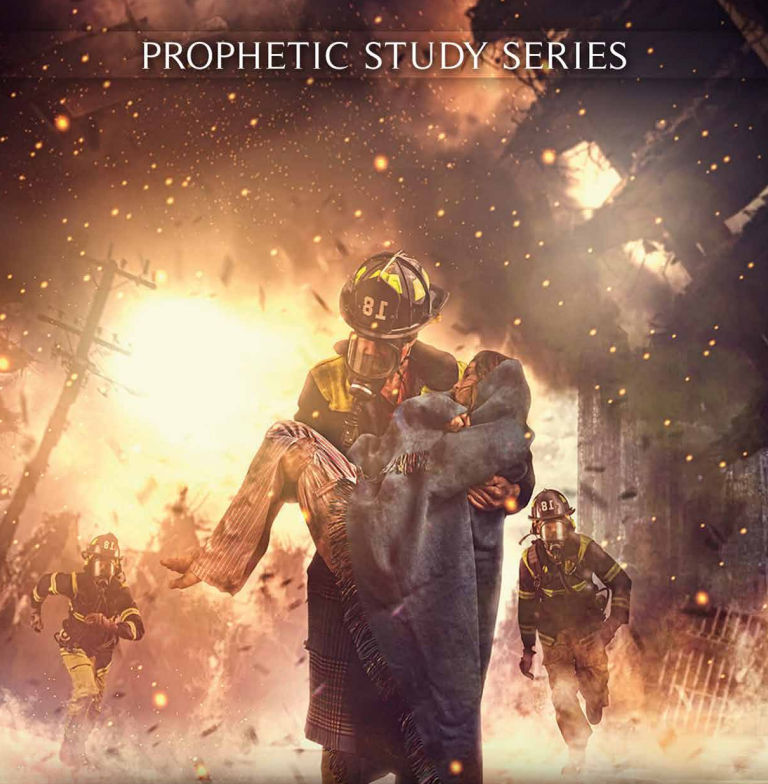


PROPHETIC STUDY SERIES



# SALVATION: FAITH? GRACE? WORKS?

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BOOKLET #10

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

There are seven questions in this booklet which I hope you will answer. The author's answers are listed at the end. May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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# **Salvation: Faith? Grace? Works?**

“What must I do to be saved?” No question provokes so many different answers. People of every culture, language, and nation ponder this question because every nation and tribe has a religion of some kind. The problem with this question about salvation is its answer. Ask a Catholic, Baptist, Jew, Moslem, and Hindu this question and you will receive five different answers! Even more confusing is the fact that factions within each religious group will give different answers!

Is there one correct answer? Is there only one way to heaven? A few years ago, a Gallup poll was conducted on the subject of salvation. Eighty-seven percent of the people questioned were convinced that they were going to heaven, but almost ninety percent knew someone going to hell. Think about that for a moment.

## **From Heaven’s Point of View**

Consider the issue of salvation from heaven’s point of view. There are 7.7+ billion people (as of 2019) on this planet and according to the Bible, God is

not willing anyone should perish.<sup>1</sup> God foreknew people on earth would speak different languages, have diverse customs, and think differently about religion. So, God prepared the Plan of Salvation to encompass each human being who would ever live *before* He created the world. Consequently, those who wish to understand the enormous scope of salvation must understand qualities describing the powers of God.

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 Question #1: God prepared the plan \_\_\_\_\_  
 He created the world.  
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## **God's Powers**

God is omnipotent. This means He can do what He pleases with anything or anybody. He is accountable to no one, yet is willing to be studied. He is the source of all authority and power, yet gives His subjects the power of choice. He speaks and worlds exist. He could double the size of our infinite universe in a split second by simply commanding it. He creates matter and no one can destroy it. He sets limits and no one can change them. He could speak Earth's solar system out of existence if He

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

wanted to and we would cease to be the very moment the words left His lips! Through Him everything exists. Without Him, there is nothing.

**God says, “This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens, who spreads out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.”<sup>1</sup>**

God is omniscient. This means that He knows everything about everything. He knows everything about the past and everything about the future with the same clarity. God knew the names of those who would choose eternal life and who would not before

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 44:24-25; 46:9-11

the world was created. God knew before the world began who would be saved and who would be lost.

This fact bothers many people because they do not understand the difference between God's foreknowledge and His ability to predestine something. According to the dictionary, predestination means, "to decree beforehand." Because the Godhead is omnipotent, they can predestine things to happen because they want them to happen.

For example, Jesus was predestined to die on Calvary long before the event occurred. The Plan of Salvation was predestined before the world was created.

Again, God says, **"I say: 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that I will do."**<sup>1</sup> So, predestination is a function of God's omnipotence. He can decree beforehand anything to happen and it will happen because He is omnipotent.

On the other hand, foreknowledge is a function of God's omniscience. Because He knows everything

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 46:10-11

about everything, He has foreknowledge. He knows what is going to happen, not because He makes it happen, but because He knows it will happen! God did not predestine Adam and Eve to sin. However, He foreknew they would sin.

In the same way, He knows *who will choose* to be saved and who will choose to be lost. However, God *has not predestined* some people to be saved and others lost. The Bible says, **“He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.<sup>1</sup> He [God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”<sup>2</sup>**

To say that God predestines eternal reward is a false and malicious charge against His Plan of Salvation. If God predestined the eternal reward of a man without recognizing man’s actions or power of choice, the Plan of Salvation would be nothing more than a deceptive trick. If God predestined people to be saved and others lost, there would have been no need for the Plan of Salvation. What would be the point of choosing Jesus as our Savior if we were predestined to be lost?

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:5

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 3:9, insertion mine

In simple terms, the difference between predestination and foreknowledge is: Predestination (decreeing beforehand) is setting the alarm clock to go off. Foreknowledge (knowing beforehand) is looking at a clock and observing it will go off.

### **Essential differences**

The bottom line: There is an essential difference between God's foreknowledge and God's predestination. Predestination *causes* the outcome whereas foreknowledge *knows* the outcome. Perhaps another illustration will demonstrate this difference. Suppose an airplane pilot can see the twists and turns of a long river. In one glance, he can see the end *and* the beginning. Also imagine there are people traveling down the river on a boat, not knowing where the river leads, but they are determined to reach its end. The pilot can see where they will be when they reach the end of their journey, but the pilot has nothing to do with the travelers reaching that destination. He can only see where the boaters will be when they reach the end of the river. Knowing the end from the beginning *without* making it happen is foreknowledge. Predestination *causes* the outcome.



In short, God predestines events to happen. He does not predestine the eternal destiny of people. God, because He has foreknowledge, knows what people are going to choose to do and He not only grants us the power of choice, He encourages our use of it!

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Question #2: Predestination \_\_\_\_\_ the outcome whereas foreknowledge \_\_\_\_\_ the outcome.

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## God Predestines Events, Not People

The Old Testament story of Israel reveals Jesus does not use His foreknowledge to change the outcome of events even when they run contrary to His plans! Notice this prophecy, **“And the Lord said to Moses: ‘You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come upon them, and in that day they will ask, “Have not these disasters**

**come on us because our God is not with us?” And I will certainly hide my face in that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods.’ ”<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus knew what Israel would do in the future and told Moses. The 1,470 years of Jewish history before Jesus appeared on Earth confirms Jesus was right. However, the same 1,470 years of Jewish history also confirms that Jesus did not use His foreknowledge to make Israel a stubborn and stiff-necked people. In fact, the Old Testament verifies God did everything possible to redirect Israel from her terrible ways—time after time!<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Israel chose to rebel against God. Jesus knew Israel would rebel before they did so! God does not deal with His creatures on the basis of His foreknowledge; He deals with us on the basis of His love and our need. Carefully think this point through and you will be in awe at the love of God!

### **Back to the question**

The question, “What must I do to be saved?” implies a condition of being “unsaved.” So, what is the human race “unsaved” from?

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 31:16-18

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 3

Today, life lasts about 70 years and then man dies. What follows? Why must man die? The psalmist Moses wrote, **“Or days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”**<sup>1</sup> The Bible gives a clear explanation of who man is, where he came from, why he dies, and all that follows.

## **Watch What You Eat**

God created man as a mortal being and placed him in the Garden of Eden where he had access to the Tree of Life. As long as man remained in the garden he could live forever because the fruit of the Tree of Life sustained life indefinitely. The word mortal means subject to death. Jesus plainly told Adam, **“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”**<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil were in the middle of Eden.<sup>3</sup> Even more, these two trees shadow the Plan of Salvation. Jesus would die upon the Tree of

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1 Psalm 90:10

2 Genesis 2:16-17

3 Genesis 2:9

the Knowledge of Good and Evil so man would have access to the Tree of Life. When Jesus created Adam and Eve, they had a natural attraction for righteousness and lawful living for they were holy. As children today possess biological traits from their parents, so Adam and Eve possessed the traits of their Creator—Jesus. The Bible says, **“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **A Test of Loyalty**

Jesus placed a test in the Garden of Eden to see if Adam and Eve would choose to obey. Jesus told them they were not to eat of the fruit of a specific tree in the middle of the garden: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. One day, as Eve went to get fruit from the Tree of Life, a serpent startled her by calling to her from the forbidden tree which was near the Tree of Life. Now, the serpent in the Garden of Eden was the most beautiful and intelligent of all creatures. (Some scholars believe the serpent could fly until he was cursed to crawl upon his belly.<sup>2</sup>) Apparently, Satan entered into the body of one of the most beautiful creatures on Earth to tempt Eve. Who wouldn't be

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:14

curious if you heard a beautiful creature speak and carry on a remarkably intelligent conversation?

Satan engaged Eve and then lied to her. He deceived her into eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Satan said, **“You will not certainly die. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**<sup>1</sup>

Satan led Eve to believe that God did not want her to experience the knowledge of evil. This part of Satan’s comment was true for God did not want Adam and Eve to experience the knowledge of evil. In fact, the devil often mixes 99% truth with 1% lie to capture his subjects. God knew that the knowledge of good was enough, but Satan lied about the fatal consequence of evil. Notice the clever mixture of error with truth in the text above!

Eve ate the fruit. Then, she gave some of the forbidden fruit to Adam and he ate it also. There is a very important distinction between the sins of Adam and Eve. Eve believed a lie and she sinned without deliberation. Adam, on the other hand, willfully chose to eat the forbidden fruit and suf-

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:4-5

fer the consequences. Therefore, Adam's sin was greater than Eve's for God had directly spoken to Adam about this matter. **“And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’”**<sup>1</sup> Adam's sin was calculated and deliberate but not defiant.

God is patient and not willing that anyone should perish,<sup>2</sup> so the Holy Spirit does not give up on us for one blasphemy. Instead, the Holy Spirit only gives up on us when rebellion becomes constant. Each time we blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our willingness to blaspheme Him grows stronger. If we continue in defiance, a point will come where the Holy Spirit can do nothing more than to leave us alone.

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Question #3: Adam's sin was \_\_\_\_\_, but not \_\_\_\_\_.

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## **Passing the Blame**

That evening, Jesus confronted Adam and Eve with their sin. As Jesus came to visit, they ran and hid

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:16-17

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

themselves. They were ashamed, naked, and defensive. When confronted with their deeds, they were strangely unrepentant! Eve blamed her act on the serpent. She said, **“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”**<sup>1</sup> Even worse, Adam blamed his act of rebellion on his Creator and then on Eve! Adam said, **“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.”**<sup>2</sup>

Then Jesus turned to Adam and said, **“Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”**<sup>3</sup>

## **Access Denied**

Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden so they might not have access to the Tree of Life! The Bible says, **“The Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing**

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1 Genesis 3:13

2 Genesis 3:12

3 Genesis 3:17, 19

**good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”<sup>1</sup>**

Because of their sins, Adam and Eve were “doomed” to eternal death. **“For the wages of sin is death.”**<sup>2</sup> They had literally tasted sin and would forever be sinners. They were banished from the garden and denied access to the life-sustaining Tree of Life. The trait of rebellion against God (just like a biological trait) was passed on to the offspring of Adam and Eve. In fact, their firstborn, Cain, became a murderer!

Because Adam willfully and intentionally disobeyed God, his sin was greater than Eve’s sin. Therefore, his suffering would be greater than Eve’s. The words of the apostle Paul make a lot of sense. **“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man,**

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:22-24

<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:23



**and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”<sup>1</sup>**

Consider Adam’s suffering. The Bible says that Adam lived 930 years.<sup>2</sup> Imagine living that long and observing the terrible consequences of your own wrongdoing! In every death, suffering, and sadness, Adam observed the extended consequences of his own deed. He saw the blight of sin upon nature. For over nine centuries, Adam witnessed the degenerate effects of his willful wrongdoing.

## **Jesus Not Caught by Surprise**

Adam and Eve’s sin did not catch heaven by surprise. In fact, the very day Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus stepped between the wrath of God and the guilty pair. Jesus came to Earth and told Adam and Eve there was a way back to Eden. Ever since that day, the way back to Eden has been called the “Plan of Salvation.”

## **Basic Law**

Since all of Earth’s inhabitants are descendants of Adam and Eve, God knew when He created the world it would one day be populated with billions

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 5:5

of people having different languages, customs, and religious beliefs. The Plan of Salvation has included all people from its beginning. The plan must work for all people of every country throughout the world. Billions of people holding diverse beliefs can find their way back to Eden in a simple way. When each person is born, God instills a set of rules we call “basic law.”

Basic law allows a person to distinguish right from wrong at an early age, the age of accountability. People mature in the process of accountability as long as they seek truth. This progression was eloquently noted by Thomas Jefferson in the introduction of the U.S. Bill of Rights. He wrote, “We hold certain truths to be self-evident.” However, we all know if people do not want to see truth, they cannot understand it or see the evidence of it! In fact, those who would justify evil are the first to deny what is right. God created human beings with reasoning powers for He wants us to distinguish good from evil. If a person strives to do all that he believes is right and good, then he is doing all God asks of him. This concept suggests God has placed within each rational person the basic ability to distinguish right from wrong. People living up to the fullness

of their heart's understanding of truth glorify their Creator! On the other hand, those refusing to learn more truth are not candidates for salvation.

Paul says, **“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law [the revealed will of God], do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. This [is how it] will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.”**<sup>1</sup> The word “law” as used in this text implies the larger meaning of the word, which is, all Scripture. James also supports the concept of basic law. He says, **“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”**<sup>2</sup>

Some people do not want to know the difference between right and wrong. Paul explains their reasoning this way, **“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness**

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1 Romans 2:14-16, insertions mine

2 James 4:17

**of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them . . . so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. . . . Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. . . . Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.”<sup>1</sup>**

Billions of people down through the ages have lived and died who never knew the particulars about salvation. God foreknew the darkness of sin. Subsequently, the Plan of Salvation can save a person who does not understand all of the details. This is like the law of gravity. A person does not have to understand gravity to be affected by it. However, God is not content with basic law. He desires to restore His image within man, but for this to happen, man needs to know his Creator. This calls for much more information and education on the subject of the Plan of

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:18-28

Salvation. Jesus wants a close relationship with His children, and a close relationship is only possible when each party knows the other one very well.

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Question #4: Basic law helps us know  
\_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.  
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### **Salvation Includes Full Restoration**

The Plan of Salvation does not stop with “basic law.” On the contrary, basic law is where it all begins. Salvation consists of much more than the promise of eternal life because the human race lost more than eternal life!

God not only wants to restore eternal life to all people. Even more, He wants to restore the traits of holiness, righteousness, and divine love within man! He wants us restored back in His image! To do this, God has patiently worked through the human race to inform man of what He is like, desiring people to respond. In God’s economy, it is not enough to save man *in* his sins. God intends to save man *from* his sins.

So, the Plan of Salvation has two parts. Theologians have termed these two elements as “Justification” and “Sanctification.” Justification means God has

personally paid the price for the salvation of everyone living in the world. Sanctification means that God wants to restore His image (traits) in all human beings. Actually, sanctification works in two ways. First, holiness brings fullness of life, happiness, and joys never ending. What a contrast to the wages of evil. Second, sanctification serves as public relations for the kingdom of heaven. Those who experience the joy and fullness of life that come through sanctification become living examples of what heaven is all about. Thus, uninformed people are brought to a knowledge of the God of heaven through sanctified examples of what God offers!

These two concepts of sanctification are wonderfully explained in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> For example, Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:3-7:29

**greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>1</sup>**

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Question #5: The two elements of the plan are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
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### **How the Pieces Fit**

As mentioned before, every normal person is born with reasoning powers sufficient for “basic law.” God grants this ability so we can understand the difference between right and wrong. God appeals to this basic ability to reveal more and more light about Himself. The more we know about our Maker, the more we become like our Creator!

Some people do not want more information about God or His ways. Jesus told Nicodemus, **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:43-48

**the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”<sup>1</sup>**

Groups of people can also reject truth corporately. Entire cities, states, or nations can rebel against truth! Jesus denounced Capernaum saying, **“And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”<sup>2</sup>** In other words, Sodom’s evil was not as great as Capernaum’s because Capernaum had greater evidence of truth!

## **The Conclusion of the Matter**

Some people want to know more about God. Others do not want to know anything about Him. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus those who live up to all they know will find more light, while those who do evil will not want any more light for fear their deeds will be exposed. Salvation then comes to any

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:19-21

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 11:23-24



person, in any culture, in any language, and in any religious body when they are willing to follow all the light they have. It is that simple and that universal. Using “basic law,” God attempts to lead each person into greater and greater light so that each one may become more like Him.

### **The Final Exam**

Revelation indicates God has prepared a final exam for all the world’s people who are living at the end of time. In effect, God is going to send a powerful testimony of truth throughout the world during a short window of time to see who will follow it. Those living up to all the light they have, and looking for more light, will quickly see the beauty of this simple, but powerful, testimony; many will accept and embrace it even though it will cost them life itself.

God has carefully designed this final exam so all who are living up to the light they have now will be separated from these three classes of people:

1. Those refusing more light
2. Those professing to walk in the light
3. Those indifferent to greater light

Question #6: The final exam occurs at the

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## **Sin Causes Death**

Adam and Eve lost much and gained very little as a result of sin. When they lost the privilege of eating fruit from the Tree of Life, death overtook them for they were mortal. They also lost their beautiful Eden home and the natural traits of God's righteous character. In exchange for these losses, they gained the knowledge of evil, suffering, and sorrow; but their greatest loss was holiness. After sinning, Adam and Eve became attracted to sin and, consequently, passed their sinful nature on to their children. Unfortunately, sin has damaged every descendent since Cain and contaminated the whole world. What a sad exchange!

According to Paul, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!”**<sup>1</sup> This is the fallen and unsaved condition of man. We may be unsaved but we are wanted! God wants to redeem us back to Himself. **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**<sup>2</sup> The pen-

<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:23

alty for sin is the second death. Jesus experienced the second death. When He chose to die in our place, He went to His death without any hope of resurrection. Despite the fact that prior to Jesus' death He predicted his own resurrection, when He died on the cross, He died believing that He would not be resurrected. When the Father applied the curse of sin to Jesus on the cross, Jesus experienced a feeling He had never known. He felt the Father had totally forsaken Him. Matthew says, **“About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’).”**<sup>1</sup> This verse reveals the Father abandoned Jesus at the cross so He would die without any hope of a resurrection. Jesus, our Creator, personally paid this penalty so whosoever will believe in Him might be saved.

### **Stage Set for Faith**

Now, the stage for understanding salvation has been set. Salvation has two parts: first, to restore man to Eden and second, to restore within man the image of God. Through God's grace, Jesus paid the price in full at Calvary to restore man to Eden. That God could love the human race and pay such

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 27:46

an extreme price for our salvation is grace beyond comprehension. It is also love beyond comprehension. Paul calls this “the mystery of God.” He wrote, **“Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.”**<sup>1</sup>

The process of restoring man into the image of God is exciting, rewarding, and excruciating all at the same time. Our natural inclination is to be hostile toward God. Paul wrote, **“Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.”**<sup>2</sup>

Jesus told Nicodemus how a person can live in accordance with the Spirit and find life and peace, **“I**

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 3:8-9

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:5-8

**tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**<sup>1</sup> What does being born of water and the Spirit mean?

Some people interpret Jesus’ words, “born of water,” to mean that “unless you are baptized,” you cannot go to heaven. Controversy over baptism developed within the Christian church about the second century. The issue was whether baptism was required for salvation. The church finally decided that baptism was compulsory. Since the majority of infants died before reaching one year of age in those days, the church implemented the baptism of infants to insure that they met this “mandatory” requirement of getting to heaven.

Being born of water; however, meant something different to Nicodemus than it typically means today. Being born of water was an expression associated with becoming a Jew. If a Gentile (non-Jew) wished to become a Jew, he or she had to submit to months of extended education on the rules and practices of Judaism. After indoctrination, the candidate denounced his past life and then was dunked beneath the water. This

<sup>1</sup> John 3:3, 5

symbolic act was known as being “born of water.” The Jews thought the act of baptism overcame the terrible tragedy of being born a Gentile. As far as the convert was concerned, life began at baptism. The Jews believed nothing between Gentile birth and baptism was worth remembering. Thus, being born of water was an expression of denouncing natural birth as a Gentile.

Nicodemus was well acquainted with the baptisms being performed by John the Baptist. He was baptizing at the Jordan River where there was plenty of water.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit led John to use the symbol of being “born of water” to call Israel to repentance.<sup>2</sup> God sent John the Baptist to Israel to plead with them to forsake their evil past and put away their hard hearts so they could recognize and receive Messiah! John’s baptisms were an expression of denouncing the hardness of heart that belonged to Israel! John the Baptist proclaimed, **“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”**<sup>3</sup>

So, Jesus was saying, “Nicodemus, you must be ‘born of water.’ You, Nicodemus, a respected leader

1 John 3:23

2 John 1:33

3 Matthew 3:11

of Israel, need to start over! You need a new heart; a new life. You need to repent of your spiritual pride and religious self-exaltation. You need to live a humble life ‘born and led of the Spirit’ for He will guide you into more truth and light! You, Nicodemus, can mark this new beginning by being born of water!”

## **Salvation**

The answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” *begins* with a simple and inclusive sentence. Start right now. *Give yourself completely to Jesus*. This means to go, to be, and to do as He directs in your life. Humbly live up to what you know to be true and seek more truth! If you are willing to do what God asks, willing to be what God asks, and willing to go where God sends, then you are living by faith, and God grants you salvation full and free! The biblical definition of faith means full surrender. Noah did all that God asked him to do. Abraham went where God asked him to go. Moses became what God wanted him to become.

These worthy men yielded their hearts to God’s will and freely received His righteousness! If we allow

Jesus to be the Lord of our life, we will want to obey Him. Jesus told His disciples, **“You are my friends if you do what I command.”**<sup>1</sup> **“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”**<sup>2</sup>

## **God Reveals the Future**

We have considered salvation from the personal view, so now we need to consider the corporate view of how God implements the Plan of Salvation. God’s purpose in choosing the descendants of Abraham as a special people was not to make them the exclusive object of His love and special blessings. Rather, He chose them to be ambassadors of His love. **“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”**<sup>3</sup> Israel was to be a channel through which the world would come to know and love God, the Creator of all the universe. However, Satan thwarted that glorious plan by leading the Jews into rebellion against their Creator. For nearly 850 years after Jesus delivered Israel from

1 John 15:14

2 John 14:21

3 Isaiah 49:6



Egypt's bondage, He worked with Israel to make them the great nation He wanted them to be. Unfortunately, each time Israel reached a plateau of physical comfort and wealth, they promptly forgot God and turned to idolatry. The reason idolatry was so attractive to Israel is that pagan religious services were more entertaining than worshipping Jesus.

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Question #7: Abraham's descendants were to be \_\_\_\_\_ of God's love.

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### **True Worship**

The worship of Jesus is thoughtful and reflective. It causes soul searching and brings the sinner to a greater or daily realization of his need for a Savior. True worship unmasks our deceitful hearts. For example, worshipping Jesus is like going to the dentist for a checkup thinking that everything is okay and discovering there are hidden cavities! The worship of Jesus penetrates the soul and reveals hidden thoughts and motives that are impure. This type of worship is contrary to human nature and thus, Israel sought other "more exciting" gods to worship.

## **Pagan Worship**

Pagan worship comes in a thousand forms and ranges from the sublime to the ridiculous. Satan has devised a counterfeit worship for each type of lust. Some forms of false worship seem very close to true worship while other forms are excuses for the most degrading acts. Given the diverse range of false worship, the only general statement that can be made about false worship is that it neither glorifies our Creator nor brings the worshiper into harmony with His truth. There is a psychological law that says, “By beholding, we become changed.” This means we become like the object of our worship! In time, false worship leads men and women to behave like the creator of sin while true worship leads men and women to become like their holy Creator!

False worship appeals to the carnal or fallen nature. Those who worship in darkness hate truth because their deeds are exposed by the light! Jesus told His disciples, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates**

**you. . . . A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”**<sup>1</sup> In Israel’s day, pagan worship included entertainment of all kinds. History reveals everything from infant sacrifice to gross sexual practices were performed on or for the benefit of worshipers. In many ways, worship became a spectator’s delight. The interesting element about such drama is that people can live out certain fantasies without actually participating in the act.

Today, television, radio, magazines, and novels fulfill many of the sensual desires pagan worship services provided for ancient Israel. Many of the Israelites would not actually commit the indecent acts they witnessed, but they enjoyed watching them nonetheless. How does this compare with the multitude of evil acts committed on television each day? Are we becoming a more noble and God-like people as a result of our reading and entertainment?

## **The Plan**

The Plan of Salvation is not based on the death of a righteous man named Jesus; it is based on the willing death of an immortal, coeternal member of the God-

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<sup>1</sup> John 15:18-20

head. Because an angel is a created being, an angel could not redeem sinners. Angels do not have eternal life within them. They are subject to death and in fact, one-third of them will die the second death in hell.

Because Adam was a created being, he could not redeem man. Adam did not have eternal life within himself. Jesus willingly gave up His immortal life as well as His prerogatives as a coeternal member of the Godhead so believers in Him could be rescued from sin's penalty.

Jesus achieved two wonderful benefits for sinners: He lived a life of perfect submission to God's will and his 33-year struggle against sin produced a spotless robe of righteousness which is freely granted to us through faith in Jesus. Also, Jesus, as an immortal God, gave up His eternal life so we could have it.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by accepting our guilt and dying the second death. Jesus also provided the righteousness we need by living a perfect life. Now you understand what Jesus accomplished, you can understand the song of the numberless multitude around the throne: **“And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 7:10

This song means salvation was entirely God's rescue, not ours. When the saints go to heaven, they will be amazed at Jesus' profound love and truth and will understand who Jesus really is. It is no wonder that in the book of Revelation, the angels and elders fall on their faces as they worship the Lamb and the Father, because there has never been, nor will there ever be, a greater expression of love than revealed in the Plan of Salvation.

### **Salvation and Prophecy Work Together**

The Plan of Salvation has two components. First, Jesus paid the penalty for sin in full by dying on Calvary. **(Justification)** Second, our Creator wants to restore His image in those who choose salvation. **(Sanctification)** Prophecy is to the Plan of Salvation what the wedding date is to a couple planning for marriage. The Bible often compares the second coming of Jesus to a marriage feast or a wedding. **“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come.”**<sup>1</sup> Those who have received salvation are eager for Jesus' return and subsequently, they are interested in prophecy! What would you say about a couple who were indifferent about the date of their wedding? What

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 19:7

would you say of Christians who are indifferent about the time of Christ's coming?

When it comes to the fullness of salvation, many people are confused. If it is so simple, why is it so hard to understand? The answer might be summarized by saying the plan is simple, but not shallow. It is wonderful, but intricate. The Plan of Salvation is a deep and fascinating subject and those who love God find great joy learning about His plans to return man to Eden.

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### **Answers to Questions:**

1. before
2. causes / knows
3. deliberate / defiant
4. right / wrong
5. justification / sanctification
6. end of time
7. ambassadors

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