

God's Plan of Salvation

by Richie Temple
Cary, North Carolina

The central theme of the entire Bible is God's plan of salvation which he brings to fulfillment through his Son, Jesus Christ. This plan, which was foreknown by God before the creation of the world and foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, is to bring about a family of children who will live in intimate fellowship with God as their Father and share in the glory of his goodness forever. The working out of this plan of salvation is the thread which ties the whole Bible together from beginning to end. It brings unity to its diversity and meaning to its action and thought. The Gospel of John summarizes this plan in words that are known by many the world over:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The Bible consistently teaches that there are only two possibilities for the final destiny of man: to receive "eternal life" or to "perish." Since man is "mortal" - subject to death (Rom. 1:23; Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27), he has no hope for a life that lasts forever apart from receiving the gift of eternal life from God, who alone is "immortal" (Rom. 1:23; 1 Tim. 6:16). For those who reject God's way of salvation, Jesus Christ (John 14:6), the final end or destiny will be to perish after the final judgment. For those, however, who accept Christ there will be a very different destiny - eternal life. For the believer in Christ this eternal life begins in the present life with the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) and will be brought to its final completion in the paradise of the kingdom of God after Christ's second coming (I Cor. 15:20-28).

In the Bible the terms "salvation," "eternal life" and "kingdom of God" are closely related to each other and are often used as almost interchangeable expressions (cp. John 3:5, 16, 17). The word "salvation" is a comprehensive term. It includes the idea of deliverance from something as well as the result of that deliverance. When speaking of the eternal salvation of man it refers to being saved from sin, its consequences, and the final condemnation of the ungodly at the last judgment. As a result, instead

of being condemned to perish, the believer in Christ will receive the gift of eternal life.

Biblically, the term "eternal life" means the "life of the coming age." The Bible speaks of this present period of time in which we live as the "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). It is influenced for the most part by the "god of this age," Satan, and his spiritual kingdom of darkness (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:10-12; I John 5:19). Though God is still ultimately sovereign over all (Psalm 103:19), the Bible teaches that this world is fundamentally in rebellion against God (Eph. 2:1-3). After Christ's second coming, however, God's enemies will be destroyed and a new age will be ushered in - the age of the kingdom of God.

In this new coming age God's righteous and loving rule will be established "on earth as it is in heaven" for God's kingdom will finally have "come" (Matt 6:10). This kingdom will be a "paradise" (Rev. 2:7) consisting of "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1ff). It will be everlasting in duration and those who live within it will have the "eternal life" of the coming age. This eternal life will be a life that is "immortal" and "imperishable" (I Cor. 15:53-54), for it will be life in a kingdom whose origin is "not of this world" (John 18:36) - a paradise where all of God's people will enjoy forever "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

Understanding the biblical concept of salvation should enable the Christian believer to live this present life within the proper spiritual framework that the Bible presents. Our central point of focus should be Christ's future second coming and the final establishment of God's kingdom. As believers in Christ our daily lives should be lived with the certainty that godly living in this life will be rewarded at Christ's future appearing (Col. 3:23-24; Titus 2:11-14). For though the Bible offers the believer in Christ promises for the present life (I Tim. 4:8), it remains true that the fullness of eternal life will only be received in the life that is to come after Christ's second coming (I Tim. 6:18-19).

Until that time Christians are still subject to the sufferings of this world - even death - because we have mortal, perishable bodies and live in the midst of a great spiritual battle (Eph. 6:12). Though Christians have the assurance of ultimate victory, it is only at Christ's second coming that the

"perishable" will "clothe itself with the imperishable" and "the mortal with immortality" so that death will finally be "swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:50-57). Until that time, the believer in Christ can enjoy salvation with the "firstfruits of the Spirit" and with the full assurance that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Although our understanding is limited today, the Bible promises that after Christ's second coming we will no longer "see but a poor reflection as in a mirror," but, instead, we will see Christ "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will no longer know only "in part" but "fully even as we are fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). Then, and only then, we will enjoy "God's salvation" in all its fullness - eternal life in the paradise of God's kingdom forever.

The Book of Revelation offers us a pictorial glimpse of this future "kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" that "will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15; Eph. 5:5). When this comes to pass the final goal in the out-working of God's plan of salvation will have finally been fulfilled (cf. I Cor. 15:20-28).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is

with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son (Rev. 21:1-7).

Who, then, is the one who "overcomes" so as to "inherit all of this"? Only those who through faith in Christ "overcome by the blood of the lamb" (Rev. 12:11). The Book of I John confirms this truth:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and ... everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God ... I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (I John 5:1-5, 13).