

The Christian faith, according to the Bible, is the free-will choice to put one's trust or confidence in Jesus for salvation from God's eternal condemnation.

This bears saying because of the significant confusions and lies that have, in some cases, persisted down the centuries and, in others, been invented out of whole cloth in our times. For this reason, we will take a brief but very high-level overview or tour of the Bible as a whole to understand the exploration that will follow in time.

First, why is there a divine eternal condemnation with which to concern ourselves? The obvious answer is that we sin, and God's answer to sin is condemnation. That answer is sufficient for you, dear reader, to make the decision to turn to the Lord Jesus in faith to be saved from that condemnation. Please, we implore you, do so and avoid the terrible fate that awaits everyone who rejects the truth.

Still, there is more to this. Long before man was created, when the universe was first created, creation was different. It did not have all the markings of judgment with which we have become so familiar that they may even seem like the way creation is by nature. For example, there was no darkness at that time. In this perfect universe where nothing good lacked, the most privileged creatures rebelled against their Creator and Father because the most exalted of all of them had got it into his head that he should be the ruler of Creation.

That rebellion caused a break in God's family with two thirds of the angels choosing loyalty to Him while the last third chose to throw in their lot with that creature also known as Satan. After giving all the angels sufficient time to make their choices, God destroyed that universe and pronounced His judgment against the rebels after rewarding the faithful ones with new rankings in His family.

Then, He recreated the whole universe, only this time allowing the marks of destruction to persist in a form for His purposes. When He was done, He created man as a new race of creatures that would be the source of replacements for the angels who had rebelled. Man was made deliberately by God to be a lower creature than the angels as an attack on the arrogance of the rebels. He was also a demonstration to them of their terrible miscalculations about Him and thus an opportunity for them to rethink their choices if they could. Angels are not quite like humans though: They don't change their minds once they have made a decision. So, rather than seeing an opportunity for repentance, they doubled down on their rebellion by attacking the new race with temptations of the couple in the Garden of Eden and later on with other efforts to get them to do things that would either cause God to destroy them or would result in their own self-destruction.

This is how human sin came about. It is also why man exists. We were made as God's answer to the lies that underpinned the Satanic rebellion that occurred long before man was created. Still, it is clear to see that we have become our own worst

enemies in the choices that we have made since our creation. Our first father miscalculated when he saw his wife in terrible jeopardy because of her sin, choosing to join her in the hopes of forcing God to save them both rather than destroy the woman he loved; now, as a result, we all who are born of human fathers must come into the world with a body that is twisted in its instincts and desires so that right from our first breath, we go running after sin like we need to displease God to survive. This is why there is a condemnation from which we need to be saved.

Just like God did not need to fix the broken creation when the angels rebelled, He does not need to save us either. He is God; creating a new and perfect creation where rebellion against His will is impossible is not even a difficult thing for Him to do, much less an impossible thing. That He chose instead to provide salvation to us is proof of His incredible love and mercy.

Clearly, Adam's and Eve's judgment in the Garden was an inflexion point for creature history. In fact, God described the course of creature history there beginning from that moment until the end of time and the beginning of eternity. In order, God declared that Satan would be reactive in the conflict from that moment on: he was never going to gain the initiative "again" and he would suffer defeat after defeat until he ended up losing the whole war. God was also going to set up an adversary to Him in "the woman" and "the Seed of the Woman." Although Satan would do damage to this Seed (he would bruise His heel), this Seed was going to destroy him and all his works in the end, thus bringing about the salvation of those the world of humans. For our parents, Eve and all her daughters after her were going to have great pain in childbirth from then on such that their lives would even be at risk. Also, there was now going to be an authority structure in marriage: women would be subordinate to their husbands henceforth. Adam and all men (not excluding women either) would now work for a living and this would be a very frustrating experience because no matter how hard humanity would work, the result would never match the effort. We would never again eat anything that would sustain our lives indefinitely like the tree of life did for our parents in the Garden. Ultimately, all human beings would die.

To begin this new reality that was going to define the human story now, God demonstrated what the Seed of the Woman would do to save humanity from the condemnation of God's judgment against their sins and from the tyranny of their new master: He killed an animal in the Garden and offered its skin to our parents. This was His offer of the salvation that would be realized later in human history. They accepted it and passed the story down to their own children. The first of their children was Cain. His name was a mark of their optimism that things were going to work out just fine, but he did not end up terribly interested in what they taught him. The second son did better.

To be clear, what God showed to them is that in order to spare their lives which they had forfeited by disobeying Him on pain of death, a life had to be given in place of theirs. This is what the killing of the animal in the Garden of Eden was about. That animal, like many other sacrificial animals that would follow in human history, was a symbol of the Person who would come to lay down His life for the world.

This is what Adam and Eve passed down to their children and what Abel responded positively to by bringing an animal offering from among the firstborn of his flock. He was acknowledging that his own life was forfeit because of sin and that Someone whom God was going to send later would pay for his sins with His life. Cain, on the other hand, brought vegetables to the Lord as an offering. By doing that, he pretended that he had no sin and certainly did not believe that any sin he committed was worthy of death or else he may have thought that God should forgive sins without demanding reparation for them, something abominable to God's perfect justice and to any common sense. In any case, this is where the human population began to divide. The division was between those like Abel and those like Cain.

This division proved to be fatal for those like Abel. Abel was murdered by his brother, not for any offense that he caused him but just for being right in his response to God while he was wrong. This would go on through human history to demonstrate this difference between the two kinds of human beings. Ten generations from Adam, by the time we get to Noah, we find Noah as the only man alive whom God found worthy to preserve from a total judgment that would kill everybody alive. For that to be the case, most of those who thought like Abel would have joined those who thought like Cain or else, they were actively being murdered like Abel was by Cain. In fact, both things were happening — as they have throughout human history since. Because of the hardships of choosing for God in this world, especially the hostility of those who, like Cain, do not care for God at all, people like Abel are often pressed to change their minds and adopt the same attitude as those like Cain. Also, they are often killed. By the time we get to Noah, the world was filled with violence, certainly including the same kind as we see that Cain inflicted on his brother. So, whether by choosing to join Cain's side or by being murdered, the number of those like Abel was down to just Noah.

This situation was not least due to Satan's intervention in human procreation by having some of his fellow rebels consort with human women and produce human-angel hybrids who soon overran the human population because everyone wanted to have them as their children too. These hybrids were absolutely hostile to God with not even a little consideration for any peace with Him just like their angelic fathers. The result of that was a world that would soon have no true human being to save and no possibility of the birth of the Savior of the world whom God had promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. So, God destroyed the world of that

time with a global flood that the Nephilim (these human-angel hybrids) could not escape or survive despite their vastly greater abilities and hardiness than normal human beings had.

Noah and his family were spared destruction and preserved in an ark that God had instructed him to build and which he, in remarkable obedience, did in fact build. This is the first great demonstration of God's deliberateness in making a difference between those who are not hostile to Him and those who are so that the judgments that are due to His enemies do not apply to His people.

By the time that Peleg was born, 101 years after the Flood, Satan had already launched a new effort to attempt to undermine God's Plan now playing out in human history. This effort was targeted at eliminating freedom of choice from among human beings. In short, Satan wanted to build a tyrannical society where dissent would not exist. This is a great way to end the possibility of choosing to submit and be loyal to God. As with the matter of the Nephilim, Satan took time planning and launching his operation. Still, he tends to move quite fast. We are not told in the Bible when he launched his operation to destroy the purity of the human race and replace the race with Nephilim, so we don't know how long that operation was in motion. We only know that God gave a grace period of 120 years for human beings to listen to Noah's warnings and turn around from their destructive choices, which means that this thing had been going on for longer than that. Another clue that we have is that Noah took 500 years to get to having children, which suggests that he took about that long to find a purely human wife who was of a mind to marry a man of his spiritual predilection. A third clue is that when the angels who were involved in this debacle are released from the Abyss during the Tribulation, they number 200 million, which indicates a significant operation. So, this business of the Nephilim probably took a few hundred years at least to push. Not so with the operation to build a despotic society.

There was a human being who was Satan's spearhead for this operation. We don't know how long he lived or when he started his career, but we know that the operation lasted for a portion of his life within the first hundred years after the Flood. That human being was nicknamed Nimrod in the Bible. Fourth generation from Noah, his nickname was coined because of his deliberate effort to capture human hearts in opposition to God. Nimrod was a very ambitious man who wanted to rule over everyone, and he was exceptional in his ability to sell that ambition so well that others thought that it was what they too wanted. The result was the city of Babel (or Babylon as it is later called in the Bible), which was also a religious center. In fact, the religion was the uniting factor. Everyone was going to worship the same god (Satan, in this case) and adopt the same ethics and those who didn't were going to, at best, be ostracized since they would be accused of subverting the

community. Nimrod is the first in recorded history to attempt to do something like this.

Nimrod built a number of cities. The first of them was Babel. If God had not intervened, he would have succeeded in welding the human family into one unit that was bound by a common hostility toward God. Because of that divine intervention though, he ended up pursuing his ambitions with only a portion of humanity building other cities, namely, in order, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar and Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen in Assyria. God disrupted the project at Babel, which was his first city, giving languages to the family of man that existed then and spoke one language. Once people couldn't understand each other anymore, the sin nature and natural self-preservation kicked in and forced people to group themselves by their languages. Thus, nations were born.

Nations, then, are God's answer to Satan's effort to eliminate free will choice for God from the world through despotic rule. The Gentile nations were created first. After all, those who received all these new languages were, like Nimrod, hostile to God or, at the very least, very spiritually naive. In other words, these nations were by definition, groups of people who wanted the world that Nimrod was trying to create but now could not because God had disrupted their ability to see it through. This is the definition of the Gentiles. Regardless, nations exist in order to make it harder for evil ideas like Nimrod's to spread through the world and cause the kind of damage that he promised to do too.

Having divided up the human population in this manner, God set about making a home for those in the world who were inclined to having peace with Him. Ten generations from Noah, Abraham was called out of the peoples of the East to start a new line, a new nation that would take a little more than half a millennium from the time he was called to form.

Through Abraham, God created a nation that was special among the nations. All the other nations came into existence out of the mass of hostile human beings who wanted to eliminate the possibility of free will choice to seek to know and worship the true God, but Israel is definitionally the family of all those in the world who freely choose to follow the true God. Although many ethnic Israelites (and not a few Gentiles) think of Israel in purely biological terms and although the Bible is clear that God does treat the biological children (and other relatives and close associates) of those who are loyal to Him with compassion because of the latter, the definition of the nation that God was making out of Israel was really a matter of a type of attitude to Him. In other words, this was going to be the one group of people on earth among whom anybody who wished to know and worship the true God would

be completely free to do so and would enjoy the help and support of others to do so.

The birth of the nation was not without its travails. Abraham had to go through certain testing and experiences both to prove his mettle and to set an example and provide a demonstration of the nature of the relationship that God was calling his descendants to. Everyone who wanted to be identified with Abraham was going to look to his life as a way to understand their calling. This was continued in Isaac and Jacob as well as in Joseph and his brothers.

Abraham's household may have been very large (he had more than 300 fighting men who were born and raised in his household), but when Jacob moved to Egypt with his own household more than a hundred years later, there were fewer than 100 people in it. Four generations later, 430 years after the family arrived in Egypt, there were more than 600,000 men, not counting women and children, of the family of Israel who were leaving to move back to the country that had been promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. God had used Egypt as the nursery for growing His family.

The process of transplanting the family back into the land He had promised them was yet another way of reinforcing the definition of the nation. First, the nation had been reduced to slavery in Egypt a few generations after they arrived because their population was exploding, and Egypt was nervous about them. To deliver them, God performed extraordinary deeds that humbled Egypt, perhaps the mightiest nation of that time, into rushing the Israelites out of their country with gifts and offerings in hopes of placating their God. When the Egyptian king changed his mind about letting the Israelites go, God terrified the elite military units that he led out after them with wonders He performed until He ultimately destroyed them in the Red Sea.

Following upon this, this nation of slaves whose professions had largely been farming and construction had to deal with the hostility of nations they had to pass by or through to get to their homeland as well as the hostility of the desert, both things that they were not equal to on their own. In short, they needed a great God to make that journey and its outcome even remotely possible. Their God did so. Even though He did, they frequently questioned the wisdom of following Him and trusting Him, many times choosing to look to other gods and actively trying to return to Egypt at least once. These responses to God were things that God wanted to expose through their difficult navigation through the desert. That is, where the patriarchs of Israel had learned and demonstrated absolute trust in God to bring them through all manner of confusing and difficult circumstances, their biological children decided on the opposite choice. They blamed God for their hardships and actively tried to get away from Him with every chance that they got. It got so that

God decided that the generation that came out of Egypt was not cut out for the promises that He had made to their fathers, so He ended their lives in the desert and used the time to raise a new generation who would inherit those promises. In this way, God showed right at the outset that the nature of Israel as a nation is not just a biological reality, in fact, it is less a biological issue and much more a spiritual one. Anyone who showed Abraham's faith was accepted by God as one of His, an heir to the promises that Abraham had been given, even if that person was not an Israelite by blood. Anyone, on the other hand, who rejected that faith was also rejected by God, even if that person was an Israelite by blood. The first part of this truth was not particularly evident in the desert because it was very rare that someone unconnected to Abraham by blood would display Abraham's faith in God. There were Gentile believers in God for sure — Melchizedek was one, for example — but they seemed few and far enough between.

While they were in the desert, God gave them what has come to be called the Law. It functioned as a national constitution, but also as an insight into what really this creation is about. In it, God gave the Israelites an idea of His perfect holiness and how abhorrent sin is to Him. He also showed them how people who belong to Him are fundamentally different from those who don't belong to Him. First of all, their first direct introduction to Him was extremely terrifying to them, so terrifying that they didn't want to deal with Him directly and preferred someone else to approach Him on their behalf. That instinct was approved by God and it was just the point of that appearance on the mountain by God. God wanted them to see what they were dealing with. He is a Holy God. He is the true God. It is a horrible idea to get on His wrong side, and because of His incredible gentleness and mercy toward His creatures, it is ridiculously easy for many to think that disrespecting Him has no great consequence to worry about. Yet, treating Him with disrespect can mean eternity in the Lake of Fire, something that no sane person wants, and something He would like all His creatures to avoid too. Furthermore, we are sinners: it is truly unwise to approach a Holy God, so we need a mediator. This is the main point that God was making for Israel and all of us who would hear the story told later.

The Law was really a systematic teaching about God and His Plan for Israel, specifically, and the world at large. It was a framework that they were supposed to properly understand and use to design their individual and collective choices as people whose hope was in God. The Law defined Israel as God's people, God's bastion in the world for faith in Him and for all His faithful.

The Law was given to Israel early in their journey, just three months after they came out of Egypt. Although the next 40 years went into explaining and refining their understanding of it through much rigorous testing, it was unchanged when Moses reviewed it to the Israelites just before he passed on and Israel went into the Promised Land.

In a nutshell, the Law declared that all human beings are sinful and unworthy of God's kindness but that God would provide a way to fix that, to make it possible for man to reenter a loving relationship with God and that that way would be at the cost of a perfect life given for sinful human beings. There were teachings too that focused on demonstrating that there was a difference between people who had been chosen and entrusted by God with His "secrets" and those who had not been, which difference is still demonstrated today, but in a spiritual way.

As was evident from their desert journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, Israel was not particularly interested in knowing God, understanding Him, or walking with Him. The main difference between them and the Gentile nations was that there was always a sizeable minority of those among them who really cared about God and His Plan. This matter persisted throughout the life of that nation and resulted in many judgments and, when that minority began to be persecuted to the point of destruction, its ultimate destruction although with a promise that God would eventually restore it and fulfil all His promises to it.

For all of Israel's difficulties, she was still the only nation that could produce the Savior that God had promised to mankind. After the Exile into Babylon and the destruction of Israel's nationhood, God arranged for them to be brought back and reconstituted in preparation for the birth of the Savior of the world who was also first of all the Redeemer of Israel, the One to whom it belonged to regather, reestablish, and rule over Israel forever.

This, then, is how God realized His promise of salvation to all mankind: He regathered a few of those Israelites who had been expelled from the land that He had given to them. He helped them rebuild a reduced form of the nation and even the Temple in Jerusalem. Then He used successive Gentile nations to keep them in line until the time of the Messiah came. When He came, that Messiah was promptly and roundly rejected by His people, very much in keeping with their old ways. Not only did they reject Him, but just as they had done in killing many of those who loved their God in generations past, they betrayed Him to their Gentile overlords to get them to kill Him for them. None of this was a surprise to God, however. He had given Daniel and many other prophets to prophesy that all this would happen. He simply used it to also work out the reality of salvation.

The salvation of sinners can only be brought about by taking the just judgment that is due to sinners and applying them to a substitute for them. Because God is perfectly just, He cannot ignore sin, no matter how small it may seem to the sinner, so sin had to be punished. This is the despair of the sinner: There is no way to satisfy the punishment for sin and be spared because God's judgment against sin is that it is worthy of death. In order then for the sinner to be spared, somebody else must die. For it to be fair too, that person had to willingly accept the responsibility

for the sins of the sinners for whom he must die. This is what the Savior did. When the Israelites of the Messiah's day conspired to kill Him, they set in motion the sacrifice for human salvation. The Savior accepted all human sins as His responsibility, just as any human being may buy another human being's debts, and suffered an indescribable experience of spiritual death on their behalf before giving up His physical life. Because He was perfect, though, and was even being obedient to God in carrying out such an incredible sacrifice, He was raised back to life in a new, indestructible Body and confirmed ruler over all of God's creation (the very position that Satan wanted in competition with God, but which is now shared freely with this obedient Servant of the Father).

Clearly, what it required to be able to do this massive thing was beyond any human being. Even the best human being who could live could probably only manage their own salvation if even that, and the Scriptures claim that not a single one managed even that. So, for this salvation to work, God had to do it Himself. The Second Person of the Trinity put on humanity through a virgin birth that circumvented the sin nature that was passed down through human fathers to every human being that was born. Again, God only **had** to do this because He wanted to save human sinners, and no one else could do it. He was under no obligation or necessity at all to do it.

Because, then, God shared in humanity and in the line of Abraham, He thus guaranteed the preservation and restoration of Israel forever and also the salvation and preservation of the human race eternally. This latter applied to the Gentiles. Even though God had made His own nation, a nation that was meant for Him among all the nations of the world, He had never meant to abandon the nations that rebelled against Him. They were all His creatures. Additionally, there were always a few within each Gentile nation who went against the grain in their nations and tried to find Him so that they could become His children. In fact, if Israel had lived up to her purpose, these Gentile believers would always have provided a refuge for people like this, but they largely failed to understand that purpose anyway.

Through the Sacrifice of Jesus, which answered for all the sins of all human beings, the Gentiles too were restored to God. The Israelites thought of their relationship to God as exclusive and based upon their ancestry, and they were only partially correct about that. God gives Himself exclusively to some people and He did treat the Israelites differently, preferentially, if you will, because they were the descendants of His friend Abraham. Their error is that God has no choice but to belong to people who have an ancestral claim on Him. In fact, only those who care for Him get to have a relationship with Him, not those whose fathers had a relationship with Him. The Cross of Jesus declared that everyone needs to be saved from the condemnation of sin, everyone! Including the Israelites! That is, as elitist

as they may want to be about the fact that they had a generations-long acquaintance with God, the Israelites were in no better position than the Gentiles. In fact, they were worse because of all the incredible advantages that they had but didn't exploit. If the Israelite is no better off than the Gentile, then it didn't matter who your father was. It only mattered how humble you were willing to be about the reality of your situation. Since the Israelites were too arrogant to accept that they too needed saving, God's gift of salvation has largely been enjoyed by the Gentiles. Again, as always, there is a small remnant of Israelites who humbly accept that salvation, so it is not as if Israel has been written off entirely.

This restoration to God of the Gentiles has taken two millennia to be fully realized through the faith-acceptance of a pre-ordained number of Gentiles of the Gospel of Salvation. Once this number of Gentiles and the remnant of Jews has been completed, there is no longer any judicial reason to suspend God's conclusion of the rebellion that Satan began. That is, the next major event on God's divine calendar after the Cross of Jesus Christ is actually the repossession of the earth and the removal from His universe of all His enemies. The intervening double millennia was hidden from even the prophets and kings of Israel as God's secret because it was God's answer to Satan's argument that no matter what, God is stuck with a broken family because the fallen angels cannot be rehabilitated — and now, human beings have also largely fallen into Satan's hands with only a very precious few choosing to turn back to God. Through the Cross, powerful but hidden changes occurred throughout the universe that resulted in a mass pouring into God's family from among the Gentiles who were considered entirely lost to Him. In just that little time (from even an angel's perspective), the number of fallen angels has been almost exactly matched.

Satan's answer to try to prevent this in the first instance was first, as usual, a swift corrupting attack on the Gospel to make it less effective with perversions of the Gospel and alternatives to it being presented right from the time that the Apostles were still alive. Failing that — and frequently, right on the heels of that, regardless of its success or not — he also launched terrible persecutions against Christians. This combo has largely been his method of trying to prevent as many as possible from coming to faith in Jesus Christ and/or causing those who do come to that faith to turn away from it. Down the centuries, he had varying degrees of success but never enough to prevent the flood of new members in God's family. There were points when it seemed that he had won too when the number of true believers dwindled because he had so thoroughly corrupted the proclaiming of the Gospel that it seemed as if no one knew or cared what the truth of the Bible is anymore, but as the end of the most recent of those periods showed in the Reformation, his "victory" was never to last. The Gospel was always reclaimed and taught

aggressively so that the flood renewed, even in much greater proportion than previously.

Nevertheless, Satan will continue his opposition to God's plan right up to the point when he is finally thrown into the Lake of Fire ceasing all his rebellion forever. Until this execution of his suspended sentence is carried out, he will be active in trying to prevent God from replacing every last one of the angelic rebels. This activity of his though will serve to further God's plan at every turn. To illustrate, in general terms, Satan's use of the lie to attack God's truth serves to give every potential human penitent an opportunity to truly consider whether they want God's truth or whether they wouldn't prefer an alternative (even if utterly impossible) reality to it. For another illustration, Satan's use of threat of physical harm up to the point of death against those who choose for God against him serves to ensure that only those who value God and His promises above even their own earthly wellbeing join His family. Why does this detail matter? Because if anything is more important to you than God, it won't be long before He starts to seem like a tyrant to you, and since the relationship that He is offering is an eternal one, it would be a very long tyranny to endure. In short, God uses Satan as a winnowing tool to separate those who really want to be part of His family from those who really don't want to be.

As the number of God's family is being completed, the closing order of this part of His plan will commence using Satan exactly in the way that he has proven himself to be useful. The Bible calls this closing order "The Tribulation." The idea of this time is that it is the period of the preparation for the final showdown between Satan and God's Champion, Jesus Christ. If Satan succeeds at preventing the return of Jesus as God's rightful King or otherwise defeating Him at that return (both utter impossibilities even if not to Satan's insane mind that told him that picking a fight with God could go some other way than his own complete defeat), then he gets to keep the spoils of war: God's creation as his own eternal kingdom without any further interference from its Creator. On the other hand, God fully intends to completely destroy Satan's hold over his creation and restore things to the way He meant them to be.

At a time of God's choosing, the Tribulation will kick off. It will begin with Satan's chosen "man" ascending to power in strategic nations and power blocs across the world. To obscure his nature and what he is really up to, Satan will have many other people at the same time pretending to be what this man will be. As he has so successfully done many times throughout the millennia, by pretending that there are many other possibilities, he will deceive many people into joining the "best" of many bad options or some option that, to the minds of those who choose it, is just as good as any other. This way, the Antichrist, Satan's man, will capture the world's loyalty in the first half of the Tribulation. This will not be all. A massive world war involving some of the richest and most powerful, as well as most violent, nations of

the world will start with the Antichrist leading one side and the Mah'di leading the other. Again, this is only a very successful tactic of the enemy: creating false dichotomies that capture anyone no matter what side they choose.

This war will end with the Antichrist sitting at the top of the world as its ruler. By the time he has taken this position, a significant number of believers — a full third of all believers who enter the Tribulation — will have fallen into apostasy, not least because nearly all unbelievers will have given up on common decency, choosing instead to be utterly wicked. This is because the divine restraint that has kept the world from suffering the full extent of human evil will be removed. The pressure of human evil all around them and of the powerful lies that will be swirling around the world spewed by the Antichrist and all the false prophets and false messiahs who will arise at that time will prove too much for many of these believers.

Those believers, on the other hand, who endure that experience of the first half of the Tribulation and come through it with their faith intact will have to deal with the Antichrist's unparalleled hostility toward Jesus Christ and every memory of Him in the world. The whole concern of the second half of the Tribulation is the extraordinary trouble that the Antichrist goes to to try to rid the world of everyone who still believes in Jesus Christ at that point. He will very nearly succeed too, given that he will reduce the population of those believers by a full half.

At the end of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will be provoked into trying to completely destroy Israel. Although this will seem like a precipitated reaction, it really was the plan all along. Destroying the nation and all the people who share in its true heritage was always the goal of Antichrist's ascension to power over the whole world. Again, this effort will nearly succeed. Just as they are about to be destroyed, the last holdout will be saved by the return of the King of the believers, God's Champion, Jesus Christ.

This is the final inflexion point in God's Plan. With the return of Jesus Christ, all the hard-headed rebels will be summarily killed (if they are human) or thrown into the Abyss, the angels' prison (if they are angels). In this way, everyone who actively rejects God's right to His creation will be removed from the world. The Antichrist and his prophet will get special treatment, being thrown directly into the Lake of Fire as human-angel hybrids who led the world to attempt to destroy God's children out of His creation. The only people who will be left alive at this point will be children too young to make choices, unbelievers who finally turn to faith in Jesus when they see Him return, and, possibly, unbelievers who did not join in the destruction of believers but who still don't turn to Jesus at His return. This population will seed the new world.

Now, this new world is not the final destination of God's Plan. The situation here is really the destruction of the most virulent of God's enemies and the demonstration

of what God's rule is like for the world. That is, when all those who hate God are removed and only those who are still making their choices are left and the world no longer has to deal with Satan's tyranny and his meddling, what kind of choices would the world's peoples make? This is also the period of the fulfillment of God's wonderful promises to Israel and to those who faithfully followed him in the darkness of Satan's tyranny over the world for six thousand years. In addition to their rising from the dead and all receiving new bodies that are now indestructible and perfectly suited to eternal life with God, they will now be the new rulers of the world in place of Satan and his fellow rebel angels. This will be a perfect world, with perfect weather, perfect flora and fauna, and perfect rulers. Still, it will be a world peopled by an imperfect population still making their choices about what sort of response to offer to God. So, it is not the end yet, just a final demonstration before the end.

A key feature of this return is the reward of these loyal servants of God who endured 6000 years of Satan's hostility toward God and themselves. This contingent of human believers is the first prize of God's war to restore His family. His family is restored to its full number when they are completed. They are together the replacement for the angels that rebelled. As such and also in recognition of the fight that they put up to be confirmed as part of God's family, one of the first orders of business at the return of Jesus Christ is their reward. Depending on how hard they fought, how committed they were to God's victory, that is, the zeal that they displayed in their fight, each of these human believers will be rewarded. While the vast majority of them will get the base rewards, a number of them will gain greater rewards with a few winning the highest rewards possible. The full list of possible rewards to win is not given in the Bible, but enough is provided including

- a Perfect Eternal (that is, the Resurrection) Body that is not limited by material/physical concerns even though it is a true corporeal body;
- unrestricted access to and eternal fellowship with the Trinity;
- full rights in and permanent membership of God's family;
- unrestricted access to every part of God's creation for one's enjoyment;
- a home in God's divine and universal capital, the New Jerusalem;
- eternal participation in God's rule over all creation beginning with participation in Jesus's millennial rule over the world;
- unrestricted access to the Tree of Life for one's enjoyment forever;
- no fear ever again of the Lake of Fire;
- a new name that perfectly describes the believer and their eternal achievements,

which are some of the base rewards that every believer will enjoy in eternity. There are incredible rewards beyond even these that those who show greater zeal will enjoy including specifically the three crowns: the crown of righteousness, the crown

of life, and the crown of glory. Although the absence of all the troubles of this life and the incredible wonders of the previously listed rewards are so good as a prospect that the higher rewards are difficult to appreciate as something greater to aspire to, the fact is that the base rewards are meant to give a sense of curiosity about what could be better than having those things that we are called to them.

At the end of this period, which will last for a thousand years, the essential wickedness of human beings will be displayed through a global uprising against Jesus Christ. Again, believers will be targeted by these wicked people whose sole anger is that under Jesus Christ, they cannot do just whatever they want without consequences. Again, this is not a complaint that the world was poorly run, that resources were scarce, that there was too much war and violence and trouble of every kind such as we know today. Rather, the entire complaint is that Jesus Christ's government is too strict. The consequences for breaking His laws are immediate and extremely effective. For example, the righteous will live exceptionally long lives running into hundreds of years with those who start the Millennium and have faith in Jesus whether then or later on living through the entire duration of the Millennium, but when someone dies "young" at a hundred years old and around that age are understood to be sinners suffering the consequences of their choice to defy Jesus Christ's laws. This is a key feature of that period. It is a demonstration that the problem with the human heart is not the circumstances that the human must endure, but rather the essential requirement that the human submit to God and accept His rule over himself. This is the test that free will was given to human beings to answer.

This uprising will not last long or accomplish its end even though Satan alone of all the rebel angels will be released to provide the population of that time an alternative to Jesus Christ once again. Satan's work of deception will succeed at helping this massive population of disgruntled unbelievers to rise up against God's King ruling from Jerusalem. The result will be a summary destruction of that population and of the entire universe too.

With the destruction of the universe, the time for the final judgment, that is, the trial and execution of all of God's enemies will finally arrive. Jesus Christ, God's chosen Champion, will sit in judgment over these people. First, those who became believers in the Millennium will receive their own commendations and rewards from the Lord Jesus. Although they are not part of the Church, the contingent of humans who came through the 6000 years of Satan's tyranny over the earth, they are part of the eternal family of God. They are the double portion, the final knell in Satan's coffin, a declaration that any effort to thwart God's plan only serves not only to further it but also to create a better thing than the original thing that was attacked. In this way, God's victory is by nature such an overwhelming thing that it completely obliterates the attacking force and its effects. God's family after the

Rebellion doubles in size because of these Millennial believers. They too are rewarded for their choice to turn to and stand with God and for enduring the inconvenience of that final uprising. They will constitute the nations outside the New Jerusalem on the new earth in the new Creation that Jesus will make after the Judgment of the Great White Throne.

Having apportioned rewards to these believers, the Lord Jesus will turn to God's enemies who until this time were kept in the Abyss (for angelic rebels) and Torments (for human rebels). First, since the angelic rebels have already been judged, this is likely to just be their consignment finally to the Lake of Fire. If there is any exchange at this time between them and Jesus Christ, it is likely to be only how with all the time they had had to turn around from their rebellion given their observation of God's dealings with the human population, they still maintained an unyielding hostility toward Him and therefore threw away their place in His eternal family. Second, the human population that had chosen to ignore or reject God's offer of reconciliation in Jesus Christ will answer for their choices. This answer will run along the lines of God's expectations of them and how their actual choices had not risen up to those expectations and therefore they had consistently and/or finally rejected His offer of eternal fellowship with them. They too then will be confined to the Lake of Fire for all eternity.

The Lake of Fire is literal. It is God's eternal condemnation, His eternal hostility, and cursing. There is nothing about it to be desired for anyone. For all that, it is not a foregone conclusion for anyone. God has plenty of room in His heart for all who are willing to be friends with Him. To demonstrate that, He has paid a price beyond imagining to make reconciliation with Him possible for His enemies. It is critical to understand this point. God would be well within His rights to inflict terrifying judgment on all those who have offended Him, and even if He was not — an unthinkable impossibility too — He is not only the most powerful Person in existence, but He is also the source of all existence so that no one can meaningfully oppose Him, so if He elected to inflict terrifying judgment on anyone or people that He is displeased with, there is absolutely no one who can stop Him from doing so. He has not chosen to do either. Rather than summarily throw everyone who offends Him into the Lake of Fire, He has offered both the means of reconciliation and the time and opportunity for His **enemies** to take full advantage of it. **Anyone** can be reconciled to God if they want. No one **has to** end up in the Lake of Fire. Everyone who ends up there is someone who either aggressively rejected God's offer of reconciliation or just did not care for it at all. It is a terrifying end in the extreme. Please, dear reader, make sure that it is not yours.

After this Judgment on His Great White Throne, Jesus will make a completely new creation. Where at His return, He had only renewed the earth, this time, He is creating a whole new universe from scratch, taking nothing of the old to do so. This

is very much like the resurrection of the righteous where we get a completely new body that has nothing to do with the old one except for the fact that they are individually specific to us. That is, this will be a true universe with all the defining features of a universe except for the things that were suited to testing free will choices and enduring evil while those tests were carried out. For example, the new universe that Jesus will make will have no darkness at all although night and day are perfectly normal to us. Darkness is necessary for the mortal bodies that we live in today and the mortal bodies are necessary for us to make real choices every day. In the new universe, our bodies will be immortal, so they don't need the rest that our mortal ones require. Because too we will be immortal, there is no point in testing anymore. Our choices will be sealed then: We will have proven that our choice is eternal submission to God and enjoyment of Him as our Father and God. There is no further question about that. All we will do with our free will then is just whatever comports with that fundamental choice to be His eternal family. It is then in this perfect, new universe that we will live with God eternally.

We are not told very much what life in eternity with God will be like not least because we have no real frame of reference in this life to make sense of it, and even if we did, it is not unlikely that being told will leave us in such longing for it that it will be all we think about to the point that we will do nothing that we are supposed to do in this life. We do have some idea. For one thing, we will be carrying on productive and even inventive activities because of the description of something like a global fare in the New Jerusalem to which the nations of the new earth will bring their "glory." We also know that we will have a viewing port into the Lake of Fire to watch the fate of those who chose hostility against our God. It is sufficient to say that whatever legitimate thing that we enjoy here on earth does not hold a candle to the least interesting thing that we will be able to get up to in the Eternal State. At the dawn of the Millennium, believers are told that they will go out and leap like calves released from the stall just because Satan's kingdom ruling over the world has been destroyed. Clearly, it will be an even greater release, a freedom like nothing previously known, when we are brought into the Eternal State where God is the undisputed King and where there is no evil to worry about or remember, where we are not in constant warfare with our sin-infested mortal bodies, and where we don't have hostile neighbors to avoid or defend against. This is the heritage of the righteous, the hope that we are fighting for, the goal of our faith.