

MINISTUDY The Last Great Day Completes God's Master Plan

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In this series of studies covering God's seven annual festivals, we have learned that God has a plan for reproducing Himself through mankind.

The first six festivals show how those called of God through the ages - especially since the first coming of Christ to the end of the Millennium - fit into God's great master plan for expanding His universe-ruling Family.

But what about the billions who have lived and died from the time of Adam and were not called of God (including, now, perhaps, most of your loved ones) - who didn't have a chance to know and really understand God's purpose and plan for mankind? Are they lost forever?

The surprising answer is revealed in the meaning of the Last Great Day - the seventh and last of God's annual festivals - the festival that shows the final step in God's great master plan.

1. Is it God's will that all who have ever lived come to the knowledge of His plan of salvation? II Pet. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4_

In His loving concern for all mankind, God has planned for everyone who has ever lived to receive an opportunity for salvation and sonship in His Family, just as the already spiritually called and begotten children of God have been given opportunity.

Just as the week is not complete without the Sabbath Day, God's master plan is not complete without His seventh and final annual festival.

The number 7 in the Bible signifies completion and perfection. Without knowing the meaning of this seventh festival of God, you can't understand the perfection of God's great master plan - that God's love and mercy toward mankind extends beyond the Millennium.

2. Was there an eighth day of worship immediately following the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles? Lev. 23:34-36. Is it the final festival - the final annual Sabbath of rest? Verse 39.

The last annual, high Sabbath Holy Day is observed immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. But because of its close proximity to this seven-day Feast, it was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and was called the "eighth day." In the New Testament it is referred to as "the last day, that great day of the feast" (John 7:37). The Last Great Day is, then, clearly a separate festival.

3. Revelation 20 holds the key to the meaning of the Last Great Day. As we already know, verses 4 to 6 speak primarily of the resurrected saints ruling with Jesus Christ on earth for 1,000 years. But exactly what is said in the first sentence of verse 5?

These are not the dead in Christ, but simply "the dead." They are the billions who were not Christ's (Rom. 8:9) - those who have not been spiritually begotten by the Father and who may have not even heard the name of Jesus Christ.

The first part of Revelation 20:5 is really a parenthetical comment. The verse should read:

"(But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection."

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

But now notice the first sentence in verse 5: "But the rest of the dead [those people who have not had an opportunity to come to understand God's truth and participate in God's great master plan] did not live again (would not come up in a physical resurrection) until the thousand years were finished" (verse 5). This resurrection, which occurs after the 1,000 years have elapsed, is the second resurrection.

4. How does John further elaborate on the second resurrection? Rev. 20:11-13. How will these people be "judged"? Verse 12.

The Greek word that is translated "books" in Revelation 20:12 is *biblia*. It is from this Greek word that we derive our English word bible.

The books that are opened are the books of the Bible! They will be opened to the understanding of the billions of people who had not been able to know and understand God's purpose and plan for them. This simply was because the Father had not yet called them (John 6:44, 65) and given them His Spirit of understanding.

I Peter 4:17 shows that Christians today are now being judged (not sentenced) by how well they live by the Word of God, the Bible. Those resurrected after the Millennium will be judged the same way

These individuals will be given enough time to live a life of overcoming and obedience to God, just as Spirit-begotten Christians today.

Those who continue to live God's way of life will be changed from mortality to immortality at the end of this period of judgment, which the Bible apparently indicates will last 100 years (isa. 65:20)

5. How did Jesus refer to this special "day" or period of judgment for people who have yet to hear the wonderful message of salvation? Matt. 10:15, 11:20-24, 12:41-42.

Christ first mentioned the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, then Tyre and Sidon, Sodom again, Nineveh in Jonah's time and finally the Queen of Sheba. All of these examples of people who lived in different generations are compared to the citizens living in the cities and towns of Jesus' generation, the vast majority of whom did not understand or believe Christ's message Jesus tells us that they are all to be resurrected with the generation that lived during His time.

Jesus gave enough examples of generations of people living at widespread and different times in human history to prove that most of humanity will be alive at the same time on this earth. There will be pre-Flood men and women, all 12 tribes of Israel, those who lived during the Middle or Dark Ages

and the vast majority living now. Even babies and children who died untimely deaths will be resurrected then. They will all rise in the second resurrection simply because they had not been called by God during their previous lifetimes.

This group includes all people of all times everywhere on this earth, except, of course, those who will be in the first resurrection, those who will have already been born of God during the Millennium or those relatively few unrepentant people who will be resurrected

in the third and final resurrection to have their part in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15), becoming ashes under the feet of those already born into God's Family (Mal. 4:1-3).

This latter group, incorrigible, understood God's truth and had the opportunity to receive eternal life, but deliberately rejected it (Heb- 10:26-27).

The ancient peoples Jesus mentioned in Matthew 10, 11 and 12 would have repented if He had personally come to them in their day. And they will repent when resurrected and given access to the Holy Spirit after the Millennium.

Your Bible shows that the vast majority of the billions of humanity will finally be born into God's Family at the end of the coming period of judgment, pictured by the Last Great Day.

God's master plan of salvation for mankind will then be complete.

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

(For more information about God's annual festivals, write for our two free booklets, Pagan Holidays - or God's Holy Days - Which? and How Often Should We Observe the Lord's Supper?)

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