 8:44-45).

Satan's choice to sin and rebel against God has become a way of life for him.

It all started with Lucifer's decision to distrust and disbelief God and God's teaching and go His own way (Proverbs 3:5, 14:12).

God's way is faith in His word and obedience to His commandments. It is also the way of love towards God and neighbor as defined by the Ten Commandments and the whole Bible.

Satan's way is the way of doubt in God's word and disobedience to His commandments (Genesis 3:1-5). It is the way of self-centeredness, hostile competition towards others, and trust in one's own reasoning more than trust in God.

This was Satan's state when God made man on the earth.

The Creation of Man

After the rebellion of Satan and the angels who followed him, God made man on the earth. Before making man, God renewed the face of the earth in six days, and in that sense, God "made" the earth in six days (Exodus 20:11, Genesis 1:3-31, 2:1-3). But this was not the original creation of the earth. The earth, as a planet, already existed before the six days, but in darkness and covered with water (Genesis 1:1-2).

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Then Genesis 1:2 describes the state of the earth sometime AFTER its original creation as recorded in verse 1. "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

Did God first create the earth in darkness and covered with water? There is evidence in the Bible that He did not.

Genesis 1:2 says that the earth was "without form, and void". You can use Strong's Bible Concordance to look up the original Hebrew words for "without form and void". They are the Hebrew "tohu" and "bohu". They refer to a state of chaos, emptiness, and waste. But Isaiah 45:18 says "For thus said the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he has established it, he created it not in vain...". The original Hebrew word for "in vain" is "tohu", the same word used in Genesis 1:2 to describe the earth at that time. In other words, God did NOT originally create the earth in the state of "tohu", that is, in chaos and waste and emptiness, or as it is translated in the KJV, "without form and void". That condition apparently came later.

There is evidence also that Satan was on a throne on the earth BEFORE the surface of the earth became wasted. Isaiah 14:13-14 says, speaking of Lucifer, "For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also on 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." Notice, Satan was on earth at a time when he sinned against God, determining to exalt his throne. He intended to rise above the clouds. So he had a thrown of rulership, and he was on the earth.

The rebellion of Satan and the demons against God could have been the cause of the destruction of the surface of the earth at that time, just as the sins of mankind resulted in the destruction of the surface of the earth by a flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:5, 7, 11-13).

In any case, the earth existed before the events recorded in Genesis 1:2-31, and at that time the surface of the earth was NOT "without form and void", covered in darkness and water.

How long had the earth existed? The Bible does not say. It could have been millions or billions of years. But there could have been physical life on the earth at that time, and those life forms could explain the fossils scientists have found in the ground of species that do not exist today, such as the dinosaurs.

Then the surface of the earth was destroyed, probably because of the rebellion of Satan and his demons. Genesis 1:3 then begins to record the six days of creation when God renewed or recreated the surface of the earth, repairing the damage, restoring land and atmosphere, restoring plant and animal life, in preparation for man (Genesis 1:3-25). On the sixth day, God made man in God's own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-28). On the seventh day, God made the Sabbath day by resting (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 2:27). According to Bible chronology, man was made about 6,000 years ago. The fossils of man-like animals scientists find in the earth and can date as hundreds of thousands of years old are animals, not human.

Like Lucifer and the angels, man was made to have free moral agency. He can choose between right and wrong. But unlike angels, man is not immortal. He can die. God says, "the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Also, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Also, angels are spirit, but man is made from the earth, physical. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Notice that the soul is mortal, able to die, not immortal. Man, made from dirt, BECAME a living soul, and God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam, being a living soul, would die. It was Satan who told Eve she would not surely die, but Satan was lying (Genesis 3:4). God told Adam the truth when He told him he would die. After Adam sinned, God said to him, "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and to dust shall you return" (Genesis 3:19).

God was acting in mercy and wisdom when He made man mortal, able to die, able to cease to exist, unlike angels who cannot die. If a man refuses to repent and be saved, he can be destroyed forever in the lake of fire and not suffer for eternity like Satan. God says that the wicked will be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Malachi 4:3). The wicked will be as if they never had been (Obadiah 16). The destruction of the wicked in the lake of fire is the "second death" (Revelation 20:14-15). It is eternal punishment because there is no resurrection from that death. The second death is death forever.

After making Adam and Eve, God used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to test them to see if they would believe and obey Him, as Lucifer failed to do. God made sure they received His instruction before Satan could tempt them. Then God allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve.

Satan planted doubt in Eve's mind about God's word (Genesis 3:1-5). When Satan did this, he was, in effect, planting the same doubts he had about God's word into Eve's mind. He was leading her in his perverted, evil way of thinking and living. She ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam also ate. They followed Satan's way of life, and the whole human race has been following Satan ever since (Genesis 3:6-24).

But God had already designed a plan of salvation that would allow man to repent and turn from sin, learn to live God's way, and receive eternal life.

God's Plan for Mankind

In the account in Isaiah, Lucifer is described as having a throne. He wanted to exalt his throne and rise above the clouds, so his throne must have been on earth (Isaiah 14:12-14). God had given him a position of rulership on the earth.

His position as ruler of the earth continues. He will remain the invisible ruler and deceiver of mankind until the time that Christ gets rid of Satan and returns to rule the earth. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Revelation 20:1-3).

Before Jesus was crucified, He said, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me" (John 14:30). Paul wrote, "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). Also, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9). Notice that Satan is the ruler of this world and deceiver of mankind. Notice also that Satan sought to use his authority to tempt Jesus with a position of authority under Satan. "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, All this power will I give you, and the glory of

them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship me, all shall be yours. And Jesus answered and said to him, Get you behind me, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (Luke 4:5-8).

Satan is the present ruler of this world, and he is also the deceiver of mankind (Revelation 12:9, 20:1-3).

God has allowed Satan to remain as ruler of this world and deceiver of mankind. God has a purpose for doing this, which will be made clear later in this article.

But there is no contest between God and Satan. Satan has no power against God. He can only do what God allows him to do. Notice the account in Job. Satan accused Job of living righteously for selfish purposes, and God gave Satan **permission**, first to take away Job's possessions, then later to afflict Job physically, but never to take Job's life (Job 1:8-12, 2:3-6). Notice that Satan had no power to go even the tiniest step beyond what God allowed him to do.

But why does God allow Satan to deceive mankind at all?

When Christ returns, Satan will be put away and no longer allowed to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1-3). But why does God wait? Why not put Satan away now? In fact, why did God allow Satan to remain on his throne even one second after he rebelled against God? It is Satan's influence over this world that brings so much suffering. Since God is a God of love, and since He has all power, including the power to remove Satan whenever He wishes, why not remove Satan, send Jesus Christ to rule the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:11-16), and put an end to suffering and injustice now?

Though mankind is suffering and does not understand the real cause, man is writing the lesson in history that Satan's way of life does not work, that it does not bring happiness but brings pain, suffering, destruction, and death.

The whole controversy between God and Satan was over which way of life is best. God's way is the give way of life, of love towards God first and also towards neighbor. Satan's way is the self-centered way of get, of each person getting for himself what he can, trying to get his own happiness. Satan's way is also the way of each person deciding for himself what is right, what is wrong, what is the best way, as Lucifer did when he sinned, rather than believing, trusting, and obeying God and God's law that defines right and wrong.

We are nearing the end of an age. God revealed to Daniel that near the end of the age, knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro (Daniel 12:4), and we are in that period now. In the last hundred years there has been an explosion in scientific and material knowledge unlike anything that has happened since human beings have existed, and

transportation by plane, by automobile, by high-speed rail has increased and quickened travel tremendously since the time that Daniel lived.

If you calculate the chronology of Bible events based on ages of men and number of years as recorded until the time that events can match up with known history, you can determine that we are nearing the end of about 6,000 years since the creation of Adam. God has allotted 6,000 years for man to live under Satan's rule and influence to experience first-hand what Satan's way is like and to write the lesson in history of what the result would be. Then, at the end of this period, Christ will return to rule the earth and teach mankind the right way to live (Matthew 24:30, Acts 1:6-11, Daniel 2:44, Revelation 20:4-5, Isaiah 11:1-9). Satan will be put away, removed from his position of power and influence over mankind, not allowed to deceive and influence mankind (Revelation 20:1-3). There follows a period of 1,000 years of peace and happiness as Christ rules mankind on the earth. "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6). "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4). "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatted calf together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Then mankind will be able to compare the results of Satan's way of life for six thousand years with God's way of life for one thousand years, and man will be able to see that God's way is best.

Before man existed, Lucifer chose to go his own way apart from God's rule and teaching, perhaps as an experiment. God is now making sure that all mankind will fully see the results of that experiment. It is like a demonstration experiment in a science class in school. The teacher knows what the results of the experiment will be, but he wants the students to see it firsthand. God knows that His way leads to happiness and Satan's way leads to misery and destruction, and He wants mankind to see it and experience it firsthand. That is why God is allowing Satan to lead mankind the wrong way for 6,000 years. The human race is getting a bellyful of Satan's way.

This is all part of a 7,000 year plan to teach man a lesson, one he will remember for eternity.

Notice how this 7,000 year plan is patterned after the seven-day weekly cycle. "Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:9-10). The Sabbath day, a day of rest from the burden of the labor of the week, a day of delight for those who keep it properly (Isaiah 58:13-14), is symbolic of the one thousand year millennial reign of Christ, which will be a time of peace and joy over all the earth. Peter wrote, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). God told Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden tree he would surely die. Adam ate of that tree, and he died in the first thousand year "day" of the seven thousand year plan of God (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:6, 17-19, Genesis 5:3-5).

But what of the billions who lived and died in the first six thousand years, the majority of mankind to this point, who only knew Satan's way of life, most of whom never even heard the true gospel or had an opportunity for salvation? Are they permanently lost?

They will be resurrected back to physical life at the end of the seven thousand years. They will have their opportunity to hear the true gospel, to believe the gospel, to repent of their sins, to accept Jesus Christ as their savior, and to be saved. They will finally have that choice, and they will be able to choose God's way of life and God's salvation knowing the result of Satan's way and the result of God's way in human history, and they will be able to see that God's way is best.

Notice this passage in Ezekiel: "The hand of the LORD was on me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the middle of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, see, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, you know. Again he said to me, Prophesy on these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus said the Lord GOD to these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, see, the sinews and the flesh came up on them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus said the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus said the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, said the LORD" (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

God does not show partiality (Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:11). What he does for Israel he will do for all mankind. The men of Nineveh, who were Assyrians, not Israelites, will be in that resurrection. The queen of the south, the queen of Sheba, will be in that resurrection (Matthew 12:41-42, 1 Kings 10:1-13).

When does this occur? Revelation indicates this general resurrection happens after the millennium, after the entire 7,000 years. "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5). "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-13).

There is a first resurrection and a second resurrection. The first resurrection is the resurrection of the saints, those comparatively few who make up God's Church during this age, and this occurs when Christ returns. This is a resurrection to immortality into the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Matthew 24:30-31, Revelation 20:4-6). But the second resurrection, the general resurrection of all mankind, is a resurrection back to physical life, not immortality. Notice that in the prophecy in Ezekiel chapter 37, those resurrected had to breathe air in order to live. At that time, the books will be opened (Revelation 20:11-13), and the book of life will be opened. Those resurrected will be judged for what they have done in this life (Revelation 20:12), and all will be found guilty of sin (Romans 3:23). But then they can repent at that time and receive God's Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 37:14). Their names can be written into the book of life.

This is why God allows suffering. God allows it because it is part of His overall plan to teach mankind lessons that will last for eternity. But in the end, all suffering will cease. "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" (Revelation 21:4). God allows it at this time for our ultimate long-term good. Mankind will finally learn the lesson that God commands us to obey His law for our good, and that faith in God's word and obedience to His law is the way to happiness and every good result.

Why does God allow the majority of mankind to live and die without being saved, without even having the opportunity to hear the true gospel? Everyone who has ever lived will have a chance. If someone does not have a chance for salvation in this life, he or she will have the opportunity in the general resurrection of the dead.

The reason so few are being saved now is that God is NOT trying to save the world at this time. God is not offering salvation to the majority of mankind at this time. God has all power. When He sets out to save the world, He'll do it, and no one will be able to stop Him! God will save the world later, and everyone will have a chance, but not now.

No one will be lost because of circumstances of birth. Everyone will be able to make a free choice to believe the gospel, to repent, to accept God's salvation, and to receive eternal life in the kingdom of God. And those who refuse to repent of their evil ways will be cast into the lake of fire and burned up. They will be dead forever, never again to be resurrected, put out of their misery forever. They will never again cause pain and suffering for themselves or for others. They will be as if they never existed.

Who, in this age, has the opportunity for salvation now?

The FIRST FRUITS! Those few who are called by God, who are represented by the Day of Pentecost. A small, early harvest, not the main spiritual harvest to come.

That number is fewer than most churches think.

It is not enough in this age for one to hear the true gospel. A person must be specially *called* by God in this age. His mind must be opened to be able to receive the truth. So even if a person has heard the true gospel, perhaps from a family member, but does not respond, that person is NOT necessarily lost. It may be that God has not called that person to salvation at this time. His chance will come later, in the millennium if he lives into that time or in the general resurrection if he has died.

The next section will make this clear from the Bible.

The Church

It is God's purpose NOT to save the world now, but to let mankind find out from the cruel teacher of painful experience the kind of suffering and destruction Satan's way causes. To convert and save the majority of mankind at this time would thwart that purpose.

But even though the majority of mankind is not being saved now, a small number are. Pentecost, in a sense, represents those few. Pentecost represents the Church. It is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament Feast of Weeks, the same day with a different name, looked forward to: the early harvest, the smaller harvest, the first fruits. The Church is that early, small spiritual harvest.

The true Church is the collective body of all those who have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in their minds (John 14:15-17, 25-27, Romans 8:9, 14-16). The Church was actually started on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 1:4-5 and 2:1-4. That was when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They had already been trained by Christ in God's way of life. Now, with God's Holy Spirit dwelling in their minds, they had the spiritual power to live that way of life more fully and to do God's work of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Acts 1:7-8).

But why the Church? If God is not saving the whole world at this time, why did He send His Son Jesus Christ to build His Church at all?

Though God is not saving the world as a whole at this time, He is saving a small number, those true Christians who make up the Church. God has called them to salvation and given them His Holy Spirit in this age for two purposes: One, so they can preach the gospel and a warning message to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14), and two, so they can be trained and prepared to rule with Christ when He returns to rule the earth (Luke 19:11-19, Revelation 2:26-27, 3:21, 20:4-6).

Through the efforts of the Church, the gospel is being preached as a witness. Yet even of those who hear the true gospel, only a few become converted and become members of the Church.

Jesus Christ preached to thousands when He was on earth (Mark 6:32-44). He performed many public miracles. Yet on the Day of Pentecost, there were only about 120 disciples (Acts 1:15).

For a person to be saved, more is required than just hearing the gospel. That person must be specially called by God to understand the gospel. God must grant repentance as a gift (Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25). God must actually *draw* a person to Christ or that person will not be able to truly come to Christ to be converted. "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). Before a person can respond to the gospel, God's Holy Spirit must work WITH the person's mind to free that person from Satan's deceptions and help him or her understand the truth. This must happen even before a person is baptized and actually receives the Holy Spirit dwelling IN his or her mind. When the disciples were with Christ before His death and resurrection, they were unconverted because the Holy Spirit was not yet given to them (John 7:39, Acts 1:4-5). Yet the Holy Spirit was WITH them, that is, God's Spirit was working with their minds. "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it sees him not, neither knows him: but you know him; for he dwells with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17).

God has allowed Satan to deceive the whole world. Satan has the power to deceive mankind. He is an evil spirit that works in the minds of men to lead them to disobedience and hostility to God and God's law (Ephesians 2:2-3, Revelation 12:9). He is the source of man's carnal human nature, which is actually Satan's nature. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Jesus, in speaking to His disciples, even acknowledged that they also had this evil human nature in them. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11). Paul referred to himself as being carnal and talked about the battle that took place in his mind between his carnal human nature, which is hostile to God and God's law, and God's righteous nature that was in him because of God's Spirit dwelling in his mind (Romans 7:14-25). For a converted Christian, overcoming our carnal human nature is a battle which we fight with the help of God's Spirit (2 Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:13-14).

But it takes the help of God's Spirit to open a person's mind to the truth when that person is being called, to help that person understand the gospel, or that person will continue to be deceived by Satan. By our own human power and intelligence, without God's help, none of us can escape the deception of Satan in this age. We need the help of God's Spirit to fully understand spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

Notice in the parable of the sower and the seed, Christ said, "The sower sows the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan comes immediately, and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mark 4:14-15).

Suppose one of your loved ones has heard the true gospel, but has not responded. It may be that God has not called that person to salvation at this time, in this age of 6,000 years of Satan's deception. In that case, God has not drawn that person to Christ and he CANNOT come to Christ. "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him" (John 6:44). His opportunity will come later, in the millennium or in the general resurrection of the dead after the millennium. At that time, Satan will be put away and everyone will have his mind opened to the truth. Until then, he is blinded (2 Corinthians 3:14-16, 4:3-4, Romans 11:7-36). Those in this life who are blinded are, at this present time, lost, but they are not permanently lost. They will have their chance to repent later, when their minds are opened, but if they still refuse to repent after God opens their minds when Satan is no longer around, then they will be lost permanently.

Though Jesus spoke to thousands on earth, not all were being called. Christ often spoke in parables, not to make His meaning clear, but to **hide** His meaning from the crowds. "And the

disciples came, and said to him, Why speak you to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which said, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:10-15). Notice what Jesus said was the reason He spoke to the crowds in parables: "Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (verse 11). It wasn't their time to be saved. But to His disciples, Jesus explained everything (Mark 4:34).

So if a loved one has died without it "being given" to him or her to understand the truth, even if that person heard the true gospel preached, there is still hope for that person. His or her chance for salvation is not at this time - it will come later in the general resurrection along with the majority of mankind.

In the meantime, those who have died are asleep in the grave, waiting for the resurrection from the dead. They are unconscious. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4). The Bible describes those who have died as being asleep (John 11:11-14, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 15:6, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Most of mankind is cut off from God, deceived by Satan, UNABLE to turn to Christ and be converted. But God is calling a few now, a small pioneer group, and is opening their minds to the truth. Those who are called by God at this time can choose to believe God and repent, and if they do, they can be among those in the first resurrection when Christ returns, and they will be kings and priests ruling the earth with Christ during the millennium. Those in the first resurrection will be made immortal, born into the kingdom of God. They are the early spiritual harvest, represented by Pentecost, called Feast of Weeks and day of firstfruits in the Old Testament.

In a sense, their reward is greater, because they can rule mankind with Christ in the millennium, but they have a tougher trial in this age because they have to overcome Satan, which those in the millennium and general resurrection will not have to do, because Satan will be put away at that time.

This is the meaning of Pentecost, not known by most churches. The Church is the first fruits, an early, small spiritual harvest, a small number of men and women called and converted in this age of 6,000 years, just as the Feast of Weeks, as Pentecost was called in the Old Testament,

represented the early summer harvest. And just as the great agricultural harvest occurs in the fall, so there will be a larger spiritual harvest AFTER the 6,000 years, during the millennium and the general resurrection of the dead that follows.

The lesson of Pentecost is that God knows what He is doing! He is NOT failing to save the majority of mankind. God is a successful God. He is fair (Ezekiel 18:25-29). He is a God of mercy (Exodus 34:6-7, Jeremiah 3:12, 9:24, Matthew 23:23, Hebrews 8:12). EVERYONE ever born will have a chance for salvation.

And by letting mankind live Satan's way for six thousand years, then letting Christ teach mankind God's way for one thousand years, He is giving all those in the millennium and in the general resurrection the very best chance to see the results of the two ways of life and to make the right choice, the choice to believe God (as Lucifer refused to do), to believe the true gospel, to repent of their sins, to surrender to God and accept Christ as their savior, and to be converted and saved. This will include everyone who has lived and died without hearing the true gospel, and it will even include those who have heard the gospel but are blinded (2 Corinthians 3:14-16, Romans 11:7) and were unable to escape from Satan's deception at this time because God has not called them in this age, has not drawn them to Christ (John 6:44), and has not worked with them by His Holy Spirit working **with** their minds to open their minds to the truth.

Those in the Church, the first fruits, are being saved now for a special purpose. They will be in the first resurrection and will help Christ rule the world and teach mankind the right way of life. In that sense, they are pioneers. As people who have overcome and learned God's righteous law and way of life, they will be able to help mankind in the millennium and white throne judgment learn that same way. They will understand mankind's problems because they will know what it is like to fight against human nature. They can show people in the millennium and general resurrection how to overcome. They can encourage them. They can understand them. And the people in the millennium and general resurrection will know that, as the first fruits have learned to live God's way of life, they can do it too. In that way, the first fruits will be a blessing to mankind. God can use them as examples and as teachers to show mankind the way.

Speaking to Christians, Paul wrote, "For as you in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:30-33).

What God Requires of Christians in this Age

Those who are called to salvation in this age, as first fruits, have a special responsibility. Their time for salvation is now. They are having their chance to overcome and endure to the end, now (Matthew 10:22, 24:13, Revelation 2:26, 3:21). With God's help through the Holy Spirit dwelling in their minds, they must overcome Satan, they must overcome the influences of this worldly society, and they must overcome their own carnal nature.

If they believe and obey God, they will be made immortal at the second coming of Christ, raised in a resurrection if dead, or changed to immortality if alive. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). They will then rule with Christ, as kings and priests ruling and teaching the nations God's law, helping Christ bring peace and happiness to mankind (Revelation 20:4-6, Isaiah 11:9). Each person's reward will depend on what he does with the opportunities he has in this life, as illustrated by the parable of the talents. Some will rule over five cities, some over ten cities (Matthew 25:14-30). The twelve apostles will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

The few God has called in this age must overcome Satan's influence and reject Satan's way of life. They must choose to believe what God says in His word, the Bible. They must believe the true gospel. They must repent of their sins and sinful nature. They must strive to obey the two great commandments, to love God with all their being and to love their neighbor as themselves. They must strive to obey all of the Ten Commandments. They must strive to obey all of God's teaching in the Bible. They must seek God's will in everything more than their own will.

Repentance involves more than repenting of those things we think are sinful or which bother our conscience. We must know what sin is. God tells us, "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). It is the law of God that defines what is right and wrong. Paul explains, using the example of covetousness, showing that he would not know that coveting was a sin unless the law said, "you shall not covet" (Romans 7:7). It is God who decides what sin is and what righteousness is, not us. Faith requires we believe God's definition of sin, not our own. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). We must learn to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4), and **fear** to break God's word (Isaiah 66:2). If something seems right to us, but God says not to do it, it is sin, and we must repent of it.

To those who believe and obey God, He gives the gift of His Spirit (Acts 2:38, 5:32). God's Holy Spirit is the mind and power of God, and by His Spirit dwelling in the mind of a Christian, God helps us understand God's word and spiritual truth and helps us to live God's way of life (1 Corinthians 2:9-16, 2 Timothy 1:7, John 14:25-26, Romans 8:13-16). It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person that makes him or her a true Christian and a member of God's true Church.

The Holy Spirit is actually the down payment of eternal life, which Christians will receive in full when they are resurrected to immortality, made spirit, at the second coming of Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14).

We must have faith in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, and in all God's word, the Bible. But our faith must be a living faith, a faith that leads to obedient action, not a dead faith that acknowledges God's truth verbally but does not live it. True faith bears the fruit of obedience to God's holy law (James 2:14-26). "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12, KJV). Obedience to God's word and law confirms our faith and proves it genuine.

God's way requires that we believe what He says, unlike Lucifer, who disbelieved God. We must succeed where Lucifer failed before God will entrust us with eternal life and the power that will go with it (Revelation 2:26-27).

We therefore must believe the Bible, since the Bible is God's word. The Bible is God speaking, and God cannot lie (John 10:34-36, 2 Timothy 3:15-16, Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, Psalm 19:7-11).

God will surely test us in this. We must believe the Bible more than our own opinions (Proverbs 3:5-6, 14:12, 16:25, Isaiah 66:2).

We must believe the Bible more than we believe our churches, because churches, even the true church, can make mistakes, as the Bible clearly teaches. Go through the messages from Christ to the seven churches in Revelation. Many had serious errors that Christ rebukes them for, even doctrinal errors, yet they are His churches (Revelation 1:11-20, 2:4, 14-16, 20-23, 3:1-4, 15-17).

We must believe the Bible more than we believe our ministers (Psalm 118:8-9, Jeremiah 17:5-9). Servants of God can make mistakes. Paul rebuked Peter for his error (Galatians 2:11-13). Paul and Barnabas had contention (Acts 15:36-40). Even a prophet can make a mistake in speaking for God. King David went to God's true prophet, Nathan, about his idea to build a temple for God, and the prophet Nathan told him to go ahead. But that night, God corrected Nathan and told him to tell David he was NOT to build the temple. Nathan was a true prophet,

but he made a mistake until God corrected him (1 Chronicles 17:1-4). Later, God used Nathan to correct and rebuke David for his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

Ministers, pastors, evangelists, prophets, and apostles are still *men*, not perfect, human and subject to error. We should respect those who hold an office, but they are still men and can make mistakes. Some may even be false prophets or false apostles, wolves in sheep's clothing (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). How do we know if they are false? By their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20), and a main fruit is their *doctrine*. We test their doctrines by the *Bible*. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). Even if a prophet can work miracles, that is not the test. False prophets can work signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Matthew 24:24-25, Mark 13:22-23, Revelation 13:10-15, 16:13-14, 19:20).

God pronounces a curse on anyone who puts his trust in human beings. "Thus said the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:5). "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psalm 146:3). I do not see ministers excluded from this. We can love men and pray for them, we can respect an office, but TRUST, especially in doctrinal matters, belongs only to God, who alone is infallible and one hundred percent trustworthy.

God has given ministers in His Church certain authority over administrative matters in the Church (2 Corinthians 10:8, Hebrews 13:17), but He has not given ministers authority over what we *believe*. "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith you stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24). No minister, pastor, evangelist, prophet, apostle, priest, or pope has authority over what doctrine you believe. Only God has that authority, and God speaks to you through the Bible.

We should test and prove doctrine by the Bible. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

We must believe the Bible more than our religious traditions. Christ rebuked the Pharisees for following their traditions, which Christ called "the traditions of men", traditions which contradicted the Bible. "He answered and said to them, Well has Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. However, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do. And he said to them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:6-9). Paul praised the Corinthians for following the traditions they received, but Paul is referring to the traditions *he*, Paul, passed on to *them* (1 Corinthians 11:1-2, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6), not to every tradition

passed on in every church today including Catholic traditions, Orthodox traditions, Anglican traditions, Lutheran traditions, Baptist traditions, Methodist traditions, Presbyterian traditions, Episcopalian traditions, Seventh Day Adventist traditions, Mormon traditions, Quaker traditions, Jehovah Witnesses traditions, etc. These churches all have different traditions and different doctrines, so they can't all be the traditions Paul was talking about. Paul was talking about the traditions he passed on to the churches at that time, the true traditions of the first century Church of God. How do we know what those traditions and doctrines were? By the Bible. There is no other way. The traditions and doctrines Paul taught were simply the true doctrines of God's word, the Bible, some of which Paul himself wrote, under inspiration of God.

Some parts of the Bible are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). We must take the time to study, to let clear scriptures interpret difficult ones. Paul says we only know in part, so our understanding on a subject may be incomplete (1 Corinthians 13:9). So we must always be ready to learn what God has to teach us in the Bible, always ready to let the Bible correct us in our beliefs and behavior (2 Timothy 3:16). We are to GROW in knowledge. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Early in this article I spoke briefly of the scientific method vs. what I call the "faith method". These are two methods for acquiring knowledge. The secular world puts its trust in the scientific method. Lucifer may have originated that method by experimenting with sin to see the result.

That same Lucifer has become Satan, the enemy of God and the deceiver of all mankind, and God has allowed Satan to have great powers of deception at this time. Human beings, by their own power and intelligence, are not able to escape this deception without God's help.

But for those God calls in this age, there is a way to escape Satan's deception and come to learn God's truth. It requires believing what God says, even when it is hard, and believing strongly enough to ACT on that belief. This is what I have called, "the faith method". Here is how it works.

You read or study the Bible. Some things you may understand right away, and some things you may not understand right way. Some things may take time because you have to put many scriptures together on a particular topic or doctrine to get the whole picture. But you keep reading or studying with an open mind, a mind that is willing to learn, a mind willing to believe God and learn what He is teaching you.

Then you find something that contradicts something you already believe or want to believe. Maybe it differs from what your church or your minister has taught you. Maybe it differs from what you were taught growing up. You might search the Bible for additional scriptures that help to make things clear. But in the end, it is still there. You have found something different from what you have believed. It could be a small doctrine or a big one.

Will you believe God?

That is the test.

You can go either way.

If you believe God, you will begin to obey Him. Living faith leads to obedient action. If it is something hard to obey, you will have to begin to fight yourself to overcome temptations to sin. If it is a matter of doctrinal belief, you will change your belief to fit the Bible.

Or...

Or, you can keep your existing belief. You can believe what you want to believe and not change. There are several ways you can do this. You can simply reject the Bible and decide it is just the collected writings of men, not inspired by God. But there is no excuse for this because, as I said near the beginning of this article, you can prove that God inspired the Bible by fulfilled prophecy. Prophecies written in the Bible thousands of years ago have come true in the last few hundred years with an accuracy that cannot be explained to a reasonable person as coincidence (see end of this article for more information). Another method is simply to twist the scriptures to fit what you want to believe. God lets you to do this (I don't mean He gives you permission, but He doesn't stop you - He makes it possible for you to twist the meaning of verses as you like). You can let your doctrines and opinions interpret the Bible, making the scripture fit into the framework of your doctrines, rather than letting the Bible shape your doctrines. You can do this unconsciously.

Either way, God has tested you, and you have made your choice. You have demonstrated to God where you stand.

Now, if you choose to believe and obey God, if you adjust your personal beliefs to fit the Bible, then you have passed a test and God will help you to understand more of the Bible. He will open your mind to understand more truth. The more you believe and obey His commandments, the more you will understand. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" (Psalm 111:10).

And each time you learn something new, if you believe and obey God, God will help you understand more of the Bible.

In this way, little by little, God can bring you out of Satan's deceptions into the truth, IF you do your part to believe Him.

It can be hard. Change can be very hard, but that is what Christians are called to. "Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in therewith: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads to life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). What is happening is that you are showing God that, when faced with the same choice Lucifer had to make, to believe God or not, you are rejecting Lucifer's mistake. You are making the right choice whereas he made the wrong choice. You are succeeding where he failed. And as you reject Satan's way of doubting God's word and choose God's way of believing and trusting God, God will free you from Satan's deceptions and reveal more and more truth to you. You are showing God that He can entrust you with eternal life because you will not use that eternal life to rebel against Him as Lucifer did. You will not become another Satan in God's kingdom.

But what happens if, at some point in this process, you reject the word of God and refuse to believe Him on some point?

The understanding stops. You are unlikely to learn more after that. You need God's help to understand, and He helps those who believe and obey Him. Unless you repent of your disbelief, you will not escape the deceptions of Satan.

Most of the world follows Satan in disbelief of God's word. The world as a whole is deceived by Satan. And unless God gives a person special help, that person will not be able to free himself or herself from Satan's way of thinking. Most of the world will get its chance for salvation later when Satan is no longer around to deceive.

But if you are one that is being specially called by God in this age to be part of the first fruits, His Church, then He is giving you your chance for salvation now. He will open your mind to let you see some of His truth. But you must pass the test. You must believe God.

Even if it is hard.

It wasn't easy for Jesus Christ to die a painful death. But He did it for us, and He requires that we suffer for Him (Matthew 26:38-39, 1 Peter 3:14, 1 Peter 2:20-21, Romans 8:17-18).

"He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that takes not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me. He that finds his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:37-39). "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33). Do you believe God? Do you believe what He is saying?

"But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:17-19).

"Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Be not high minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not you. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off" (Romans 11:20-22).

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Does God **require** that you prove everything from the Bible?

Suppose you have been taught all the true doctrines of God from your youth. You may attend a church that is very accurate in all its teachings, and your ministers may be faithfully teaching you the truth from the Bible without any serious error. Perhaps you have simply believed what they taught you and never proved the truth from the Bible. Does God reject your faith because you haven't proved the important doctrines from the Bible? Is your faith in God and Christ insufficient because you have learned the truth from ministers and not from the Bible?

I don't say that, necessarily. God is the judge, and He knows the heart. He wants children who have faith in **Him**.

In the first century New Testament Church, the Bible was not complete because the New Testament was being written. Even the Old Testament was not widely available because the printing press was not invented and few people could afford all the books of the Old Testament. Individual books were copied by hand, and only a few people had a few of the books. Those who had access to Old Testament scriptures certainly used those scriptures to see if the teachings of the apostles were accurate, and God commends them for that (Acts 17:11). Not everyone had that access. But those who did not have access knew that the word of the apostles in those days was from God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). How did they know? By the miracles the apostles performed in those days (2 Corinthians 12:12), and by the fact that they heard the scriptures preached in the synagogues and they knew the apostles were being consistent with the scriptures (Acts 15:21). God gave proof that the apostles were speaking for Him. Yet, even with the miracles, those who listened to the apostles had to compare what they said with the scriptures as they had access to the scriptures. If you go through some of Paul's epistles, it is evident that he assumes that his readers are familiar with the Bible and he uses many Old Testament scriptures to prove and back up his teachings.

Today, we do not have proof of God's word in the public miracles performed by God's true apostles who preach that word, but we have the Bible, complete and widely available. And we have a different kind of proof of God's word - fulfilled prophecy! Fulfilled prophecy is proof in our day that the Bible is God's word just as miracles performed by apostles were evidence in the first century that the apostles were preaching the word of God.

God looks at the heart. He may know if your faith is in Him or if it is in men. Yet, He may want to test you. He knows us, but sometimes He knows us by *testing* us, as He tested Abraham. "And the angel of the LORD called to him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do you any thing to him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son" (Genesis 22:11-13)

It is possible God accepts the faith of one who, for whatever reason, may not have yet proved the truth from the Bible, but has an attitude He discerns that is WILLING to believe the Bible more than men.

I, myself, would be afraid to rely on the doctrines of my church, which might be only the doctrines of men, without proving them from God's word, the Bible. God has made His word available to us, and He expects us to use it. If I don't, I risk being deceived. How can I know my church and my ministers are teaching the truth unless I check up in the Bible?

The safest route, one I think will please God in every case, is to study God's word and prove every major doctrine from the Bible. We should take the time to do that, even if it takes a while. Or, is it better to spend our time watching TV?

We should learn from the positive example of Abraham. "Listen to me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the LORD: look to the rock from where you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from where you are dig. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah that bore you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him" (Isaiah 51:1-2). "For what said the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3). "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:6-7). "And the scripture was fulfilled which said, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23). "And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, This shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if you be able to number them: and he said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:4-6).

As God counted Abraham's faith in God's word as righteousness, so will God count it as righteousness to us if we believe His word, the Bible, more than our traditions, our opinions, our churches, and our ministers.

Summary - God's Plan for the Church and for the World

The world as a whole follows Satan's way of life of doubt and disobedience towards God's word, the Bible.

But those God calls as first fruits in this age must make a choice. They must face the same choice as Lucifer. They must decide if they will believe and obey God or decide for themselves what is right and wrong. They must decide how they will acquire knowledge of moral and doctrinal matters.

The method of learning by experimenting is called the scientific method. Learning by believing what God says in the Bible is what faith is. You could call it the "faith method". Science today will not give any credence to anything that cannot be learned by experimenting and/or observation. Scientists make a false god out of the scientific method. But God wants a family to share life with forever, and He wants the members of His family to always and without reservation believe and obey what He says. So those who are willing to believe and obey God will be given eternal life.

The purpose of the Church is to teach, to train, to prepare, and to help save those few whom God is calling to salvation now, in this age, to be pioneers of the way of life God will begin to teach all mankind after the return of Christ. It is also the purpose and the commission of the Church to preach the true gospel to all nations as a witness, and to make disciples of those few whose minds God opens, who respond to the gospel, who are being called by God to salvation at this time.

Those who are true Christians must trust and believe God, strive to obey God's commandments and live by every word of God, and overcome and remain faithful to the end, either the end of their life or the return of Christ, whichever comes first.

Those Christians who overcome and endure to the end will be in the first resurrection, which occurs when Christ returns, and will be in the kingdom of God with Christ ruling mankind on the earth.

Those in the first resurrection are granted immortality in the kingdom of God (eternal life) when Christ returns. The vast majority of mankind comes up in a general resurrection (white throne judgment) and can repent at that time. Those who refuse will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire. Those who repent can receive eternal life in God's kingdom.

The Annual Feasts and Holy Days of God

God gave seven annual feasts and holy days to ancient Israel, and they help to teach God's plan of salvation for mankind. Here is a summary of all of them and what they help to teach.

Passover represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven. The slain lamb represents Jesus Christ. As God "passed over" the houses that had the blood of the lamb and did not kill the firstborn, so God passes over our sins when we repent, believe the gospel, and accept Jesus Christ as our savior.

The Days of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follow Passover, are a seven day feast with the first and last days being holy days, sabbath days of rest and assembly. During this time, leavening and leavened products are avoided (food made with yeast, baking soda, baking powder, etc.) and unleavened bread is eaten. The leavening represents sin, and this feast represents repentance and the putting of sin out of our lives. After the sacrifice of Christ, we must do our part to repent and obey God, and this is what the Days of Unleavened Bread help to teach us. This feast represents our need for repentance and obedience to God's law (Leviticus 23:6-8, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Pentecost is a holy day, an annual sabbath, and it represents the gift of the Holy Spirit. It also represents the Church as the first fruits, the early spiritual harvest. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible and spiritual knowledge and empowers us to know and do God's will in our lives.

The Day of Trumpets is a holy day, an annual sabbath, and it represents the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the saints in the first resurrection, and the Day of the Lord, which precedes both. It is those who receive the Holy Spirit in this age, as represented by Pentecost, who will be in that first resurrection, so in a sense, the Day of Trumpets represents the completion of the salvation that is begun with Pentecost. Church members who have died in the faith are asleep in the grave until the second coming of Christ, but at that time they will be brought back to life, immortal, in the kingdom of God and will rule the earth with Christ (Leviticus 23:23-25, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Revelation 8:1-6, 11:15).

The Day of Atonement is a day of fasting, no food or water for 24 hours. It is also a holy day, a sabbath of rest and assembly. It represents two things. Like Passover, it also teaches us about the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. But it also looks forward to the putting away of Satan so he can no longer deceive mankind during the millennium and after the general resurrection of the dead (Leviticus 16:5-31, Revelation 20:1-3).

The Feast of Tabernacles is a seven day feast with the first day being a holy day, an annual sabbath. It represents the millennium and the happiness that will be over all the earth during the one thousand year reign of Christ over all nations (Leviticus 23:33-35, 39-42, Deuteronomy 16:13-15, 11:6-9, Isaiah 2:2-4, Revelation 20:4-6).

The Last Great Day is a feast and holy day, and follows immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. It represents the general resurrection of the dead, also called the white throne judgment, when the majority of mankind will be resurrected back to physical life and will have their chance for salvation (Leviticus 23:36, Ezekiel 37:1-14, John 7:37-38, Revelation 20:11-15).

The original New Testament Church observed these feasts and holy days, and God intends Christians to observe them today.

For more detail and scriptures about these days, see the end of this article.

What's Ahead According to Bible Prophecy

When Jesus Christ said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21), He was speaking of a time shortly ahead. It is a period of time and an event known as the "great tribulation". The prophet Jeremiah wrote about that same time. "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jeremiah 30:7).

God is letting mankind experience the full effect of Satan's way of life of doubt and disobedience towards God's word. This will culminate in a great crisis at the end of the six thousand years, a time of trouble so great that, unless God intervened and sent Christ to save the earth, no one would survive (Matthew 24:22).

There is not space in this article to go into all the proofs and details here, but at the end of this article is a link to more information that will explain and prove this in detail.

Suffice it to summarize for now, this time of trouble will fall first upon the United States and English-speaking nations of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, and also the state of Israel, but will be followed by the Day of the Lord, which will be God's direct punishment upon the whole world for its sins (Genesis 35:10-11, 48:8-20, 49:1-2, 22-26, 28, Jeremiah 30:7).

God teaches, corrects, and disciplines us for our good as a wise and loving parent disciplines his children for their good, to teach them right from wrong.

God is about to punish the United States and other nations for our sins.

In the United States, we used to be a God-fearing nation, to a degree. No longer. Morality has gone out the window.

We have become consumed with pleasure, and we love pleasure, entertainment, and recreation more than we love God. Lying, stealing, adultery, fornication, pornography, speaking God's name in a frivolous and disrespectful manner, Sabbath breaking, idolatry, etc. have all become commonplace in our society.

Our secular education system acts as if there is no God. Evolution, a theory that denies God as Creator, is taught in the public schools, and those who suggest that God was involved in the design and creation of life are ridiculed.

We murder our own children by the millions before they are even born (Jeremiah 2:34).

Even most religious people do not believe and obey God. Not really. God makes it clear in the Bible that we are to rest on His Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, but most people do not regard what the Bible says on this subject. In disrespecting the Bible, they are disrespecting God. Perhaps a few may be willing to learn the truth and obey the Bible, but the majority do not care what the Bible says.

God makes it clear in the Bible that we are NOT to use images and statues in worship, yet millions hang crucifixes and so-called "holy" pictures in their homes, thinking it "helps" them worship the true God, but in doing this they are disobeying God, and God does not accept that kind of worship (Exodus 20:4-6, Deuteronomy 4:15-18).

God commanded that His annual feasts and holy days be kept, but mainstream Christianity has abandoned God's days and instead substituted days borrowed from ancient paganism, Christmas and Easter, which God forbids us to do (Deuteronomy 12:30-32).

So God is going to deal with us in a language we will understand.

Christ said the time of trouble will be greater than any time of trouble on the earth since there was a nation. What will it be like?

Our rain and food supply will be cut off. We will be invaded and conquered by our enemies. The starvation will be so bad some parents will eat their own children. One third will die from starvation and disease, one third will die in war, and one third will go into captivity, enslaved by our enemies, and most of those will die also. Ninety percent of our people will die in about a two-and-a-half period of time. It will make the slaughter of the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps seem small in comparison.

We are rapidly heading for a disaster few of our people can even imagine.

But during this suffering, we will repent, and then God will send Christ to the earth to save those who are left and bring peace and happiness to the earth.

As a loving father spansks his children for their good, so God will spank us. And we will learn the lesson.

But a few may be protected during this time of suffering and will not have to go through it. Christ said, "Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). To those who are accounted worthy, at the end, Christ says, "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

God is a God of mercy. The purpose of this punishment is to bring us to repentance, but those who repent now may not have to go through it. God spared ancient Nineveh because they responded to His warning (Jonah 3:1-10) - perhaps He will spare some of us.

When will this happen? It will happen during the three-and-a-half years just prior to the return of Christ. No one knows the exact time of Christ's return (Matthew 24:36, 42-44, Acts 1:6-7). However, we can see the signs of the times and know that it is near (Matthew 16:1-3, 24:32-33). My estimate is that the tribulation will begin in the lifetime of most of you reading this, perhaps in the next ten to fifteen years, maybe more, maybe less.

Someone might say, if the most of world is blinded by Satan and UNABLE to turn to Christ in this age, then why will God punish the world for its sins? Paul wrote, "Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You will say then to me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? No but, O man, who are you that reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?" (Romans 9:18-20). Also, "Is God unrighteous who takes vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" (Romans 3:5-6).

Punishment and suffering is one of the ways God teaches us lessons and forms righteous character in us. Christ Himself was willing to suffer to bring about the salvation of mankind. Even though Satan blinds the world and tempts us into sin, that does not mean that we have no responsibility for our sins. It is a shared responsibility. Satan leads humans to sin, and in that sense, Satan has a responsibility for the sins of mankind, but humans also yield to that temptation, and so we also have a responsibility for the sins we commit.

And the severity of the punishment is in proportion to the guilt based on how much we know. Those who know they are doing wrong receive a greater punishment, those who are doing wrong ignorantly, not knowing they do wrong, thinking they are doing right because Satan has deceived them, will receive a lesser punishment. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For to whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48). Those who sin ignorantly, not knowing they do wrong because they are deceived by Satan in this age, will be punished with trials, tribulation, and suffering, but not with the "many stripes" of the lake of fire, not until they are taught the truth and have a chance to repent.

God is just, wise, and righteous to use punishment and suffering to teach us the consequences of our sins and to help us to repent and turn from them.

After the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, Christ will return to save mankind. He and the saints made immortal in the first resurrection will rule the earth and teach mankind the way to peace and happiness. Satan will be put away and there will be peace, prosperity, and joy all over the earth. After this thousand year period, there will be a general resurrection of the dead, and all mankind who had lived and died without a chance to be saved will have their opportunity for salvation.

Then, at the end, the wicked, those who have refused to repent, will be destroyed forever in the lake of fire, and there will be a new heavens and a new earth. All those who have been saved will be made immortal, sons and daughters of God in the kingdom of God. God will be on earth (Revelation 21:1-4), and the new earth will be God's headquarters over the entire universe. There will be no more sin, no more suffering, but God's family will live together in peace and harmony, working cooperatively in whatever projects God has in mind for us in the entire universe. Perhaps we will create life on other planets. God does not reveal the details. But He did not create this huge universe in vain. He has a purpose in mind for the billions of stars and galaxies. We will not be idle.

And whatever we will be doing for eternity, no one will introduce conflict, contention, or hostile competition to ruin our joy of accomplishment, for all of us will have learned our lesson

to believe what God teaches us, to obey Him, to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We will work together as a family and as a perfect team.

Those who make it into that kingdom will enjoy life forever.

This is the good news of the kingdom of God, the true gospel.

Chapter two of Daniel shows how the kingdom of God will be established on the earth. In Daniel 2:1-45 is a description of an event in which God reveals to Daniel and to Nebuchadnezzar the course of future events leading up to and including the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

The good news is that this world-ruling kingdom will establish peace and joy over the earth, but also that through Jesus Christ we can enter that kingdom that will rule over the nations. This kingdom will eventually rule over the entire universe. Those in that kingdom will be sons and daughters of God himself, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and collectively the Church will be the wife of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:17-18, Hebrews 2:11-13, 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Ephesians 5:22-32, Revelation 19:7-9). The Bible says we will be LIKE Jesus Christ: "...we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We will be glorified and will be given great power and authority, as fitting for children of the God who created the universe (Romans 8:14-22). As Christ is greater than angels, so will we be greater than angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

That is the true gospel.

God's Ultimate Purpose for Mankind

God is building a family, and our destiny is to be sons and daughters of God the Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God. As members of God's family, we will share in His divine nature and power. In a sense, God is reproducing Himself in mankind. The process God began when He made Adam and Eve in His image and likeness will be complete. That is God's purpose for making mankind. Man's destiny is to be born into God's family as God's children.

As members of God's divine family, we will be working on creative projects, managing and ruling the universe, for eternity. Those who make it into God's kingdom will rule the universe

with God forever. God may have tremendous creative projects in mind for His family for eternity. We will share in God's power and joy, and with God, we will enjoy exciting accomplishments for all eternity.

The purpose of this life is to test us and train us to live the right way of life, to prepare us for an eternity of cooperation, harmony, and working together in happiness in the kingdom of God.

I asked several questions at the beginning of this article.

Why are so few being saved in human history? Why are so few being saved even today? God has allotted 6,000 years for man to learn the painful lesson that living Satan's way of self-centeredness, doubting God's word, and disobeying God's commandments only leads to suffering and destruction, and during this time God is not trying to save the world, but only a few Christians that He calls and draws into the Church to be pioneers, like a small early harvest, to be trained to rule with Christ to save the rest of humanity in the future and to proclaim the advance good news announcement of Christ's coming kingdom. But after this 6,000 year age is over, Christ will return and rule mankind for 1,000 years and teach man the right way to live, and all humanity alive at that time can be saved. Moreover, in the general resurrection that follows, everyone ever born who died without having a real chance for salvation will be resurrected back to physical life and will have their first opportunity to hear the true gospel without Satan around to deceive them, and they will have their chance for salvation then.

It is not God's will that anyone be permanently lost. "Say to them, As I live, said the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). "For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all" (Romans 11:32).

No one will be permanently lost because of circumstance of birth over which he has no control.

Only those who refuse to believe and repent, even after they heard the gospel and had a chance to accept it, will be lost, and even they will not be tortured forever, but will be burned up in the lake of fire and put out of their misery permanently.

Why does God allow so much suffering and injustice in this life? God allows it so man can learn through hard experience what Satan's way is like. But in the end, God will put an end to all pain and suffering and there will be universal joy forever.

Those who demonstrate that they are willing to live God's way of trusting and believing what He says and obeying all His law and commandments will be entrusted with eternal life, and

they will live forever in joy, in happiness, in harmony, in cooperation, and in love. Those who won't will be permanently destroyed so they will not cause suffering for themselves and others. The universe and all that is in it will belong to God and His children forever.

The early summer harvest in the Old Testament pictured by the Feast of Weeks represents the Church, which started on the Day of Pentecost. Both are a small harvest, not the large harvest that comes later. That is the secret meaning of Pentecost that most churches do not know, but those who are willing to believe and obey what God says in the Bible can learn and understand that meaning. God is only calling a few during this 6,000 year age of mankind under Satan's rule, a small spiritual harvest, the first fruits. Later He will call everyone to salvation as pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Who Will You Believe?

I know what I am writing here goes contrary to the traditional teachings of most mainstream churches. But the Bible is clear that men, all men, can make mistakes, and that the traditions of men cannot be trusted. Only God's word, the Bible, is infallible and sure.

It is God's will that those who are willing to choose to believe and trust His word and to obey it, even when it is hard, will be able to understand His word and His truth. Those who are not willing to believe and obey Him will not understand the Bible. The majority of people will not believe or understand.

You the reader can believe your mainstream church traditions because you believe your church cannot be wrong or that God would not allow your church to be wrong, and you can twist the scriptures, consciously or unconsciously, to fit your church's traditional doctrines, letting your church and its traditions interpret the Bible for you. But if you do that, you will not understand the Bible, and you are likely to be caught up in the disasters that are coming upon the world.

Or, you can believe the Bible, and if you do, and if you obey God, He will help you to understand the Bible.

I do not ask you to believe me. Look up the scriptures I have given (and study the rest of the Bible also), see for yourself, and believe what you see in the Bible. Even if you were willing to believe me, I would not want you to believe these things because I say them. If you did that, you would believe the truth, but for the wrong reason. Believe God. Believe the things you believe for the right reason, because you have studied the Bible with an open mind and have proved the truth for yourself from God's Word.

That is my challenge to you.

For Further Information and Proofs

The True Gospel and the Ezekiel Warning is a free, full-length, online book that explains what I have written in this article in more detail, and gives much more. You can read it online or download it in PDF format. This book is in the public domain and can be freely copied. No printed copies are available. See website address below.

Here is a table of contents:

Chapter 1 - The United States and Britain in prophecy.

This chapter shows you how to prove the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible. It points out the flaws in the theory of evolution, and it shows how the design of the universe, and even life, proves the existence of a Creator. It proves that God inspired the Bible by showing how prophecies written thousands of years ago have been fulfilled in the last two hundred years with an accuracy that cannot be reasonably explained as coincidence. It also shows what Bible prophecy says is just ahead for the world, especially the English-speaking nations of the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand.

Chapter 2 - What is the True Gospel?

This chapter explains from the Bible what the true gospel is. It explains the kingdom of God and God's plan for the salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ. It explains in detail the meaning of each of the seven annual feast and holy days of God.

Chapter 3 - Is Observance of the Weekly Sabbath and Annual Feast Days Required?

What does the Bible really teach about the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days and feasts given in the Old Testament? Are these days only part of the Old Covenant and obsolete, or should they be kept today? This chapter explains the answer from the Bible.

Chapter 4 - The Name of God

Is God's name "Jehovah"? Is "God" a name or a title only? Is Jesus Christ God, and has He existed forever, or was He created? Is God more than one person? Is it correct to use "Lord" as God's name? These are some of the questions that will be answered from the Bible in this chapter.

Chapter 5 - How to Know the Truth

Seventh Day Adventists regard Helen White as a prophet. Mormons believe Joseph Smith was a prophet and that the Book of Mormon is inspired by God. Bible prophecy predicts both true and false prophets to appear between now and the return of Christ. It is important to know therefore how to tell if a man is a true prophet of God, or not. This chapter covers the basics of the signs of a true prophet and what to look for in evaluating if a man or woman is a true prophet of God. It also discusses the issue of which is the higher authority for belief and doctrine, the Bible or the Church.

Chapter 6 - The Theory of Evolution and the Creation of Species.

This chapter shows that the physical evidence in fossils and genetics is entirely consistent with a literal understanding of Genesis. It also proves that evolution is a faith and that the scientific method itself prevents science from proving that evolution occurred. It also shows from the Bible how God views our materialistic society, a society that is dominated more and more by atheistic evolution.

Chapter 7 - The Ezekiel Warning

The Ezekiel warning is a warning of punishment upon the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and other nations for our sins. This chapter shows where to find that warning in the Bible, what our sins are, and what the punishment will be like.

Here is the website address for this book:

<http://www.originalgospel.org>

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All Bible quotes are from the American King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated. Here is the web address for this version:

<http://www.angelfire.com/al4/allenkc/akjv>

KJV = King James Version.

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