

INTRODUCTION

For centuries people have dreamed about peace on earth, about a kingdom characterized by harmony and prosperity. Especially the vision of a thousand year lasting kingdom of peace has been popular, not least among Christians. On many occasions dates have been determined for the time when God will establish His kingdom, but in all cases it became no more than a prediction. What is it that has made so many be so wrong?

It is written about Jesus that *"He came to His own, and His own did not know Him"* (John 1:11). The Israelites had heard about the coming Messiah through Moses and the prophets, but an incomplete study of the Scriptures, ignorance, and a desire for earthly power and greatness laid the foundation for their later rejection of Jesus as the Son of God.

They had mixed together the prophecies about the first and second coming of Christ, and chose to ignore the part that described Messiah as "the humiliated, suffering sacrificial lamb" that was to die for the sins of the people. Instead they expected a saviour in pomp and circumstance, one that would not save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), but deliver them from the Roman dominion, and establish an Israeli kingdom of greatness where human government would enforce the laws of His kingdom.

Even His disciples shared this view. This is one of the reasons why they could not fully understand His mission until He was resurrected and had ascended to heaven, and the Holy Spirit was given to them on the Day of Pentecost. To them and to all people through all times who have had expectations of a divine kingdom here on earth, Jesus says: *"My kingdom is not of this world."* (John 18:36).

The word Millennium (a kingdom lasting for 1000 years) is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. However, in the 20th chapter in the book of Revelation a period of 1000 years is mentioned several times. During these years Satan will be bound, while the true people of God shall reign with Him.

Many a religion and political movement have claimed to be the rightful inhabitants of this "kingdom", especially in the Middle Ages. Then this chapter gave growth to many new speculations about a millennium kingdom of peace on earth.

Not long ago we entered year 2000. Many people had prepared themselves for great disasters. Some expected that Jesus would return others that a new age would begin. But nothing happened. The world went on as normal, and the disappointment was great among many who had hoped that something would happen.

Different religious groups all over the world have many different explanations of our earth's continuation and end. Even inside Christianity the alternatives are plenty. How can this happen when the book they all claim to follow is the same? Could it be that traditional thoughts and expectations have become predominant, just as the dream about a kingdom of greatness had done at the time when Jesus first came to our earth?

The purpose of this book is not to discuss the doctrines of the different groups about the second coming of Christ and the end time, but rather to be a supplement to all who wish to

study the Bible to find out what it teaches about God's kingdom and the coming of Christ.

"To the law and to the testimony!" Isaiah writes (Is. 8:20). The word of God is the only standard after which we may judge when it comes to questions about the teachings of Christianity. Many consider traditions as equal with the written word, but the rejection of Christ by the Jewish leaders has shown us how wrong this may lead.

To the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious leaders of His time, Jesus said: *"Well did Isaiah prophecy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honours Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the tradition of men... All too well you reject the commandments of God, that you may keep your own tradition."* (Mark 7:6-8:9).

The Jews rejected God's commandments in favour of their own traditions and human made commandments. They ended up with rejecting the Son of God at His first coming. Today many are in danger of making a similar mistake, as they hold the traditional attitudes and man made ideas about the end time as doctrines of truth without comparing it with the word of God.

It is important to have a clear understanding of those events that will occur, based on the teachings of the Bible alone. We have been told that *"false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect"* (Matt. 24:24).

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." (Deut. 29:29). What God through all times has revealed through His prophets and servants, He also wants us to have knowledge about. Let us therefore study His word carefully, so that we will not be confused about the greatest coming event of our history.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Dan. 2:44)

Both in the Old and the New Testament we find prophecies and texts that deal with God's kingdom. One problem is that these often are used outside their connection and not interpreted in the light of each other. Another problem is that there is a somewhat obscure understanding of what the Bible means when it uses the term "the kingdom of heaven".

Traditions and Broken Expectations

Centuries earlier, prophecies had denounced the time for the first coming of Christ (Dan.

9:24-27)ⁱ. If the Jews had studied the Scripture properly, with a humble and sincere prayer to God for guidance and help to understand, they would have understood that the Messiah would come as the humble sacrificial lamb to die for the sins of the people and re-establish their connection with Godⁱⁱ. But they were blinded by their hatred of the Romans and their desire for earthly glory and greatness. They did not want a saviour that would free them from sin, but one who could deliver them from the Roman dominion and establish a Jewish kingdom of greatness.

They mixed the prophecies of the first and second coming of the Messiah. Even those who did believe that Jesus really was the promised Messiah were influenced by this idea, and on several occasions they were ready to crown Him a king. When the disciples had problems in letting go of the thought that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom. When Jesus was crucified their visions broke apart. Jesus had tried to tell them that He would die and then rise again on the third day, but they were too blinded by the traditional opinion to understand what He really meant.

After the resurrection, not long before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told the disciples not to depart from Jerusalem until they were given power from the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel in the whole world. Then they asked Him again: "*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" Jesus answered: "*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put under His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:4-8).

The Two Kingdoms of Heaven

While Jesus and the disciples were gathered at the last supper, He explained to them what would happen after He had completed His mission on earth. "*I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also...*" (John 14:2-8).

Jesus has promised to return, and He has promised that all who accepts Him as their saviour will be heirs to His kingdom. He says: "*And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*" (Rev. 22:12-13).

We shall soon see what is written about the events that will take place when Jesus returns. But first, let us look at the inheritance to the believers, the kingdom of heaven. The Bible talks about two kingdoms, the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. Many find it difficult to distinguish between the two. Both are referred to as "the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God", but yet they are of different characters. We need to have a clear understanding of this difference between them if we shall understand what the Bible teaches about the end time and the coming of Christ.

The Kingdoms of the World Foretold

The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar one night had a special dream. He saw a statue, a great image of a man. Its head was made of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and the feet consisted partly of clay and partly of iron. While he was watching this, a stone was cut out, and it hit the feet and broke them in pieces.

Thus the whole image was broken and annihilated. The stone that had struck the image grew to a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:31-33).

With God's help Daniel was as the only person in Babylon able to explain the dream to the king. The image had shown the coming kingdoms of this world. The golden head was a symbol of Babylon (v. 38). *"But after you [the Babylonian kingdom] shall arise another kingdom, inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And a fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron... Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom [i.e. what would follow the "kingdom of iron", and was represented by the feet] shall be divided..."* (v. 39-41).

In the days of Daniel the fulfilment of this prophecy was still in the future, but to us it is history. The world kingdom that took over after the Babylonians was the Medo-Persian kingdom. Then the kingdom of Alexander the great (Greece or Macedonia) followed, and the fourth kingdom, which was symbolized by the iron, was the Roman Empire, also known as "the kingdom of iron". Then there would be no more world kingdoms, but the world would be divided. We can clearly see this in the history of Europe. Despite attempts to gather the countries, both through war and diplomacy, and not least by royal marriages, they have not succeeded. *"And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere, just as iron does not mix with clay."* (v. 42-43).

The Kingdom of Glory

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (v. 44). God's kingdom will be established at the end of our world and consume all that previously has been.

Jesus says: *"Behold, I make all things new."* (Rev. 21:5). The apostle John got to see this in a vision while he was banished to the isle of Patmos, and he wrote: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."* (Rev. 21:1).

This is *the kingdom of glory* where the delivered will live for ever. The capital on the new earth is the New Jerusalem, *"the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."* (Rev. 21:10-11). John continues his description: *"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light..."* (Rev. 21:22-24).

When this kingdom, the eternal kingdom of glory, is established, all sin, death, and misery will be annihilated for good. All traces of sin will be removed. The only remembrance of what once took place will be the nail marks in the hands of Jesus. They will always be a reminder of the price that was paid to save the human kind from sin and death. The delivered will be a great pleasure to Jesus. They are the reward from His sufferings. *"He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. ... Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,*

and He shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors..." (Is. 53:11.12).

In the kingdom of glory is the throne of glory. *"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheadsⁱⁱⁱ. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp or light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."* (Rev. 22:3-5).

The Kingdom of Grace

The other kingdom that the Bible speaks of as the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of grace. It is this kingdom that Jesus talks about when He says: *"For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."* (Luke 17:21). It was the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, who came to Jesus and asked Him when the kingdom of God would be established. What they had in mind was a mixture of the kingdom of glory - God's kingdom of peace - and a new Jewish/Israeli time of greatness as it once had been in the days of King Solomon. They knew that they now had entered the time described by the prophecies of when the Messiah would come. But in their pride they also let the establishment of the physical kingdom of God be mixed with their expectations.

Jesus answered by referring to the kingdom of grace. By doing so He hoped to open their eyes for His real mission. These people were sinners, and if they did not repent they would be lost for ever. Jesus wanted them to realize that they needed a saviour, one who could save them from sin, and not from the Roman dominion. He wanted to teach them about God's plan of salvation. Therefore He answered: *"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."* (Luke 17:20,21).

Later Jesus brushed aside any speculation about a kingdom of peace here on earth by saying: *"My kingdom is not of this world."* (John 18:36). The apostle Paul also tells us not to focus on the worldly things, *"for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17).

The Throne of Grace

Just as there is a throne in the kingdom of glory, it also belongs a throne to the kingdom of grace. The Word of God encourages us: *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebr. 4:16).

The kingdom of grace was established after the fall of man, and it includes God's promises of a substitute who would atone for the sins and guilt of humanity, of forgiveness to all that in faith accept this substitute as their saviour, and of an eternal life instead of the eternal death which is the righteous wages of sin. Jesus, the Son of God, was this substitute. He was "the true sacrificial lamb" of which all sacrificial animals since the Garden of Eden had been a symbol of. *"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."* (Hebr. 10:14).

As the substitute of humanity Jesus carried the sins of the whole world. Therefore He may - and will - forgive every repentant sinner who turns to Him. God's promise to all people is: *"If*

we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Is.1:18). When a person comes to God, He will by no means cast this person out (John 6:37), but instead He will adopt him as His child. He will start a purifying work and a restoring process in him. God tells us what He wants to do: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Hebr. 8:10).

God will change the sinner so that he no longer will sin: *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My commandments and do them." (Ezek. 36:25-27).*

This is the result of God's grace. Often this grace has been spoken of as if it only includes forgiveness. But the biblical grace is more than that. Paul described it this way: *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Tit. 2:11-14).*

It is necessary to know the biblical definition of what it calls "the grace of God that brings salvation" if we shall understand what the kingdom of grace really is. This kingdom, which begins within us already while we are here on earth - "in the present age" - may also be described as a preparation for the kingdom of glory which will be established when Jesus returns and endure for eternal times.

When we come to God, to His throne of grace, He will fulfil His promises in us and restore His image in us so that He may bring us with Him to heaven. *"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgment and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses." (Ezek. 36:27-29).*

The Kingdom and the Holy Spirit

We must not forget that all this is of God (2 Cor. 5:17-18), and that He is the one who makes us obey the laws of heaven. Yet we are not entirely passive in this process. We have to make our own choices ourselves, and we must turn to God by all our heart if He shall be able to work with us, not only once or now and then, but every day. Then He will cleanse us from sinful habits and lusts, and we will gradually be created after His image. Our character will more and more be marked by God being the Lord of our lives.

When the infidel Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the help of Satan, He answered: *"...if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Matt. 12:26,28).* Again Jesus showed them the true meaning of the

kingdom of grace, the kingdom which begins within the human hearth and results in a changed attitude and character.

We are told that *"the kingdom of God is not in word but in power"* (1 Cor. 4:20). It is this power that is at our disposal when we come to the throne of grace to *"obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need"* (Hebr. 4:16), and that has been an open offer to all people since the fall of man.

God *"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us"* (Eph. 3:20). *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* (Phil. 2:13). They who give themselves to God completely, will get part in His kingdom, which consists of *"righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17).

Death and resurrection is often used as an illustration of what happens to a person when he gives himself completely to God. The old life without God and in sin is left behind, and a new life begins as the believer makes a pact with God. Visually this is expressed through the symbolic act of baptism, where the believer is completely covered by water as a testimony of his decision. The biblical baptism is *"not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God"* (1 Pet. 3:21).

The baptism itself does not wash away violations of the law or sinful tendencies, but is a symbol of what will happen in the life of the converted. *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."* (Rom. 6:4.6). *"There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh [i.e. follows ones fallen nature and its lusts], but according to the Spirit."* (Rom. 8:1).

By the help and power of the Holy Spirit we may overcome any sin and bad habit in our lives. *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."* (Gal. 5:16). God has promised that He will *"give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him"* (Luke 11:13). He will deliver us from the slavery of sin, so that we *"shall be free indeed"* (John 8:36).

"But we all, with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of God." (2 Cor. 3:18).

Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of God begins within the heart. Jesus told several parables to illustrate the spiritual growth, i.e. how a person is changed from being a sinner without love for God and His law, to become more and more like God in character, attitude, and action.

In one parable He compared God's kingdom with a little mustard seed: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."* (Matt. 13:31-32).

This parable shows how God works to change a person. No one has fallen too deep for Him to reach. No matter whom they are and what they have done, He will begin His work in them by carefully to sow the principles of heaven in their hearts. By daily contact with Him and by His power, the Christian will experience a constant growth and become more and more formed after the image of God. What began as something small and rather insignificant will little by little grow bigger than everything else and become clearly visible.

He told them another parable: *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."* (Matt. 13:33). This parable also illustrates how God is able to let the principles of heaven "leaven" all aspects of life until they finally mark everything. No part will be left untreated. God does a complete job when He changes the human character.

The Testimony of the Character

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13).

The Jewish Pharisee Nicodemus came to Jesus by night since he feared that somebody would see him. Still he wanted to learn more about God's truth, and Jesus revealed to him important secrets about the kingdom of God. He explained: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* And as an elaboration of this He said: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* (John 3:3,5-6).

The new birth - of God, by His Spirit - results in a whole new life. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* (2 Cor. 5:17). *"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."* (Gal. 5:24). Life will be characterized by the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (v. 22). These fruits of character will be a hallmark of the life of the Christian. *"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit."* (Matt. 7:17).

It is a person's character that shows which kingdom he or she is a citizen of. *"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ... Therefore by their fruits you will know them."* (v. 18, 20). It is not only the confession that counts. Jesus says: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."* (v. 21).

A confession is without value if it is not followed by "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). A faith in lack of this is called "dead", and is compared to a body without the spirit (James 2:17-26). What is of importance is to be "a new creation" (Gal. 6:16), where the old life in lawlessness and in opposition to God is left behind. All things have become new, a change resulting from the work of the Holy Spirit within the human heart.

About His people Jesus says: *"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."* (John

17:16) They are in the world, but not as it. What does this mean? It means that they live according to principles we do not find in this world, which has been under Satan's power since the fall of man. They are born of God and are still being changed to become more like Him. They *"live in the Spirit"* and *"walk in the Spirit"*, and have *"crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Gal. 5:25.24).

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ... For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another... For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ... There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ... [Jesus] condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Rom. 8:7-8; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:13.1.3-4.14).

Where the Two Kingdoms Meet

"...if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:21-24).

All this is a result of people getting part in the kingdom of grace. When we come to the throne of grace and regret and confess our sins, *"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). This cleansing from sin is the important part of God's plan of salvation that restores a person so that he may again enter the Garden of Eden and eat from the fruit of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24; Rev. 22:14).

The members of the kingdom of grace are the same who will become members of the kingdom of glory. In one of his psalms David, the old Israeli king, asked who would become members of this kingdom. *"Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?"* The answer was a description of the character of these people:

"He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honours those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved." (Psalm 15).

THE LAST DAYS

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one

according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." (Rev. 22:12-13)

Jesus has said that He will soon return, and for us to know when this event approaches, He has given us certain signs of the last days. The purpose is not that we shall determine certain dates for His coming. *"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."* (Matt. 24:36). Instead He told us to learn from the fig tree: *"When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that Summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that He is near, at the very doors."* (v. 32-33). Let us, then, compare the words of Jesus with the world today. Is it possible for us to know that His coming is approaching?

False Christs and False Prophets

When the disciples were together with Jesus on the Mount of Olives one of the questions they asked Him was: *"What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matt. 24:3). Jesus answered by first giving a warning against great religious seductions in a Christian disguise: *"Take heed that no man deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ^{iv}," and will deceive many."* (v. 4-5).

Is this something we experience today? The answer must undeniably be yes. All from mysterious sects and little known persons with few followers to religious world leaders spoken of as "Christ himself on earth" must be said to be a fulfilment of this prophecy.

In March 2000 several hundred people died in Uganda in what first seemed to be a mass suicide, but later has been called a mass murder, committed by the leaders of the sect. The members, who had been given a certain date for the end of the world, had sold all their properties. After a great celebration they gathered in the church to wait for this event. The windows were closed and the doors were nailed down. Then the building was set on fire. Among the dead were several children. Outside the church the police discovered latrines covered by cement. When these were opened they turned out to be full of bodies. In three mass graves it was found together 153 murdered sect members, of which 59 were children^v.

In 1978 914 followers of the priest Jim Jones committed collective suicide in Guyana by drinking poison. These cases are not unique, but the dimensions are usually smaller. The end of the world is often given as the reason for this kind of suicide. If the warnings of Jesus and the teachings of the Bible about the end time had been better heeded, most of them would probably have been avoided.

Many Christians, both Protestants and Catholics, leaders and lay members, claim to get certain revelations from God, either directly from Him or through other mediums, such as the virgin Mary or other dead people^{vi}. But far too often their message has turned out to be contrary to the word of God. The Bible puts it clear that "new light" must be based on "old light". God is the same yesterday and today, and He does not act as a turning shadow (Mal. 3:6, James 1:17).

About a person who gives another message than what has already been written in the Bible, it says: *"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."* (Is. 8:20).

No matter under what circumstance a message is delivered or who might give it, the principle is the same. *"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."* (Gal. 1:8-9).

We shall not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God (1 John 4:1). How? Neither our own discernment nor our feelings are good enough for such a task. Our only secure basis is the word of God, the revelation He has already given to the world. That something is called "Christian" or "biblical" is no guarantee that it really is. It is not the label that decides the quality, but the product itself.

We should therefore pay heed to the warning: *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, there is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect^{vii}. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."* (Matt. 24:23-27)^{viii}.

Wars and Rumours of Wars

"And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." (Matt. 24:6-7).

This is also something we see a lot of today. Methods and weapons get more and more dreadful. We see nations rise against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms, and we hear threats of wars that may break out.

The bible verse also tells us something else important. In the last days, before Jesus returns, there will not be a period of peace on earth. War and disturbances will be a part of the world picture until the end.

Famines, Pestilences, and Earthquakes

Jesus went on with His description of the last days: *"And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places."* (Matt. 24:7).

Famines - Who has not seen pictures of people, children as well as grown ups, who are dying of starvation and malnutrition. Every minute several people die on this planet because of this. The following extract may illustrate part of the dimensions of this problem:

"Half of the population in Tajikistan or about 3 million people are threatened by starvation and malnutrition as a consequence of drought, UN organizations working with food supply informed on Thursday. Chronic economic problems, low agricultural productivity, and damages on the systems of water supply have worsened the situation, it says in a report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Without immediate help, the report says, the population will not get a sufficient minimum of nutrition. An estimated 85% of the population in Tajikistan lives below the poverty line, and

at the same time the access to self produced food is strongly reduced, and there are not enough jobs to give people enough income to buy food."^{ix}

"The number of East Africans threatened by starvation is constantly increasing. The UN organization of Food and Agriculture (FAO) now concludes that as much as 20 million East Africans suffer from acute lack of food. This is 3 millions more than the organization estimated in April this year, and worst of all is the situation in Kenya. According to the FAO 3.3 million of Kenya's inhabitants are seriously affected by the drought, which is the worst in the country for 30 years. It is the 4th year now that the rain has failed. The government has introduced both water and electricity rations. A FAO report on Africa south of Sahara, points to drought, war, and other conflicts as the main reason for the lack of food. Besides Kenya the following countries are also hard affected: Angola, Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda."^x

Pestilences - Some decades ago experts considered epidemics to be as good as eradicated on world basis. Today reports show a totally different situation. AIDS may undoubtedly be characterized as one of the greatest pestilences of today, and it is ranked as the number 4 cause of death in the world.

In Africa the disease is the number one cause of death. On this continent alone 14 000 people are infected daily by the mortal HIV-virus, and it is estimated that about 1/3 of all children in southern and central Africa will be orphan in the next ten years. 70% of all HIV infected in the world, i.e. around 23 million people, live south of Sahara in Africa. Only in South-Africa, which has the best developed infrastructure and economic system of the continent, more than 4 million people have died from this disease in few years. In Botswana 1/4 of the population is hit by the disease, and in Zimbabwe 1/3. The numbers are expected to increase in the future.

On the west coast of USA the government face a similar problem. Especially in San Francisco, where homosexuality is very widespread, the number of HIV infected has increased dramatically. Also in Europe it is mainly homosexual groups that are hit by the disease. Not long ago the government in the world's most populous country, China, informed that at least 600 000 Chinese were infected by HIV or AIDS, but the experts believes the number to be even larger. Many people are afraid to let themselves be tested, since they fear that they might be imprisoned for prostitution^{xi}.

Another deadly disease which may be characterized as a pestilence is tuberculosis. This disease kills more people than any other infectious disease. 2-3 million people die every year while some 8 million new cases of the disease are discovered. The last 40 years not one single new effective medicine against tuberculosis has been discovered, and scientists have discovered that an increasing number of bacteria are resistant to all types of antibiotics. Also in the western world tuberculosis bacteria are discovered that are resistant^{xii}.

We could mention more pestilence diseases, both among people and animals, but these are good enough as an illustration. The prognoses for the coming years are depressing, and the more the diseases spread among animals, the more diseases will break out among men.

Earthquakes - If we go some hundred years back in time, earthquakes were far from as usual as it is today. In the last decades we have seen several large disastrous earthquakes. The destructions have been enormous, and the costs sky high.

In one scientific magazine we could read: *"The experts believe that the earthquakes in Taiwan and Turkey last year are only presages of the disasters the world can expect. A majority of the largest cities are not only located in the worst earthquake zones, but are also in the poorest countries. Earthquake proof buildings are still something only those who can afford it may get."* Bases on the table below, we may compare the earthquakes in Armenia in 1988 with that in California the following year. The strength of the two earthquakes were about the same, but the number of dead in the American state was not even close to the number of perished in Armenia^{xiii}.

Men in the Last Days

The Bible gives us more signs than this. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul describes how people and society will be in the last days of our earth's history. *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."* (2 Tim. 3:1-4). We may analyse all these points and find that they agree with our society today.

But what is the saddest part of this description is that it is not really about worldly or atheistic people, but Paul talks about "Christians", people who confess to believe in God. He says about them in the following verse: *"having a form of godliness but denying its power"* (v. 5). With their mouth they confess that they believe in God. Perhaps they go to church once a week, sing psalms and carry a cross around their neck. But they deny the power of grace that comes from God, and that works in the person who has accepted Him in his heart, cleanses it from sin and results in noble words, thoughts, and actions.

The word of God tells us that *"the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."* (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Again we must remember that it is not the label, but the product itself that decides the quality. One simply can not call something "Christian" or "biblical" if it consists of worldliness and sin. But we are told that in the last days there will be a widespread false Christianity^{xiv}.

Lawlessness Abounds

On the Mount of Oil Jesus continued His description of the last days: *"And because lawlessness^{xv} will abound, the love of many will grow cold."* (Matt. 24:12).

God has clearly expressed how important it is that people turn away from sin and lawlessness so that He in His grace can make them obedient by writing His law in their hearts and minds. This is the power of godliness which so many of those who confess to be Christians will deny in the last days.

Through the Old Testament prophet Malachi God has given an important reminder to those who live in the time just before the coming of Christ: *"Remember the law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgements."* (Mal. 4:4^{xvi}). He is here talking about the Ten Commandments, God's law and the guide of direction for humanity.

In His word God constantly reminds us of the everlasting validity of the law^{xvii}, and He tells us to remember it as it was given by Him and as it is written down in His word^{xviii}. This also includes the fourth commandment, about the day of rest, which encourages us to continue to keep the day that He sanctified and blessed after the creation, the seventh day Sabbath^{xix} (Ex. 20:8-11).

He reminds us in particular of this commandment through the prophet Isaiah and his message to the last days: *"Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."* (Is. 56:1-2^{xx}).

Yet we are told that lawlessness will abound and since the law of God is love (Rom. 13:8-10), *"the love of many will grow cold"*. "Many" is just what the word expresses: a majority. According to the word of God there will not be a worldwide Christian flourishing in the last days. Jesus even asked this question about the time just before His coming: *"When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8).

Neither will the last days, according to what we are told, be an easy time. *"...because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,"* and *"woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."* (1 Pet. 5:8, Rev. 12:12). In the last days there will be hard times, especially to those who wish to *"keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus"* (Rev. 14:12)^{xxi}.

Then They Will Deliver You up to Tribulation

The idea that there before or at the second coming of Christ will be established a "kingdom of peace" or a "millennium kingdom" here on earth is popular even today. But Jesus says that this will not happen. In the time right before His coming the conditions will be hard and problematic to the true Christians, those who have not denied the power of godliness and God's covenant. The majority, even if in a religious coat, will turn against them.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another." (Matt. 24:9-10).

In Luke 21 this hatred is further elaborated: *"Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you an occasion for testimony..."*

You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. In your patience^{xxii} possess your souls." (Luke 21:10-13,16-19).

"Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved." (Mark. 13:12-13).

But God will not forsake those who have chosen to follow Him. He has given promises both of power to manage the trials and of eternal reward to those who remain faithful:

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt. 5:11-12).

"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20).

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:37-39).

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The signs that Jesus gave of the last days are fulfilling around us. Just as we understand that the Summer is near when we see the branches become tender and put forth leaves, we may as we see these things know that Jesus is coming soon. But, some might say, we have seen this for a while. Why has not Jesus returned yet?

The Bible has already answered that question: *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9).*

God wants to give all people a chance to convert. He wants them to live. He has already bought them free from the wages of sin with the blood of His own Son, and He hopes that everyone shall turn to Him and be saved. *"As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).*

Before Jesus returns God will make sure that the whole world has been warned. When He comes it will be too late, since He has His reward with Him to give to everyone according to the choice they have made (Rev. 22:12). At the same time as He gave the signs of the last days, Jesus also made it clear that the whole world must be given the offer of salvation: *"And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:14).*

What kingdom is He here talking about? The kingdom of glory, or the kingdom of grace? Jesus talks about the kingdom of grace. These are the good news about Gods grace that

brings salvation, "the gospel of the kingdom", which shall be preached to all nations before the end will come. The whole world will hear God's offer of salvation where He offers forgiveness and cleansing from sin so that those who are willing to accept may live for ever like the plan originally had been in the beginning.

Not only shall the gospel of salvation from sin and death be preached orally to the world, but God wants the expression of His kingdom, His traits of character, to be revealed in His people - "*as a witness to the nations*". When His character is reflected in the hearts of His followers, He will come and take them with Him.

God's law, His ten commandments, is a reflection of His character. He wants to write it in the human heart so that His image will be re-established in humanity. This is the message that God wants to give to the world. When He tells people to convert, He also shows them where to turn.

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Is. 1:18-20).

The Importance of Being Prepared

We may see the signs of the end time, and we may know that the Second Advent is near, but Jesus has not revealed the day or hour of His coming. "*But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*" (Matt. 24:36) Through His word God lets us know that His day, "*the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night*" (2 Pet. 3:10). While most people are asleep He will come.

He compares the event with the flood at the time of Noah and with the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. "*And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given to marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*"

"Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:26-29).

Since we do not know when Jesus will return, it is important that we always are awake and prepared. It is nothing wrong in eating, drinking or getting married. The statement of Jesus shows that the world will "continue as usual" until the end. It also is a warning about the necessity of being awake and to have a clear understanding of what will happen and what must be done.. Important questions must not yield to less important everyday things.

How, then, can we be prepared? By following the advice that God gives in Is. 1:18-20 - to come to Him as we are, to give our sins to Him, and let Him cleanse us from it. If we are like scarlet, He will make us as white as snow. This is how properly He will do the work. But we must not wait believing that there will always be a new chance to repent and convert tomorrow. We only have the day of today, and we need to use it to get prepared. "*Watch*

therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matt. 25.:13).

The signs of the last days were given to wake us up, so that we may hurry to get ready. *"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."* (Rom. 13:11).

THE SECOND COMING

"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24:27). The second coming of Christ will not be an event that just a couple of people on a certain place on earth will witness, but an event which the whole world will experience. It will be the greatest in our earth's history.

My Reward Is With Me

Even though many may have been deceived by false prophets and Christs beforehand, *"because they did not receive the love of the truth"* (2 Thess. 2:10), there will be no doubt when the real Christ comes in the clouds of heaven (Matt. 26:64). *"His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hands, and there His power was hidden."* (Hab. 3:3-4)

John got to see this event in a vision: *"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ... And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."* (Rev. 19:11.14.16).

Many people today avoid making up their mind about the message of Christianity, but at the same time they have a certain belief that Jesus will return. They think that when He comes, they may convert, regret all their sins, and give their lives to God. But then it will be too late. When Jesus comes He has already determined the case of every human being. The judgement which now takes place in heaven will then be finished. He tells us today: *"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."* (Rev. 22:12).

The first coming of Christ to this world was as a "sacrificial lamb". John the Baptist testified of this as he said: *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). The Son of God, who had not made any sin Himself, took upon Him the sins and punishment of the whole world, so that we shall not have to die but have eternal life. Everyone who accepts Jesus as their saviour and substitute will get part in this inheritance. The sacrificial lamb in the Hebrew sanctuary service had been a symbol of this. Paul writes: *"For indeed, Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."* (1 Cor. 5:7).

At His second coming it will be different. *"To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear*

a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Hebr. 9:28). When Jesus returns He will not once again take away the sins of the world. He has already done that, when He died for us on Golgotha. Those who have chosen not to accept Him and the forgiveness and grace He has offered, will not be able to do it then.

Before Jesus returns He has made sure that all people have been warned. They have heard the offer of salvation, and they have made a choice. Now they must harvest the consequence of it. Either they will get *"the wages of sin [which] is death"* (Rom. 6:23), or they will hear the words: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matt. 25:34).

We need to make our choice today. *"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."* (Hebr. 4:7). *"Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lords anger."* (Zeph. 2:3).

The Day of the Lord

God has given visions to many of His prophets about what the second coming of Christ will be like. Joel writes: *"Blow the trumpet in Zion^{xxiii}, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. ... For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?"* (Joel 2:1,11). Also the prophet Malachi got terrified from what he saw: *"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like the refiner's fire and like fullers' soap..."* (Mal. 3:2)

"The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out," Zephaniah writes and he continues his description: *"That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm... I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land."*

Therefore: *"Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, o undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, before the day passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you."* (Zeph. 1:14-18, 2:1-2).

He Is Coming to Judge the Earth

Jesus will not come to establish an idyllic kingdom of peace on this corrupt planet. He comes with His reward do give every one according to his work. To them that have accepted Him this implies a day of joy. Finally they get to meet their Saviour and Redeemer. But to the ungodly, who have chosen to ignore God's voice and His law, this will be a terrible time. To them it will be a torture to see the glory and purity that surrounds the throne of the Son of God, He who they denied.

"And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men,

every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"" (Rev. 6:15-17).

"Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty." (Joel 1:15).

"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it." (Is. 13:9).

Jesus Himself says: *"And I will come near you for judgement; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and the fatherless, and against those who turn away an alien - because they do not fear Me."* (Mal. 3:5).

In the eyes of the world a person who is rich, famous, and mighty is often admired and treated different from one who "lies in the gutter". But it will not be like this when the people get their reward. A rich murder will get the same punishment as a poor murder. God does not see as man sees. He looks at the heart, on what is inside the person. No one can pay themselves free from His wrath of excuse themselves with their high position. In God's eyes sin is only one thing: sin.

"For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity." (Psalm 98:9).

"Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor."

"The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the Lord has spoken this word." (Is. 24:1-3).

Why the Earth Is Made Waste

Ever since sin came into existence there has been a battle between good and evil, between God and Satan. When Satan in the guise of a serpent tempted Eve and Adam to disobedience to God, they came under his power and the curse of sin, which is death. But God had a solution, a plan of salvation, a rescue plan. Jesus would be our offering for sin^{xxiv}. He was to take upon Him our sins and suffer the punishment for them, so that we may go free - if we choose to accept Him.

Sin was the reason why Satan and the angels who followed him were thrown out of heaven. It was the reason why Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden of Eden and lost the right to eat from the tree of life. Sin is the reason of all misery we see around us today, and sin was the reason why Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross.

God is love, and He wishes the best for all His creatures. Therefore He can not allow sin to

exist for ever. We now see the sad result of 6000 years of sin - who could stand living under these conditions for ever? God has determined a time when He will annihilate sin completely from the whole universe. That is why the earth *"shall be entirely emptied"* and its sinners destroyed from it.

"Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. ... Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?" (Am. 5:18,20).

God has done all that is in His power for every person to convert so that they may escape His wrath and get part in the everlasting inheritance. He has not left any remedy untried. The sacrifice of Christ was great enough to atone for the sin of the whole humanity. Do we have any reason to believe that He has not done everything for those who He has redeemed by His own blood, to convert so that He may save them?

But God does not force anyone to accept Him. He leaves it up to every individual to choose who they will serve - "The King of Kings and Lord of Lords" or the lord of sin, Satan. When all people have made their choice, God may complete His judgement on sin. Then He may cleanse the earth from all misery that has marked it far too long.

"The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the haughty people of the earth languish. The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant^{xxv}.

"Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left^{xxvi}." (Is. 24:4-6).

When Jesus returns there will be no more time for the ungodly. They will not have any more chances to convert. This they have already wasted.

"Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you despised all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof. ... Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies." (Pro. 1:24,25,29-31).

The earth is made completely waste. There will not be a single human being left. (We shall soon see what will happen to those who have chosen God's side in the battle.) The earth will be vigorously shaken. Cities and great mountains will fall down. The ocean will roar strongly, and the islands will give way to volcanic eruptions.

"The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again." (Is. 24:19-20).

"Clouds and darkness surround Him. ... A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world, the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (Psalm

97:2-5).

The Hope of the Faithful

Those who have chosen God's side have accepted His plan of salvation. They have confessed their sins to Him and received forgiveness, and they have been cleansed from all unrighteousness by God's grace. They have been faithful till the end, and are ready to spend the eternity together with their saviour.

Jesus has given a promise to His people: *"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."* (John 14:2-3).

When He returns He will say to them: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me. ... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."* (Matt. 25:34-36.40).

Paul writes about what will happen to God's people when Jesus returns: *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [those who are dead], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."*

"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

All people who throughout history have accepted God's offer of salvation and made a clear stand for Him, will wake up from the sleep of death and come out of their graves when Jesus returns. Together with the faithful that are alive they will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. It is of importance to note that Jesus will not put His feet on the face of this planet when He returns. Thus we may also avoid getting deceived.

All God's children will be caught up in the air to meet Jesus there, and He will take them with Him home to heaven. Never again they will be separated from Him.

"And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." (v. 17-18).

THE RESURRECTION OF LIFE AND THE RESURRECTION OF CONDEMNATION

"The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28-29)

Here (in John 5:28-29) Jesus talks about two resurrections, the resurrection of life and the resurrection of condemnation. The first takes place at His second coming. When Jesus *"descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God ... the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."* (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The Sleep of Death

Before we continue there is one important theme that we must elucidate. Among the pagan traditions that penetrated Christianity during the first century AD, was a teaching about death that stands completely without a biblical foundation. Greek philosophers had stated that a human being consisted of two parts, the immortal soul and the inferior body (dualism). When a person died, they said, the soul left the body and continued its existence in a purer state.

Church father Augustine (354-430 AD), who was bishop in Hippo, North-Africa, combined these ideas with the Christian church^{xxvii}. Since then immortality of the soul has been considered a Christian doctrine, and it has given growth to many lies, such as the teaching of a burning hell, indulgence, and not least spiritualism - all under the coat of Christianity.

It is hardly wrong to say that most Christians today believe that man has an immortal soul. When someone dies it is often stated that they go to heaven or to paradise, independent of how their life has been. The alternative to heaven, which is considered to be a burning hell where the dead must suffer for ever, is not a pleasant thought, and is therefore rather avoided. At the same time it is in defiance of common sense. How can a caring God, who loved the world so high that He gave everything to save it, allow someone to suffer in such a terrible way for all eternity?

It is exactly this thought that has made many dissociate themselves from Christianity. A God that is so cruel is little tempting to serve. At the same time it is self-contradictory and disjointed. But the Bible has never stated that there is a burning hell where poor sinners must spend eternity. This teaching is one of Satan's inventions to frighten people, make life difficult for them, and lead them away from God. Unfortunately it has turned out to be quite effective...

David, the second king of Israel, is viewed as a devout and righteous man. Still, the Bible tells that *"David did not ascend into the heavens"* (Acts 2:34). The question is then: What happened to David? And what about all the other devout people that now are dead? Where are they?

The entry of spiritualism has made many believe that they can talk to their dead relatives, or that the dead sit somewhere in heaven, looking down on the earth, watching what the living do. This is also in contrast to the teachings of the Bible:

"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun." (Eccl. 9:5-6).

"The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence." (Psalm 115:17).

"For Sheol ["the kingdom of death"] cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth." (Is. 38:18).

"But man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake. Nor be roused from their sleep." (Job 14:10-12).

It is important to be aware of the unconscious state of death, this state of sleep. And no dead person will wake up from his or her grave until the resurrection at the second coming of Christ.

The doctrine of the immortal soul has weakened the belief in the coming of Christ and in the resurrection from death. If a person continued to live after he is dead, why and from what shall he then wake up? But if everything around us seems perplexing, we may find trust and safety in these words of Jesus: *"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40).*

A Necessary Change

God's people from all periods of time, who have slept the "sleep of death" in the dust, will take part in the first resurrection. They will *"be raised incorruptible"*. A human being is corruptible and mortal, and *"this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Cor. 15:52-53). God's people, who are alive on the earth when Jesus returns, will therefore also be changed from being mortal human beings to become immortal victors.

It is this change that Paul describes in the letter to the Corinthians, where the human kind, who has been under the power of death, as a climax in the plan of salvation put on immortality and imperishableness before they are caught up in the clouds and are brought to heaven. *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet^{xxviii}. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:51-53).*

Why is this change necessary? Paul continues: *"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." O Death, where is your sting^{xxix}? O Hades ["kingdom of death"], where is your victory?" (v. 54-55).* Death has no power over them that take part in the first resurrection, the resurrection of life. They are immortal and will spend an

eternity together with their God and Saviour.

The Choice Is Already Made

It is those who overcome that will get to *"eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God"* (Rev. 2:7). These are the people who have followed the invitation of Jesus: *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* (Luke 9:23). These are the people who *"are Christ's"* and *"have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Gal. 5:24). They have responded to the influence of the Holy Spirit and chosen to stand on God's side in the great battle. They have let God form them after His image. They have regretted and confessed every sin He has shown them, and God has forgiven them and cleansed them from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). They have God's law written in their heart and mind (Hebr. 8:10).

What really is a hallmark of these people is that they have let God form a character in them, a character that is made after the heavenly pattern, after God's image. By God's power they have overcome all known sins, and they are ready to put on immortality.

The change that will take place is not a sudden change of the character in that sense that one suddenly gets a lot of new interests and opinions^{xxx}. God will never force anyone to choose His side, and He will not treat people as machines or puppets. He has given them a free will so that they can make a choice themselves, and it is now, while we are still living on this planet, that we must make this choice.

God therefore encourages us to accept His offer of salvation. No! Today! *"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."* (Hebr. 4:7). The prophet Zephaniah writes: *"Gather yourself together, yes, gather together, o undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, ...before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you!"* (Zeph. 2:1-2).

Those who have chosen to live on in sin, chosen to continue to break God's law, will not, when Jesus returns, suddenly be changed so that they get a new character. It is in this life that the foundation of the eternal life is laid. If they have chosen to live in disobedience, God will not change them to suddenly become obedient. If He had forced a new character on them this would have been the same as taking their free will away from them. But God does not work like that. He has done all He can for them to choose life and the blessing, but He accepts their choice.

God's offer to all people can be summed up with the words of Moses to the Israelites when they stood on the border to Canaan, the promised land, a symbol of the kingdom of glory: *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgements, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. ... I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."* (Deut. 30:15-16.19).

Neither death nor sin will have power over them who have part in the first resurrection. They are victors, and their victory is complete. *"And God will wipe away every tear from their*

eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:4) "Death is swallowed up in victory, O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:54,55).

The Resurrection of Condemnation

The resurrection of life, then, takes place when Jesus returns, and they that wake up will put on immortality and come with Jesus to heaven. But when will the resurrection of condemnation take place, and what does this imply?

The second coming of Christ will be a day of joy to them that have overcome and to the angels. To the ungodly, those who have chosen to continue their lives in sin, the day will be a terrible darkness. *"And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?""* (Rev. 6:15-17).

Isaiah describes the same event: *"The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols He shall utterly abolish. They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily."* (Is. 2.17-21).

We are told that the earth will be laid waste when Jesus returns. *"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. ... "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.""* (Is. 13:9,11).

"Behold, the day! Behold, it has come! ... Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain, none of their multitude... They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord..." (Ezek. 7:10,11,19).

"Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants. ... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the Lord has spoken this word. ... The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again.

"It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished." (Is. 24:1,3,19-22).

The ungodly who are alive when Jesus returns will have to follow their predecessors in death. The earth will be laid completely desolate: God's people are taken to heaven, the ungodly die. This way they will be *"shut up in the prison"*. They will be *"shut up"* by the sleep of death until the day comes when the second resurrection, the resurrection of condemnation, takes place. Then, *"after many days they will be punished"*.

But does the Bible tell us when this will happen? Yes, it does. In the book of Revelation we are told about a period of 1000 years, which will begin at the Second Advent. In this period God's people will be with Him in heaven, or as John puts it: *"And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."* (Rev. 20:4) We are also told that *"the rest of the dead [the ungodly] did not live again until the thousand years were finished"* (v. 5). The resurrection of condemnation thus takes place 1000 years after the resurrection of life, and meanwhile the earth will be deserted and lay waste. (We shall soon look closer at this period of 1000 years and what will happen thereafter.)

God's Call and Warning

God wants all people to choose His side so that they may take part in the first resurrection and be with Him for ever. He has already paid the high price it took to deliver the fallen humanity from their death sentence. What He is waiting for is our response. He does not want anyone to come to Him because they fear the punishment and judgement, but that they shall accept Him and obey Him of love. He says to every person: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."* (Is. 43:1).

The same God who in His love for the world gave all for it, wants just as much to warn the people of what will come upon the earth. *"Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness..."* (Acts 17:31). Therefore He also says: *"Gather yourself together, yes gather together, o undesirable nation. Before the decree is issued, ...before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you!"*

"Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." (Zeph. 2:1-3).

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though you sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Is. 1:16-20).

THE 1000 YEARS AND THE FINAL JUDGEMENT

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over 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." (Rev. 20:6)

When Jesus returns there will only be two groups of people on this earth: those who have chosen His side, and those who have fought against Him. The first group will be *"caught up together with them [who died in Christ and have part in the first resurrection] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17). The other group of people will die, *"they will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished"* (Is. 24:22). Not until after the 1000 years the ungodly will wake up and face their final judgement.

Satan Bound

John tells: *"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while."* (Rev. 20:1-3).

This situation occurs when Jesus has gathered His people from the earth and leads them through the gates of heaven. All the ungodly are dead (see Rev. 19:21,15). The earth is completely waste. It is not a single person left. *"And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground."* (Jer. 25:33).

The only left are Satan and the angels that followed his rebellion against God. Through the prophet Isaiah God describes this situation: *"How you are fallen from heaven, o Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! [com. Hebr. 2:14-15 and John 8:34]*

"For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

"Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. ... All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, everyone in his own house; but you are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch, like the garment of those who are slain, thrust through with a sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a corpse trodden underfoot. You will not be joined with them in burial, because you have destroyed your land and slain your people." (Is. 14:12-20).

Thus Satan will be "bound" to the waste and destroyed earth for 1000 years. There are no human beings left that he may seduce, and he has no other place to go. The only thing he can do is to view the result of the destruction and the rebellion he has lead.

The term "bottomless pit" refers to the chaotic and dark earth. Jeremiah describes the condition of the earth as follows: *"I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void [com. Gen. 1:2]; and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the Lord, by His fierce anger. For thus says the Lord: "The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end..."*" (Jer. 4:23-27).

But *"after these things"*, after those 1000 years, *"he [Satan] must be released for a little while"* (Rev. 20:3). What then will happen, we shall soon see.

God's People in Heaven

While the earth is waste and empty God's people are in heaven. They have heard the invitation: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matt. 25:34). They have been given access to the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were thrown out because of sin (Gen. 3:24), and they may eat from the tree of life. *"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."* (Rev. 20:6).

John tells that he *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgement was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."* (Rev. 20:4).

It is not those who are saved that now will be judged. That judgement was completed *before* the second coming of Christ (Rev. 22:12). They who have said yes to God's offer of salvation, have been forgiven and their sins have been wiped out. Jesus has carried away their sins, and His righteousness has been ascribed to them. God's people have already been before the judgement, because they have given their case to God, and He has declared them free.

"For the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). Those people who would not accept God's offer of salvation, will have to harvest the fruit of their deeds themselves. They have to carry the punishment for their own sins themselves. It is the judgement of these, the meting out of a righteous punishment for all of them, that will take place in heaven during those 1000 years.

Paul writes: *"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels?"* (1 Cor. 6:2.3). The final judgement, where the punishment will be completed, takes place *after* the 1000 years, both over Satan and his angels. We read about these: *"And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains^{xxxii} under darkness for the judgment of the great day."* (Jude 6).

The standard in the judgement is God's word and His holy law, and the punishment of every person, which is meted out according to his or her deeds, will be written in the books (see. Rev. 20:12). Questions about why somebody is not in heaven, and why others are there, will

be answered. That is why we are told: *"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes^{xxxii}, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God."* (1 Cor. 4:5).

The New Jerusalem

John continues: *"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."* (Rev. 21:2). After the 1000 years Jesus will again return to the earth, followed by all the delivered and multitudes of angels. They will enter the holy city, where *"the tabernacle of God is"* (v.3).

Then the words of Isaiah will be fulfilled: *"In that day the Branch of the Lord [Christ] shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped^{xxxiii}. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and he who remains in Jerusalem will be called holy - everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem."* (Is.4:2-3). God's people are victors. They have had their sins wiped out, and neither sin nor death have power over them any more. They can be *"called holy"*.

John tells about the city he saw, that she had *"the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone... Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates...: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. ... And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones... And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."* (Rev. 21:11-14.19.21).

When God's people enter the city a song will be sung: *"Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in^{xxxiv}."* (Is. 26:2). *"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."* (Rev. 21:27).

The Mount of Olives

"And in that day His [Christ's] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. ... Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You." (Zech. 14:4,5). On the same place as He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9,12), Jesus will now come down.

Some Christians put the event with the Mount of Olives in connection with the second coming of Christ. This interpretation contradicts what the Bible teaches elsewhere. Paul clearly writes that Jesus, on His second coming, will not come down to the surface of this planet. Instead God's people will meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:17)!

If anyone should walk around on this earth, claiming to be Christ, we may from the word of God know that it is a fraud, no matter how many signs and wonders this person would show. *"For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."* (Matt. 24:24-27).

The event on the Mount of Olives takes place *after* the 1000 years, when Jesus again returns to the earth, and *"all the saints"* with Him. *"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountains shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south."* (Zech. 14:4).

Satan's Final Attack

While the delivered are in heaven those 1000 years, and Satan roams about the desolate earth, those people who rejected God's offer sleep the sleep of death. After the 1000 years they will wake up. The second resurrection will take place.

Again Satan will have people he may seduce, and this is exactly what he will do. *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison, and will go out to deceive the nations..."* (Rev. 20:7-8). These people wake up just as they entered the grave. Thousand years in an unconscious sleep has not changed their character or attitudes towards God. They have rejected the possibility they had to be protected, and it is a simple task for Satan to seduce them. Willingly and eagerly they follow Satan as he gathers them to a final attack on God and His people.

Satan's rebellion began with a desire to become like God. Even though he was only a created being, *"the anointed cherub who covers"*, who even was *"on the holy mountain of God"*, he became jealous of Jesus and thought that he himself was better suited for His place in the Godhead. *"You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. ... Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour..."* (Ezek. 28:14,15,17). *"For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'"* (Is. 14:13-14).

Satan broke several of God's commandments, which are the foundation of His government, and he refused to turn away from the way he had begun to walk. *"By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned^{xxxv}; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God... I cast you to the ground..."* (Ezek. 28:16,17). As a sinner Satan and the angels that followed him could no longer be in heaven. No sinner can live for ever.

The spiritual battle between Christ and Satan is described in the book of Revelation, chapter 12: *"And war broke out in heaven: Michael [Jesus] and His angels fought against the dragon [Satan]; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."* (v.7-9,12).

Satan Mobilizes His Army

When Satan is released from his 1000 year long "imprisonment" he goes out *"to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together*

to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city." (Rev. 20:7-9). Again the wish of getting Christ's position and honour flare up in Satan, and in front of multitudes of people he comes against the New Jerusalem to besiege and capture the city.

But God knows all this. He knows the end from the beginning, and when the multitude gathers around Jerusalem, He will complete His righteous judgement on them. *"My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms,"* He tells through His prophet, *"to pour on them My indignation, all my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy."* (Zeph. 3:8)

Through Joel He has said: *"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem^{xxxvi}, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat^{xxxvii}: And I will enter into judgment with them there... Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ... Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!"* (Joel 3:1-2.12.14).

"Indeed they shall surely assemble, but not because of Me. Whoever assembles against you^{xxxviii} shall fall for your sake. ... No weapon formed against you shall prosper..." (Is. 54:15.17) The attack of Satan and his army will not succeed. They will get their righteous punishment.

"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it. ... It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. ... I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered." (Zech. 12:2-3.9; 13:2)

Through Ezekiel God says: *"And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. ... I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord."* (Ezek. 20:35.38).

Books Opened

John tells that he saw *"the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books^{xxxix} were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life^{xl}. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."* (Rev. 20:12). When the books are opened the ungodly will remember every sin they have made. *"And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. Then you shall know that I am the Lord..."* (Ezek. 20:43-44).

The ungodly will remember how they rejected God's commandments and despised His messengers^{xli}. They see what they could have won if they had chosen God's side in the great battle, but now they have to harvest the punishment of an eternal perdition instead. They will

loathe themselves, and realize that God's judgement is fair. But this does not mean that they regret their rebellion. Just like Judas when he had betrayed Jesus, they regret *the consequences* of their deeds, and not the sin itself. Even though they would like to own the New Jerusalem, they have no love for God.

God's word tells us how useless it would be to let these people into heaven. If the punishment for their transgressions was removed, they would have done the same again. *"Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they will see and be ashamed for their envy of people; yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them."* (Is. 26:10-11).

Despite their reluctance to God and His principles, the ungodly will *"know that I am the Lord"* (Ezek. 20:44), and they must admit that His judgements are fair. From the city the song sounds: *"Great and marvellous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested."* (Rev. 15:3-4).

The Lake of Fire and the Second Death

Satan makes a last attempt to make the multitudes attack the city, but they realize that they have lost, and instead they turn against those people who once seemed to be ministers or workers of God, but instead have worked in Satan's service to mislead them. *"Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand."* (Zech. 14:13). *"Every man's sword will be against his brother."* (Ezek. 38:21).

Satan's attempt to conquer the New Jerusalem fails, and the nature of sin and its evilness are fully exposed. It is time to complete the judgement. *"And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."* (Rev. 20:9). *"Surely in that day [as Satan and his army come against Israel, God's people, and surround the city] there shall be a great earthquake... The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground... And I will bring him [Satan] to judgment with pestilences and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."* (Ezek. 38:19.20.22). *"Upon the wicked He will rain coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind; this shall be the portion of their cup^{xliii}."* (Psalm 11:6).

God sends fire from heaven, just like He once destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as a warning illustration of the final judgement (see Gen. 19 and Jude 1:7). At the same time the mountains fall down, and the earth shakes and its surface cracks. Fire comes up from the inner of the earth, and the face of the earth gets transformed into a burning lake of fire.

"And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. ... But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murders, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. 20:15, 21:8).

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yea, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord of

hosts, *"That will leave them neither root nor branch."* (Mal. 4:1). Satan is the root, and those people who followed him are the branches^{xliii}. All will now get the punishment that has been meted out for them.

"But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the Lord." (v.2.3). God's people will be safe in the eternal city while all this takes place. Because over *"he who has part in the first resurrection ... the second death has no power"* (Rev. 20:6).

Eternal Annihilation

For how long will the ungodly burn? That depends on the punishment they have been meted out. They *"were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books"* (Rev. 20:12). But one thing is certain: No one will burn for ever, as many people imagine God's punishment to be. These people have chosen not to take God's side, and therefore they will not inherit eternal life. Consequently they can not burn for ever.

The word of God tells us that *"the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendour of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away."* (Psalm 37:20).

"For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be more; indeed, you will look diligently for his place, but it shall be no more." (Psalm 37:9-10).

"They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish." (Is. 26:14)

"For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head. For as you drank on My holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been." (Ob. 1:15-16).

The greatest and longest punishment will be given to Satan, the leader of the rebellion. Not only will he have to pay for his own sins, but he will also have to carry the punishment for all sins done by God's people, but which they have given to Christ. Now all these sins will be put on Satan^{xliv}. *"And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone."* (Rev. 20:10).

To Satan God says: *"I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you [com. Is. 14:16]. You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever"* (Ezek. 28:17-19).

The sin and the sinners will be annihilated from the Universe: *"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."* (1 Cor. 15:26). *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire."* (Rev. 20:14). The consuming fire cleanses the earth from all traces of sin, death, and

destruction. John tells of what he then saw: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."* (Rev. 21:1).

The New Earth

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."" (Rev. 21:3-5).

The New Jerusalem, with its streets of *"pure gold, like transparent glass"* (v.21), is the capital of the new earth. *"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day, there shall be no night there."* (Rev. 21:22-25).

"Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again. And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water. A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias." (Joel 3:22-23).

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him." (Rev. 22:1-3). What Adam and Eve because of disobedience were shut out from, the delivered will now get access to for ever. God's purpose with the earth and the human kind will then be fulfilled.

"My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." (Is. 32:18).

"Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." (Is. 60:18).

"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord." (Is. 65:25).

"And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity." (Is. 33:24).

ı . The prophecy in Dan. 9:24-27 was given to Daniel in the days of the Jewish captivity in Babylon. The angel Gabriel (v.21) tells David: *"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."* (v.24). This determined period was, according to the Hebrew text, "cut off" for Daniel's people and his holy city, i.e. the Jewish people as God's chosen people and for Jerusalem as His chosen city. All the points mentioned by the angel were fulfilled by Jesus, the promised Messiah. The time period, the *"70 weeks"*, was not literal weeks, but "year weeks" based on a Jewish way of counting. These "year weeks" were formed after the principles of a normal week, where the first six days were ordinary days of labor and everyday business, while the seventh day was God's holy Sabbath, the day He had blessed after the creation and put aside from all work, trade and worries. In a "year week" the first six years were ordinary years, but the seventh year was a "year of rest" in which the fields were supposed to lie fallow etc. We may read about this in Lev. 25:3-4: *"Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard."* The same principle of regarding one day as one year is found in Numb. 14:34 and Ezek. 4:6. The prophecy in the book of Daniel is in other words about a period of: "70 weeks" = "490 days" = 490 years.

Gabriel continues by giving the starting point for when this period that is "cut off" begins, and this was *"from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem"* (v.25). The Medo-Persian kingdom took over as world rulers after the Babylonian, and three commands went forth from the Medo-Persian kings concerning Jerusalem and the Jews. The final and most complete was given by Artaxerxes in the Autumn of 457 BC, which we may read about in Ezra 7. After this command there would first be *"seven weeks"* and then *"sixty-two weeks"*, or all together 483 literal years, until *"Messiah the Prince"*. After these years *"Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself"* (v.26). If we count 483 years from the Autumn of 457 BC we end up in the Autumn of 27 AD. (Note that year 0 does not exist. We therefore need to add one year to our calculation.) In Luke 3 we may read about the event that took place in those days: Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River (v.1-3, 21-33). Until then He had faithfully worked in the workshop of Joseph, and few people had heard about Him. But the Jordan event marked a turning point: Now Jesus became the Messiah (the word meaning "the Anointed"), as *"the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him"* and in this way anointed Him for the work He had come to do (v.22). Luke goes on by telling: *"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age"*.

When Jesus began His mission there was only one "year week" left of the "70 weeks" that had been determined for the Jewish nation and for Jerusalem. The prophecy said about this final "week": *"Then He [Messiah] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week."* (v.27). We may read about this covenant in Hebr. 8:10-12. Then we are told the time when Messiah would die for the sins of the world: *"in the middle of the week"* this would happen (v.27). In other words, three and a half years after He had begun His ministry, *"Messiah [would] be cut off, but not for Himself..."* This brings us to the Spring of 31 AD. Precisely at that time, during the Passover of 31 AD, Jesus was nailed to the cross (Mark 14:12, 15:16-39). Jesus knew the prophecies, and He knew very well Himself when the time would come for Him to die. Therefore He could also say: *"My time has not yet fully come."* (John 7:8). And as the time approached He made several attempts to explain to His disciples what would soon take place: *"You know that after two days is the Passover and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."* (Matt. 26:2). The prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 was fulfilled exactly the way it had been written centuries before.

ıı . *"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ... And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter... He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people He was stricken."* (Is.53:5-8)

ııı . God's name is an expression of His character. When the text says that the people shall have His name on their foreheads, it means that they will have His character "written" in their mind. (A person's character is "located" in the frontal part of his brain, in the *lobus frontalis*.) In other words, they will again be completely formed after the image of God, just as it had been in the beginning when God created man in His image, and reflect His character.

ıv . The word "Christ" origins from the Greek "Christós" which just as the Hebrew word "Messiah" (or "Máshîyah") means "the anointed".

v . *Aftenposten*, March 20th, March 21st, and March 25th, 2000

v i . What happens when a person dies? This question has been subject to reflections and philosophic ideas for thousands of years. It is also asked in the Bible: *"But man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last, and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep."* (Job 14:10-12) According to the word of God death is a sleep. No one will wake up until Jesus returns (see 1 Thess. 4:15-17 and John 5:25-29). Also Martha alluded to this when she spoke about her dead brother: *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (John 11:24). We shall take a closer look at this theme in the chapter *"The Resurrection of Life and the Resurrection of Death"*.

From the Bible alone it is no doubt that death is an unconscious state. One does not continue to live in another condition or form of existence, neither in heaven or anywhere else. *"For Sheol ["the kingdom of death"] cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth."* (Is. 38:18). Modern science has showed that feelings are somatic, i.e. they are in the body and are only registered by the thought or mind. A person is not what he feels, but he is a person who feels this or that. It is simply impossible to feel anything or think without one's body, with its complex nerve system and communication between nerve cells, sending information to the different parts of the brain. What, then, has this got to do with death? It tells us that the authors of the Bible were right when they thousands of years ago wrote about the state of the dead: *"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun."* (Eccl. 9:5-6). When the human body decays and turns to nothing - "to dust" - the feelings, thoughts and plans of the person comes to an end. Could it be found a better description of this state than the term "sleep"?

v i i . When the Bible talks about "the elect" it does not mean predestination, i.e. that God has predetermined some people to salvation and others to perdition. God created man with a free will, and He accepts the choice he makes. The offer of salvation - the opportunity for getting saved - is given to all people, but it is our response which decides the result. God's word sums it up as simple as this: *"But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly."* (Psalm 4:3). Those who say yes to God's offer of salvation will be elected as heirs to His kingdom. Those who do not want to serve God are not. God does not treat people different (Rom. 2:11). Jesus said: *"...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."* (John 6:37). Already before the plan of salvation - that Jesus would die in the place of man, so that man by God's grace may live - was put into action, it was decided that those who accepted God's offer would be elected as His children and heirs, as we also may read in Eph. 1:4.

v i i i . Other texts of importance: Matt. 7:21-23, Matt.7:15, Acts 20:29-30, Is. 9:16, 1 Cor. 11:13-15, Matt. 7:16 and 18, Matt. 5,17-19, Acts 4:11-12

i x . *Aftenposten*, July 28th, 2000

x . *Dagsavisen*, Aug. 2000

x i . NRK news, Aug. 24th, 2001

x i i . *Aftenposten*, March 3rd, 2000

x i i i . "I ruiner på sekunder", *Illustrert vitenskap*", no. 2, 2000

x i v . Other texts of importance: Is. 58:1-14, 59:1-3, Matt. 7:21-23, 2 Pet. 3:3-9, 1 John 3:4-10 and 15-18, Acts 26:18, John 8:31-36, Col. 2:8, Acts 22:16, Pro. 1:23, 14:12.

x v . The Bible has a clear definition of the term sin. We find it in 1 John 3:4: *"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."* It is about breaking God's law, the Ten Commandments, which is the constitution of the universe and the norm of righteousness. In Psalm 119 this law is honored in almost every single

verse. The psalm begins with a blessing of those who have chosen to walk on God's way: *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the laws of the Lord!"* (v.1). At the same time we are reminded of a serious fact: *"You rebuke the proud - the cursed, who stray from Your commandments."* (v.21). And: *"It is time for You to act, O Lord, for they have regarded Your law as void."* (v.126). This last quotation is of special importance in connection with the last days, since *"lawlessness will abound"* and *"the love of many will grow cold"* (Matt. 24:12).

xv i . The verses above and below show that it is about the last days.

xv i i . God says: *"My covenant [see Hebr. 8:10] I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips."* (Psalm 89:34). And in Psalm 111:7-8 it says: *"All His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness."* The death of Jesus on Calvary did in no way destroy God's law, nor the words and promises that had already been given through His prophets. To make clear the purpose of His mission, Jesus said: *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 5:17-19).

xv i i i . We find the Ten Commandments the way God gave them written down in Ex. 20:3-17. Today we often find the law expressed in such a way where the 2nd commandment - which forbids worship of idols - has been removed and the 10th divided to maintain the number of ten and pretend that the law has not been changed. In addition the 4th commandment has been shortened only to say "Remember the day of rest that you keep it holy", without mentioning what day it is all about. But the law unmistakably says that it is the Sabbath, the 7th day of the week, which God sanctified and blessed after He had finished the creation, that shall be kept holy and be a day of rest. According to God's system the Sabbath starts at sunset on Friday, and ends on sunset Saturday. No other day is commanded to be kept holy, neither in the Old or the New Testament. On the contrary it says that we shall work on the remaining six days. Jesus kept the seventh day Sabbath, as did the disciples and the first Christians as well. It was not until the beginning of the 4th century AD that Sunday began to be kept as a day of rest also among Christians. Originally this was the day of the sun god. The English word "Sunday" testifies of this: *SUN-day*, the day of the sun. Also in other languages we may trace similar linguistic connections, for instance in German: *SONN-tag* ("Sonne" meaning "sun"). Similarly, there are names testifying that our Saturday is the Sabbath: *Subbota* (Russian), *Sabado* (Spanish), *Sabbato* (Italian) - to mention a few. There have been people throughout the whole of history who have kept the seventh day Sabbath in accordance with God's commandment. Usually they have been a minority, and not seldom they were subject to scorn and persecution from a Sunday keeping "Christian" majority, not least in the Dark Ages.

x i x . *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord you God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."* (Ex.20:8-11)

xx . Verse 3 continues by saying that obedience to the law of righteousness and the keeping of the Sabbath also includes *"the foreigner"*, those who are not of Jewish blood. In other words, the validity of the Sabbath as a holy day of rest was just as important to them, to *"both Jew and Greek"* as Paul in several of his letters puts it to underline that God does not treat people different. In Is. 56:3 we may read: *"Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying, 'The Lord has utterly separated me from His people'. Nor let the eunuch say, 'Here I am, a dry tree.'"* And God's message to the people in the last days continues: *"For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant [the covenant where God says that He will write His law, the Ten Commandments the way He gave them, in the human heart and mind, Hebr. 8:10], even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name, better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants - everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant - even them I will bring to My holy*

mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer." (Is. 56:4-7). In this chapter in the book of Isaiah the importance of the Sabbath in the last days is further underlined. Verse 7 states that it is those people - who have chosen God's side, given their sins to Him, and allowed His grace to teach them so that the law has become a part of their character, as it is written in their heart (the Sabbath commandment included) - that God will "*bring to His holy mountain*", i.e. take with Him to the heavenly Jerusalem. The meaning of this verse will be further explained in the following chapters of this book, which speaks of the second coming of Christ and what will take place in the time thereafter.

xxi . Other texts of importance: Psalm 119, John 14:15.21 and 23, 17:17, Prov. 18:4 and 9, 29:18, Eccl. 12:13-14.

xxii . Com. Rev. 14:12: "*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*"

xxiii . To blow the trumpet was a signal of getting ready for war. God uses it as an illustration on how His people must wake up, acknowledge their sins, and prepare for His coming.

xxiv . God gave the sanctuary service to the Israelites to teach them how the plan of salvation would work. The animal that had to be sacrificed when someone had sinned, was a symbol of the coming Messiah who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world. The innocent had to die for the guilty to go free. The sanctuary service therefore was only valid until Jesus died on the cross (see Hebr. 10:1-4 and 14). Then the shadow had faced the original, the type had met the antitype, and it was not necessary to make any more sacrifices. It was this law of ceremonies (the sanctuary service) that was abolished by the death of Christ on the cross, not the Ten Commandments! The Commandments were on the contrary confirmed (Matt. 5:17).

xxv . The everlasting covenant is the covenant that God made with man already in the Garden of Eden. Jesus would die in man's place, so that we could be forgiven and get cleansed from sin. This includes what is written in Hebr. 8:10, where God says that He will forgive and forget our violations of the law (which is termed sin, 1 John 3.4), and write His law in our hearts and minds. Those people who have "*broken the everlasting covenant*" are, then, those people who would not accept God's offer of salvation. It is those who rejected God, His law and His rescue plan. These will have to carry their sins and their punishment themselves.

xxvi . Unfortunately it will - as it has been all throughout history - also in the last days be a majority that renounce God and His law. When these die on "*the day of the Lord's wrath*" there will only be a small number of people that will not be hit by the punishment. These have accepted Jesus as their Savior. They have given their sins to Him and received the grace He has offered to cleanse them from sin. They will not be left on earth when it is made waste and is disorderly and chaotic, but they will be caught up in clouds to meet their Savior in the air (1 Tess. 4:16-17), and together with Him they will travel to Heaven where they will reign with Him for 1000 years. More about this in the next chapters!

xxvii . Augustine himself belonged to the Manichaeism (a Gnostic sect) where the teachings of Platon about the two worlds - the "sense world" (what we see around us) and the "idea world" (where everything, including the soul, had eternal existence) - was popular. Today Augustine is honored as the one who united Platonism and Christianity.

xxviii . See 1 Thess. 4:16 and Rev. 11:15-18.

xxix . "*The sting of death is sin...*" (1 Cor. 15:56). Just like death, sin will not have any power over those people who have chosen God's side in the great battle. Sin, which since the fall of man has kept humanity in slavery, has completely lost its power over them, and will be annihilated when God "*makes all things new*".

xxx . A change of the character must take place in this life. Jesus has made it possible for us to overcome every sin in our lives. After the fall of man humanity came under Satan's dominion, since Adam and Eve chose to follow

his advice instead of God's. As a consequence it is impossible for a person to resist sin in his own power, since we have a fallen nature (referred to as *the flesh*, or *sarx* in Greek). It was this nature Jesus took when He came to this earth as a human being. "*And the Word [Jesus] became flesh [sarx] and dwelt among us.*" (John 1:14). With the fallen nature of man Jesus showed that it is possible to live a life without sin, if we give ourselves completely to God and receive His power to overcome. Jesus spent hours together with His Father in prayer, and He got power to fulfill the mission He had come to do. He gave us the recipe for victory over sin. The power that helped Jesus to live a life without sin, is also available to us. Satan, the father of sin and lord of death (Hebr. 2:14), has no power over any person who puts his trust in God! No sin or temptation is too big for us to overcome with God's help. Therefore it is important that we give all known sins, i.e. all sins that God shows us, to Him so that He may forgive us and cleanse us from it. The result of God's work in the Christian is a changed character.

When Jesus returns we will be changed, but this is a change from mortality (since we are under the power of death) to immortality (so that we may live for ever). The power of death will be completely broken. It is, then, not a question of a change of the character. But, some may ask, does this mean that we may continue to sin for ever? And what about those sins that we yet may not be aware of, and which we yet have not given to God (something we according to our *attitude* would have done immediately if God had shown us those problems)? The human being that overcomes will not continue to sin. He has already given himself completely to God, and is willing to follow Him wherever He may lead, and to let go of all things He would show him.. One of the questions that will be asked by the faithful when Jesus returns is: "*Death where is thy sting?*" (1 Cor. 15:55). We are told that "*the sting of death is sin*" (v.56). Just like death sin has lost all its power over those people who have chosen God's side. In other words, Satan can not force anybody to sin any more. They are completely free from his slavery. "*He [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*" (Col. 1:13).

xxxix Compare with Rev. 20:1. Satan and his angels are bound to the desolate earth, and they cannot go anywhere else – to other worlds or in heaven (see Rev. 12:12) – to seduce someone. Not until after the 1000 years they will be “released for a little while” and they will face their final judgement.

xxxixi This “clear up judgement” thus takes place after the Second Advent.

xxxixiii The name *Israel* means “Prince with God” or “Striver with God”, and was given to Jacob when he “*struggled with God and with men*” and prevailed (Gen. 32:24-30). This battle was a symbol of the battle that God's people will have to fight in the end time. Jacob, or Israel, was the father of the twelve men who became the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Mainly two of these tribes are known today, the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. The other ten disappeared after they had been conquered and captured by the Assyrians. As a people the Israelites were chosen only to the extent that they did and continued to do the will of God. When the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, they shut themselves out of the kingdom of God in practise. They no longer had any privileges, “*for there is no partiality with God*” (Rom. 2:11), and “*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythians, slave nor free...*” (Col. 3:11). Carnal descent does not make anyone God's people (John 8:31-34). Israel, the chosen people, was a symbol of God's chosen people through all times and from all nations. “*For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7). God searches the human heart and judges it with righteousness, according to its true character (Matt. 15:8-9 and 22:25-28). “*But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly*” (Psalm 4:3). Those who accepts God's offer of salvation, fear Him and obey His commandments, they constitute God's true people. Paul writes: “*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter*” (Rom. 2:28-29).

xxxixiv “*Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?*” This question is asked in Psalm 15, and the answer is given many places in the Bible: Psalm 15:2-5, Joel 3:5, Rev. 14:1-5, 22:14, Is. 33:15-16, Psalm 37:29-31, Pro. 2:21, 28:10,18; Is. 57:13, 65:9, Psalm 4:4, Jer. 7:5-7, Pro. 2:21, Psalm 69, 37, 1 Pet. 3:10-11, Is. 56:6-7, Psalm 61:6.

xxxixv The wages of sin is death, also for Satan and the angels that followed him in his rebellion. Satan once had a high position in heaven. He was “*the anointed cherub who covers*”. “*I established you,*” God says, and He continues: “*You were on the holy mountain of God. You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones* (comp. the sea of glass in Rev. 4:6). *You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned;*

therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones.” (Ezek. 28:14-16). God could not allow sin to be in heaven. Just as Adam and Eve were shut out from paradise when they disobeyed God and sinned, Satan and his angels were thrown out of heaven. Why? God said about the sinful human beings: *“Lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”* (Gen. 3:22). The righteousness of the law requires that the sinner gets his punishment, i.e. death. God can not allow sin to exist for ever. 6000 years of the history of this earth has showed us why. All suffering, grief, unrighteousness and misery are a result of the rebellion that Satan started in heaven, and which he continued on the earth. The plan of salvation offers sinful human beings forgiveness for their transgressions, but it also implies a cleansing from sinful traits of character. God’s grace cleanses us from all sin and set us free from the slavery of Satan, so that we may be prepared to enter God’s kingdom, eat from the tree of life and live for ever. But the sin and all sinners, angels as well as humans, must be annihilated. Not until then will all sorrow and misery disappear from the universe.

xxxvi When the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, and Jesus, and His people with Him, comes to the earth for “the third time”.

xxxvii The Valley of Jehoshaphat – compare with *“the breadth of the earth”* (Rev. 20:9) and the *“very large valley”* which is formed when the Mount of Olives splits in two (Zech. 14:4).

xxxviii God is here talking about the New Jerusalem. See verses 10-14. (Verses 11-12 give a description of the city: *“Behold, I will lay your stones with colourful gems, and lay our foundations with sapphire. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, our gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones.”* Compare with John’s description of the city in Rev. 21:18-21: *“And the construction of its wall was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire...etc.”*)

xxxix The books that are opened here are the books where the sins of the ungodly are written down. Here is the result written down from the judgement which took place in heaven during those 1000 years.

xl The names of God’s people, who took part in the first resurrection, are written in the Book of Life. All their sins have been wiped out, and it is written “forgiven” beside their names.

xli Read the parable of the wicked vinedressers in Luke 20:9-16 (compare also with Is. 5:1-7. The symbol of the vine yard as God’s people was not unfamiliar to the Jews when Jesus told this parable, and the story is just as current today).

xlii The prophet Obadiah writes: *“For the day off the Lord upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head. For as you drank on my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually; yes, they shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been”* (v. 15-16).

The punishment is not an eternal burning hell. The ungodly will not inherit eternal life. Consequently they can not burn for ever in an eternal hell. The punishment, on the other hand, is eternal. Their reward is eternal perdition and annihilation. Jude, the brother of Jesus, refers to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God destroyed with fire and brimstone, as a comparison. He wrote that these cities *“are set forth as an example [the Greek work implying something that is visible], suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”* (v.7). The sites where these cities ones flourished are completely burnt out today. They can not possible burn any further. But the consequences are eternal; the cities are annihilated, and there are only porous layers of ashes left.

Also Rev. 21:4 puts it clear that there will not be an everlasting torment: *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

xliii Compare with John 15:1-8. Jesus is the tree, those who follow Him are the branches.

xliv On the Day of Atonement, which we may read about in Lev. 16, the last step of God’s plan of salvation (or atonement) is illustrated. A goat was chosen by casting lots to be the scapegoat. *“But the goat on which the*

lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness” (v.10). This goat would not be slaughtered. During the whole year an Israelite should bring a sacrifice, a lamb without blemish, to the Sanctuary when he had sinned and regretted his transgression. This lamb he had to kill on the altar that was in the court, in front of the tabernacle, but before doing so he transferred his guilt to the lamb by placing his hand on its head. This was a symbolic action which pointed towards Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), who one day in the future would come and die for the sins of the whole world. The innocent had to die for the guilty to go free. When the lamb was sacrificed, the priest brought some of its blood into the tabernacle and sprinkled it on the veil which divided the tent in two departments, the Holy place and the Holiest of All. (The Ark of the Covenant, which contained the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, was placed in the Holiest of All.) Thus the sin was transferred to the Sanctuary. The Day of Atonement was the only day of the year when the high priest was allowed to enter the Holiest of All. Also that day a sacrifice was made, and the blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holiest of All. Thus atonement was made for the Sanctuary. Finally the priest placed his hands on the head of the scapegoat and thus transferred to it the sins of the whole people. Then the goat was sent into the desert to die. This scapegoat was a symbol of Satan, who in the end will have to carry the guilt of all those people that have regretted their sins and given themselves to God (just as the Israelites sacrificed the animals). The righteous requirements of the law will be fulfilled.