

The Mystery of Godliness

**“and without controversy great is the
mystery of godliness” 1 Timothy 3:16**

**Steven J. Connor
Aiken, South Carolina**

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Notes to the Reader

You are not obligated to read this book just because I wrote it and gave it to you. If you are interested, then please read it. If you are not interested, then save it. I believe that one day you will sense the need for it. The book traces the history of God's revealing of the plan of salvation from before creation to the yet future end of the mystery.

Unless indicated otherwise, all Bible quotations are from the New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

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Preface

This book is intended to be a message of hope for those that seek a better life than can be found in this world of suffering and conflict. It is not a highly theological book, but it could have been. There is much greater depth that could have been explored, but to make the message more accessible to people not deeply involved in religious studies, it is only a brief survey. There are many more texts that could have been cited to more rigorously prove the points made. There is sufficient subject matter in the Scriptures to satisfy the most elevated intellectual mind, but that is not our purpose here.

The topic is the Mystery of Godliness. This is a phrase that is used many times in the Scriptures. When the Bible often repeats something, there is usually a benefit of looking deeper into it. At the end of this Preface are listed several Scripture use or allude to the phrase, the Mystery of Godliness.

Briefly, the Mystery of Godliness is the Plan of Salvation. It is what God intends to do with the Universe in which part of its citizens have entered into rebellion against God's government. It is His plan to restore all that was lost, but He has to do it in a way that is consistent with His universal laws. As we shall see, this creates a problem so large that only Omnipotence and Omniscience could solve it. We will explore the mystery as God, Himself, reveals it in the ancient Israelite sanctuary service.

There are a number of topics that have been omitted from detailed discussion. Some of these are theological topics of great importance but do not fit easily into the story because they are not discrete and sequential steps in the discovery of God's mystery. These include the mechanics of salvation¹ (confession, repentance, justification, sanctification, *etc.*), righteousness by faith, the law of God, the role of obedience in salvation, the nature of mankind, the state of the dead, and many more.

¹ A good, short book on this subject is E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California, 1956.

There are other topics that are omitted, even though they do fit into the story; however, they require either a greater prerequisite understanding of the Bible or are too large to fit into this short work. These topics, covered in another book of this series², include last day events, the second coming of Jesus, the millennium, and the final judgment and the Earth made new. Essentially, these topics are not included because this book is intended to be easy to read³. Nevertheless, Chapter 8 will provide the briefest of looks at these topics, but without building the required Scriptural support.

It is the author's desire that you not just be informed of God's plans, but that you decide to cooperate with those plans so that you can enjoy an eternity. The following are the most direct statements about the Mystery of Godliness.

And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables. Mark 4:11

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Romans 11:25

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of

2 Connor, Steven. What in the World is Going On? unpublished book available upon request, Aiken, South Carolina, December 2018.

³ For readers with no spiritual background at all, the following book is recommended. Connor, Steven. *Why I Believe* . . . , unpublished booklet available upon request, Aiken, South Carolina, May 2018.

the mystery kept secret since the world began. Romans 16:25

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory. 1 Corinthians 2:7

having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. Ephesians 1:9

You have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets. Ephesians 3:3-5

To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:9

For me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel. Ephesians 6:19

the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. Colossians 1:26

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among

the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27

that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ. Colossians 2:2

meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains. Colossians 4:3

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16

but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets. Revelation 10:7

CHAPTER 1

The Origin of God's Mysterious Plan

A very long time ago, in a distant place, an important decision was made. We do not know how long ago: perhaps a few thousands or trillions of years ago. All we know is that it was before the foundation of this world. The Creator decided to create sentient beings. His reasons for doing that have not been revealed to us, but there are strong indications that it is because He desired fellowship.

Perhaps the first sentient beings He created were the angels described in the Bible. One of the specifications for their creation and the creation of subsequent sentient beings was that they have free will. They would choose to honor their Creator because of the righteousness of His character, the love and goodness He showered on them, and the fact that He was their Creator. Clearly, the Creator did not want sentient machines, artificial intelligence programmed to always honor their Creator. The Creator's desire for free will among his creatures is one of the indications that the Creator wanted fellowship.

The Creator knew that there was a risk involved in creating beings with a free will. They could, at some future point, in spite of the joys of living in the presence of an Infinite Provider, decide to not honor Him, even to resist Him. Perhaps one or more of them could strike out on their own, set up their own rules of living, independent from the Creator. Being omniscient, the Creator knew that this would, indeed, happen. Yet, He made the beings with free will anyway. Ultimately, the Creator wanted a Universe filled with love and harmony forever, but He wanted that condition to be coincident with free will. Therefore, the only path

to such eternal love and harmony was to allow a period of rebellion, suffering, and misery. Yet, he made free will anyway.

So, when that decision to create was made, something else was made: a *Plan* to win back errant beings who would confess their error, desire to change their course, and submit to the benevolent will of the Creator. *The Plan* was at the same time a glorious, elegant *Plan* and a horrible *Plan* -- too horrible to grasp until the even more horrible results of rebellion became apparent to all. It involved the suffering and death of the Creator. Therefore, *The Plan* was kept secret for a long time. Eventually, *The Plan* was revealed little by little as the created beings experienced the misery of isolation from their Creator and the self-inflicted wounds of rebellion. That is why the Bible refers to this *Plan* as “The Mystery of Godliness.”

And without controversy great is the mystery
of godliness: God was manifested in the
flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels,
preached among the Gentiles, believed on in
the world, received up in glory.
1 Timothy 3:16

The Bible informs us that the first to rebel was an important angel, the one who was called a covering cherub, Lucifer. The prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah describe the rebellion of Lucifer. A few excerpts are:

You were the anointed cherub who covers; I
established you; You were on the holy
mountain of God; You walked back and forth
in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect
in your ways from the day you were created,
till iniquity was found in you.
Ezekiel 28:14-15

Your heart was lifted up because of your
beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the

sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground. Ezekiel 28:17

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! Isaiah 14:12

For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.' Isaiah 14:13

[For you have said] "I will be like the Most High." Isaiah 14:14

The angel, Lucifer, was cast out of heaven after convincing one-third of the angels to rebel with him (Revelation 12:4). The fact that Lucifer was able to convince one-third of the angels to side with him raises the idea that perhaps he was right. The righteousness of God was called into question. Was there something wrong with the government of God? Therefore, *The Plan* had a complicating factor. It was necessary, in addition to offering reconciliation to those who rebelled, that it vindicate the character of God and the justice of His law. This required allowing Lucifer, later called Satan after being cast out of heaven, to allow his alternate government to reveal the contrast between God's way and Satan's way. Unfortunately, this resulted in untold misery to those who yielded to Satan's power.

Those who ultimately yielded to Satan were another type of sentient beings, humans. After being cast out of heaven, Satan ended up on Earth.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; 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. Revelation 12:7-9

The next thing to happen is Satan deceiving Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The record of this event is in Genesis Chapter 3. The fall of mankind resulted in the very first revealing, though ever so small, of the Mystery of Godliness – an early peek at *The Plan*. As already noted, *The Plan* was laid before the foundation of the world.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.
Ephesians 1:4

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. 1 Peter 1:20

CHAPTER 2

First Glimpse

We learned in Chapter 1 that “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” was cast to the Earth and deceived Adam and Eve. *The Plan* involved a simple test^{4, 5}: can humans obey God because they love Him, not fully understanding all the implications of God’s requirements? Eve failed the test; Adam showed his lack of faith in God by siding with Eve.

A strange thing happened after Adam and Eve sinned. They discovered they were naked. In the Bible, clothes have spiritual significance. Nakedness represents the shame of our rebellion against God. Filthy, ragged clothes represent a false righteousness that we construct ourselves, that is, self-righteousness. Pure white clothes represent part of the fulfilment of *The Plan*, the gift of righteousness to those who confess and repent, that is, the robe of Christ’s righteousness. Adam’s and Eve’s discovery of their sinful condition prompted them to make clothes for themselves, symbolizing righteousness not from God but defective and false righteousness. Therefore, they sewed fig leaves together. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (Genesis 3:7).

⁴ For information on the test, see Connor, Steven. *What in the World is Going On?* unpublished book available upon request, Chapter 1, Aiken, South Carolina, December 2018.

⁵ Connor, Steven. *Why I Believe . . .*, unpublished booklet available upon request, Chapter 5, Aiken, South Carolina, May 2018.

However, after passing judgment on Adam and Eve, God did something very special. It is quite subtle, but it shows that God's judgment is mixed with mercy. "For Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). God provided clothing of His own making for them. It does not say what kind of animal, but it is logical to assume that it was the pure white wool of an innocent lamb. "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). "John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The death of an innocent lamb prefigured the death of the Creator, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This is quite an advanced look into *The Plan*, the Mystery of Godliness. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

There is yet in Genesis 3 another glimpse into God's *Plan* for reconciling the world to Himself. During the passing of judgment, God gave a prophecy. "And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). Again, this is subtle, not a lot of detail, but it is freighted with meaning. Genesis 3:15 is one of the more important verses in the entire Bible.

God is saying there is a way out of this mess. Eternal death is not necessarily your future. Satan will not have full power over you. There would be a descendant of the woman, the Seed, which would come and do battle with Satan and overcome him. The battle will be damaging to the Godhead, Jesus would suffer and die, paying the penalty due to humanity, but Jesus would be resurrected, paving the way for the resurrection and eternal life of every human who surrenders their will to Him. In the New Testament, there is a promise that connects with this Genesis prophecy, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one,

‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). This verse clarifies for us the meaning of Genesis 3:15.

So, how did the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 and the sacrifice of an innocent animal affect the course of humanity? In Genesis Chapter 4, the story of Cain and Abel is told.

In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. Genesis 4:3-5

From this account it can be inferred that God gave instruction to Adam and Eve, and thus to their descendants, that worship now involved a sacrifice of an innocent animal. It is a gruesome thing, but so is sin in God’s eyes. It helps people understand just how awful sin is, even though we have become quite accustomed to it and even cherish it at times. The killing of the innocent by the guilty teaches that the Seed will one day come and die, and that our sins are the cause of His death. The Mystery of Iniquity is, at this point, very slightly less mysterious. God desperately wants to save humanity to the point of sacrificing His own Son for our sins.

It is interesting to note that in Genesis 4:25 we learn, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me [Eve] instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’ ” It is touching that Eve thought the Savior was going to be her third-born son, Seth. Abel had been murdered; Cain was a murderer; so her hope rested on Seth. She could not know that the Seed would not arrive for another 3,800 years.

So, in summary, the limited view of *The Plan* at this point in history is:

- 1) God has a *Plan* to reconcile the world to Himself.

- 2) *The Plan* is centered on a descendant of Eve to come and defeat Satan.
- 3) This descendant would suffer and die like an innocent lamb.

As important as this information is, there is so much more to *The Plan*. We have barely begun. The next events are full of meaning for The Mystery of Godliness, but we will skip ahead 2,800 years to the time of Moses.

CHAPTER 3

The Sanctuary in the Camp

We do not know much about the nature of God. By definition, He is infinitely beyond our comprehension. The Bible reveals that there are three personalities in a single godhead. No one can explain what that really means. The three personalities, expressed in human terms, are 1) God the Father, 2) God the Son, and 3) God the Holy Spirit. We do not imagine them to have physical bodies, given that they are described as omnipresent (although that word is not used in the Scriptures). This means that although God is not universally infused into created life and matter, which is known as pantheism, He is present everywhere at all times. This implies a spiritual nature, as best as we humans can understand it.

However, in fulfilling God's *Plan*, He did not remain remote from people. He came in visions to prophets and appeared in various forms to other individuals. He was the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day to the Israelites wandering the desert. In the Old Testament, the most meaningful representation of God among men was the sanctuary of ancient Israel. Immediately after God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He said to Moses, "let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

It turns out that the sanctuary is a teaching device that was used for centuries to reveal to the Jews (and subsequently to Christians as they read the Old Testament) the mission of Jesus in the Christian era. It is the most explicit revelation of the Mystery of Godliness thus far. King David recognized this when he said, "Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary" (Psalms 77:13). Everything about it represents either a characteristic of Jesus or a

role Jesus was to play in *The Plan* as revealed in the New Testament. We will not labor all the detailed meanings of the construction and furniture of the sanctuary, but in this and subsequent chapters, we will examine, in a simplified manner, its major compartments or areas of the sanctuary and the ministries conducted in each.

It is important to recognize that the earthly sanctuary God commanded Moses to construct is a far less glorious version of the sanctuary in heaven containing God's throne. In fact, when God told Moses, "let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," He also said, "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it." There was a pattern to go by. This pattern is the sanctuary in heaven.

In the book of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul referred to priests in the earthly sanctuary services that, "serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Hebrews 8:6). Paul referred to Jesus as the High Priest who is a, "Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Hebrews 8:2). Thus, the earthly sanctuary teaches us about the goings on in heaven.

The ancient sanctuary⁶ contained a tent-like structure approximately 15 feet wide by 45 feet long surrounded by a courtyard 75 feet wide and 150 feet long. The courtyard was fenced with linen cloth supported by 60 pillars of brass. The walls of the tent were made of vertical wooden boards set in silver sockets and overlaid with gold. The roof was made of four linen coverings, goat hair, ram skin, and badger skin. Inside the tent

⁶ The description of the sanctuary in this paragraph is borrowed both verbatim and by paraphrase from <https://www.bibleuniverse.com/media-library/study-guide/e/4994/t/god-drew-the-plans>, which is operated by Amazing Facts.

were two rooms: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. A thick, heavy veil separated the two rooms.

In the book of Numbers, Chapter 2, God gave specific instructions on where the sanctuary was to be placed in the Israelite camp, relative to the various tribes of Israel. This is suggestive that even the fact that the sanctuary was in the camp has significance for New Testament theology. Recall that God told Moses that He wanted the sanctuary to be built so that He can live among His people (Exodus 25:8). When the Apostle Matthew related the story of the angel visiting Joseph about the imminent birth of Jesus to Mary (Matthew 1:20-23), he stated, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’)” (Matthew quoting Isaiah 7:14). Comparing Exodus 25:8 (“that I may dwell among them”) with Matthew 1:23 (“God with us”) shows a clear connection between the sanctuary among the people in the Old Testament and Jesus among the people in the New Testament. The Apostle John stated something similar, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Greek text says, he “tabernacled” among us, showing the relationship to the ancient sanctuary. Jesus became “God with us” because “for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

That God would become incarnate (take human form) and live among us, assuming all the physical weaknesses and temptations of humanity, is unique when compared to the pantheon of human-derived Gods. Jesus was born as a baby, as helpless as any human baby. He knew nothing of His past glory. He had to learn of it from the Scriptures he heard in the synagogue and from His mother and father, who had memorized many Old Testament stories and passages. We know this because it says, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). He had to grow into knowledge. At twelve years old, He also observed the Passover service at the temple in

Jerusalem, where the Holy Spirit likely impressed upon Him that He, Himself, was the Passover Lamb.

While Jesus was fulfilling His role as “God with us,” He “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). This text says He taught, preached, and healed. He was informing us about and demonstrating for us the principles of the kingdom of heaven so that we might cooperate with him to prepare us as citizens of that kingdom. He laid out the roadmap to restoration and eternal life. He taught us the culture of heaven so that, if we choose His ways to live, we will happily fit into heavenly life.

Jesus did not come as a great professor of knowledge, teaching the deep philosophies of life. He came as a humble person to exemplify that heavenly culture, like a common man, making it easy for us to relate to Him. The Jews of that day were looking for a great and eloquent leader who would perform miracles to lead the people in a successful rebellion against Rome. But, God was not interested in politics. He was interested in our characters. The prophet Isaiah told of a much different mission for the “God with us.” “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isaiah 53:3). Isaiah told of His true mission of being the substitute for us to receive the death penalty:

Surely He has borne our griefs And carried
our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. All we like sheep have
gone astray; We have turned, every one, to
his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4-6

Isaiah told of the nature of His teachings, not politics and warfare, but comfort for those so severely afflicted by attacks from the adversary. The Messiah was:

To comfort all who mourn, To console those
who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for
ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The
garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of
righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that
He may be glorified. Isaiah 61:2-3

Paul declared the humility of Jesus and set it forth as the example for us that fits us for heaven:

Let this mind be in you which was also in
Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God,
did not consider it robbery to be equal with
God, but made Himself of no reputation,
taking the form of a bondservant, and coming
in the likeness of men. And being found in
appearance as a man, He humbled Himself
and became obedient to the point of death,
even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:5-8

Just before He physically left Earth, He fulfilled two important objectives. The first was to die the death which was intended for us so that we might eventually live the life He originally intended for us. This is the topic of the next chapter. The second was to ensure that He would continue to be among us, but in a different form. As He was about to ascend He said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). If He was returning to heaven, how could this be? Just before that he had said, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit who would continue to represent the presence of God on this planet.

We now turn to the first phase of ministration in the ancient sanctuary: the slaying of the sacrificial lamb in the courtyard. The next few chapters follow a sin as it is confessed and then processed through the various phases of the sanctuary service.

CHAPTER 4

The Courtyard

Just inside the entrance to the courtyard was the altar of burnt offerings⁷. It was there where animals were sacrificed. When a sinner brought a sacrificial animal to the door of the courtyard (typically a male lamb or goat without blemish), a priest handed him a knife. The sinner laid his hands on the animal's head and confessed his sins. This symbolized the transfer of sin from the sinner to the animal. At that point, the sinner was considered innocent and the animal guilty. Since the animal was now symbolically guilty, it had to pay a sinner's wage—death. By slaying the animal with his own hand, the sinner was thus graphically taught that sin caused the innocent animal's death and that his sin would eventually cause the death of the innocent Messiah. This altar represents the cross of Christ. The animal represents Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice (John 1:29).

The cross has been the central focus of Christianity since that Friday at Jerusalem, in the Spring of 31 AD. Although few, if any, recognized it at that time, the Old Testament type met the New Testament anti-type, the Old Testament shadow became a New Testament reality. Suddenly a brilliant light was shed on the Mystery of Godliness, at least as far as the courtyard sanctuary service was concerned.

⁷ The description of the courtyard service in this paragraph is borrowed either verbatim or by paraphrase from <https://www.bibleuniverse.com/media-library/study-guide/e/4994/t/god-drew-the-plans>, which is operated by Amazing Facts.

Jesus knew His mission. On the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus told His heavenly Father, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). It was nearly ‘mission accomplished’. On the cross, He actually said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus’ death was a gift to every member of humanity who would accept it. By faith, the righteous life of Jesus is assigned to the record of the repentant sinner, and His substitutionary death covers the death sentence on the sinner. This process is known by theologians as “atonement,” derived from the words “at-one-ment,” meaning being reconciled to God. Paul put it this way, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). The free gift is not earned by mankind in any way, except as we repent of our sins and accept the gift.

The death of Jesus followed an all-night session of torture and humiliation. The death, itself, was the most inhumane way that humanity had devised, normally taking days of agony to die, primarily from slow suffocation. The gruesomeness of His death, like the blood letting in the Old Testament, is an indication of the magnitude of the problem of sin. It indicates that the Law of God could not just be overlooked or eliminated; it demanded justice in a most violent manner.

Jesus’ death shows what a horrific problem God had with the existence of sin in the universe. Had there been an easier way, an omniscient God would have exercised it. Clearly, sin is the greatest catastrophe that has afflicted the universe. It has brought misery, separation, rebellion, and death to a universe that was once the essence of love and happiness. Humans have a way of excusing sin, of minimizing sin, of even making humor of it. But the Creator, who wants a sinless universe for all eternity must let it play out its course so it can be judged and eliminated, without any questioning by created beings about the justice of God.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory
of God, being justified as a gift by His grace

through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26 (New American Standard Bible)

What do these words in Romans mean? The cross satisfies two equally important functions: 1) show the love of God by His Son dying for our sins and 2) show the justice of God by requiring death to pay the penalty for our sins. If justice were not a component of this, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die; the animal sacrifices could have sufficed or perhaps just a statement of forgiveness could have been issued.

The justice component was important to God, because of the accusations against His law. It was necessary to make a demonstration of His justice. This explains the words, “displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood” and the words, “to demonstrate His righteousness” and “demonstration . . . of His righteousness at the present time.” If God did not demand a penalty for sin, then He has no justice, an accusation made by Satan.

So, what is this about “Passed over sins previously committed”? During the 4,000 years prior to the cross, it seems that God had no way to make a public display of His justice. Sinners seemed to be forgiven on the basis of animal sacrifices alone. But Paul tells us, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, God was vulnerable about those “sins previously committed” (which He forgave) until Jesus died on the cross and back-fitted the provision for justification with a real penalty paid. He was vulnerable to the

accusation of lenience, indicating sin was not that important to Him. Therefore, “the demonstration . . . of His righteousness at the present time” removed the cloud of suspicion on God, who in His love, forgave sinners in times past, in spite of a then seemingly inadequate demonstration of justice.

From all this we can see that atonement is not some formalistic function that legally saves people because Jesus died. Atonement was designed to actually win people over to accept God and His government wholeheartedly, of free will. People must, in the process, become fit for heaven, obtaining, in reality, the righteousness of Christ. This is an element to the cross that many Christians do not see.

The remaining phases of the Old Testament sanctuary service make this point much clearer. This is why Jesus had to not only be resurrected but to ascend to heaven to begin the next phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. A study of His heavenly ministry sheds light on *The Plan*, revealing more of the Mystery of Godliness.

CHAPTER 5

The Holy Place

The next phase of the Old Testament sanctuary service was conducted in the first compartment, often referred to as The Holy Place. Inside the Holy Place were three pieces of furniture⁸. The table of shewbread represents Jesus, the living bread. The seven-branch candlestick also represents Jesus, the light of the world. The oil burned in the candlestick represents the Holy Spirit. The altar of incense was where the fragrance of burning incense represents the prayers of God's people rising to God's throne.

After a sacrifice was offered for the sins of the entire congregation⁸ the blood was taken by the priest, who represents Jesus, from the courtyard into the sanctuary and sprinkled before the veil that separated the two rooms. Thus, the sins of the people were removed and symbolically transferred to the sanctuary. The presence of God dwelt on the other side of the veil.

This ministry of the blood by the priest foreshadowed Jesus' ministry for us in heaven. After Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin, He arose and went to heaven as our priest to minister His blood in the heavenly sanctuary. The blood ministered by the earthly priest represents Jesus applying His blood to our record of sins in the sanctuary above, showing that our sins are forgiven when we confess them in His name.

⁸ The description of the first compartment of the sanctuary and its service in this paragraph is borrowed both verbatim and by paraphrase from <https://www.bibleuniverse.com/media-library/study-guide/e/4994/t/god-drew-the-plans>, which is operated by Amazing Facts.

Most Christians fail to recognize that the ministrations in the first and second compartments are important to understanding God's *Plan* of salvation. If the courtyard service was important in that it prefigured the cross, then the remaining phases of the ancient sanctuary service also have meaning. In the book of Hebrews, Paul, recognizing the importance of the first compartment ministry, states, "Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Hebrews 8:1-2). So, what is the meaning of the service in the Holy Place in the Christian era?

Every day (it is often referred to as the daily service), the blood of the sacrifice, which bore the guilt of the sinner or the congregation, was sprinkled before the veil, symbolically transferring the guilt from the sinner to the tabernacle. In the Holy Place the odor rising from the altar of incense represented the sweetness of the character of Jesus mixed with the baseness of our human prayers and confessions. This intercession is aided by the work of the Holy Spirit, making our prayers acceptable to the Father. Romans 8:26, 27 alludes to this, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." The sweet odor of the justified prayers rises and passes over the veil to the presence of God, where He hears our prayer as though they were issued by someone as righteous as Jesus.

So the reason for the first compartment ministration is as follows. Jesus' death on the cross made it possible for sinners to be saved. However, sinners must access this provision by confession and repentance of sin. Our confessions are mired in selfishness. Our prayers are defective. Our characters do not warrant our prayers receiving a warm reception by God the Father.

So, Jesus, Himself, as our priest (the High Priest) pleads our case to the Father, and the Holy Spirit brings our prayers before the attention of the Creator of the Universe. As Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

The book of Hebrews is full of discussion of the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, much of it about the ministry of the Holy Place. For example:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11-12

The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:23-25

Today, Christians cannot just rely on the fact that they are members of Christ’s church. They cannot just assume they are saved because at some previous point in their lives they joined the church and were baptized. It is not possible that the death of Jesus on the cross is sufficient for us to coast through life, unmindful of the sins we continue to commit. Our sins must be confessed, and we must repent of them, meaning we choose to turn away from them. At that point, the ministry of Jesus as our High Priest in the

heavenly sanctuary pleads for our forgiveness. We can be assured that with such an Advocate, our sins are forgiven. The Apostle John explains, “We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Often, the Bible uses the language of law and a court⁹ room. It is because it is the law of God that has been broken. It is because the law of God has come under accusation as unjust. Remember, that not only is the sinner on trial, God and His law are on trial, and *The Plan* must both justly save the repentant sinner and vindicate the character of God. The Accuser of the Brethren, that serpent of old, is in the courtroom making accusations against both God and the sinner. The love of God is displayed by His appointment of an Advocate for us, since we are helplessly guilty without the righteousness of Christ and His work as our Advocate.

This light on gospel understanding results from a study of the service in the Holy Place of the Old Testament. The revealing of the Mystery of Godliness continues. In the book of Hebrews, which contains so much about the sanctuary, we see that Jesus revealed the Father during His life on Earth, died to make purification from sin possible, and then went to sit at the right hand of the Father. We know now that He is there, near the Father in the heavenly sanctuary, interceding in our behalf. “For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

The daily service in the Holy Place resulted in the guilt of sinners accumulating in the sanctuary. In the ancient service, once per year, there was a cleansing of the sanctuary, a service of major New Testament significance. That was the work of the second compartment, the Most Holy Place, the subject of the next chapter.

⁹ The judgment in heaven is an important element of the ministry in the Most Holy Place discussed in the next chapter. “The court was seated, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:10).

CHAPTER 6

The Most Holy Place

As previously described, the Most Holy Place was behind the veil dividing the sanctuary tent, making it the second compartment. The Ark of the Covenant was the only item in the Most Holy Place. It was a chest of wood overlaid with gold. On top of the chest were two angels made of solid gold. Between these two angels was a platform, called the mercy seat, which represents the presence of God, that is, His throne in heaven. “You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!” (Psalms 80:1). Among the things inside the Ark were the Ten Commandments, written by God’s finger on tables of stone.

The Day of Atonement service was conducted once a year. On that day, the high priest took two goats and cast lots over them to determine which would be the Lord’s goat and which would be the Scapegoat. The high priest placed his hands on the Lord’s goat and confessed the sins of the congregation, which had accumulated in the Holy Place over the year during the daily service. Then the Lord’s goat was killed and the blood was taken by the high priest into the Most Holy Place and offered before the presence of God at the mercy seat.

Next, the high priest transferred the sins that had accumulated in the sanctuary to the Scapegoat, which was then led away from the camp into the wilderness. This symbolically cleansed the sanctuary of those sins, and it symbolically eliminated the sins of the people forever (which had already been forgiven). The sanctuary was then ready for another year of ministry. In effect, the service made all things right between God and His people. This is why the book of Hebrews calls the Day of Atonement a

purging or purifying, “Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Hebrews 9:21-23).

As described in Leviticus 16:19, “Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.” Verse 30 states, “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” The people had already been forgiven in the daily service. Now, they were figuratively cleansed of the sin. It is as if the record of the sin had been expunged. Thus, some make a distinction between forgiveness of sins and the blotting out of sins.

If the ancient Day of Atonement service has any meaning to the Christian era, as do the camp, the courtyard, and the Holy Place, then at some point, the confessed sins of God’s people, both literal and spiritual Israelites (Galatians 3:29), begin to be removed from the true sanctuary in heaven. This represents an entirely new phase of Christ’s ministry. Notice that in Hebrews 9:23, quoted above, it states that the heavenly sanctuary had to be cleansed with something better than the blood of bulls and goats, the something better being the blood of Jesus. Therefore, it is clear that this heavenly Day of Atonement is a real cleansing of the sins of God’s people. The truth of the sanctuary is vitally important because, as we shall see, it explains the final eradication of sin from the universe.

The Day of Atonement in the Christian era also represents a period of judgment of God’s people – those who have taken the name of Christ and have accepted His free gift of salvation. Many Christian denominations think it is strange, even heretical, to think that the saints need to be judged after they have been forgiven by

accepting the death of Jesus for their salvation. However, they base their theology on the cross alone, not moving beyond the courtyard service, thus, not recognizing the significance of the Old Testament sanctuary to our day. But as important as the cross is for forgiveness of sins, it did not eradicate sin. We see sin all around us, even in professed Christians.

God has to account to all the watchers in the Universe for saving some sinners and destroying other sinners. His justice has to be vindicated. As we discussed in Chapter 1, mankind has free will, which also precludes the belief “once saved always saved.” Acceptance of Christ at conversion does not seal a person’s destiny. The life record after conversion is also critical. Are not people also responsible for the trail of sin left in the wake of their life after their death? Therefore, a judgment is necessary even for those whose names are found written in the Book of Life.

Jesus explains that it is possible to have one’s name blotted out of the Book of Life. “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Revelation 3:5). Jesus also says that not everyone who is called by His name is saved. “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” (Matthew 7:21). Therefore at some time before He comes to claim His people, there is a judgment, a separating of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:32). Theologians call this the Pre-Advent Judgment.

If God alone were involved, there would be no need for books, a court, a judgment. However, in a footnote of the last chapter one can read from Daniel 7:10, “the court was seated and the books were opened.” In the chronology of Daniel 7, this judgment occurs before the second coming. This court has witnesses and observers, “Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him” (also in Daniel 7:10). We can see that this is about more than humans; it is about the justice of God.

In Revelation 14:6-12 there are 3 warning messages to be proclaimed before the second coming. The first of these states, “the hour of His judgment has come.” We know this statement also applies before the second coming, which is not described until verse 14.

Paul states, “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:10-12). This judgment occurs in heaven before the second coming, so we are not literally there. We stand in judgment when our names come up from the Book of Life, but we are not there. We give an account of ourselves only through our Advocate, Jesus, because we are not there.

The two goats represent the final disposition of sin in the heavenly sanctuary. The Lord’s goat is slain, indicating that Jesus is the sin bearer for atonement. The scapegoat, clearly representing Satan, receives the responsibility for the sins cleansed from the sanctuary. The people become clean of sin. The sanctuary becomes clean of sin. The responsibility for all the sin rests on Satan, who is led into the wilderness (representing the 1,000-year millennium (see Chapter 8), awaiting his final destruction). Without this phase of Christ’s ministry, the atonement would be incomplete; sin would continue among God’s people.

So, is this some esoteric subject of interest to theologians but not to Christians looking for a solution to the sin problem? The purpose for the pre-advent judgment is to reveal the final verdict in favor of the saints prior to their resurrection. The court scene in Daniel 7 tells us, “judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom” (Daniel 7:22). This judgment is a demonstration, a revelation, not a determination by God who already knows. This reveals to all the watchers in the universe who is actually saved among all those who have claimed the name of Jesus. Jesus not only pleads to the Father in favor of the saints during the judgment, He appeals to a celestial jury. All can see the justice

and mercy for those saved and the justice regarding those condemned. The judgment vindicates both the saints and God, himself.

We should be excited about the pre-advent judgment. It is Jesus making final preparations for the second coming. This is why a two-compartment sanctuary was needed: not just to forgive sins, but to cleanse us from sin. The final decision has to be made before He comes. It is Jesus separating the sheep from the goats. They look a lot alike, but the goats only have a form of godliness (2 Timothy 3:5). The pre-advent judgment makes it possible for God, in the view of those observers who wondered about Satan's claims, to save some sinners who claim the name of Christ and destroy others having the same claim. It allows Him to ultimately totally cleanse them from any inclination to sin, so that the Universe can be harmonious for all eternity.

Through this revelation of the Mystery of Godliness, it has become clear that in the earthly sanctuary, the sacrifice of animals never took away sin. The lighting of lamps never lighted people's souls and minds. The loaves of bread never filled men's spirits. The blood of bulls and goats never redeemed a soul. These things were never intended to do so. It is in the heavenly sanctuary where these things happen.¹⁰

¹⁰ adapted from Heppenstall, Edward, *Our High Priest*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., 1972.

CHAPTER 7

The Marriage and Its Reception

The Bible teaches that there is a church through which Jesus works to enact His will. It is through His church that He reveals *The Plan*. Initially, the church was the Israelite people, and their prophets bore testimony to the thoughts of God. God bore long with them during their apostacy, but He finally rejected them, “Your house is left to you desolate” (Luke 13:5). This rejection is also prophesied in Daniel 9, which actually specifies the year the Jews were rejected. All the promises that had been made to literal Israel now fell to spiritual Israel, the Gentiles, “if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

As He says also in Hosea: “I will call them
My people, who were not My people, And
her beloved, who was not beloved. And it
shall come to pass in the place where it was
said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There
they shall be called sons of the living God.”

Romans 8:25-26

The church is sometimes referred to as the body of Christ. “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:27). This tells us that the church is precious to Jesus and that it is to be organized to perform its intended function.

Today, there are lots of Christian churches. Some have little truth; others have more abundant truth. Nevertheless, Jesus said He has people in every body of believers, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). It is also clear that some churches are far from God’s will. Jesus said, “This people honors 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 commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’” (Mark 7:7-9). It is incumbent upon believers to find a church with the greatest truth, a church that demonstrates a serious attitude for that truth by living it.

The Bible often symbolizes God’s church as a woman. God’s true church is a virtuous woman. “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman” (Jeremiah 6:2). “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Revelation 19:7, 8). An apostate church is depicted as a harlot. “I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters” (Revelation 17:1). Speaking of Jerusalem’s affection for idolatrous religions, Ezekiel said, “You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband” (Ezekiel 16:32).

The book of Revelation tells us that in the very last days, God will have a special people prepared to go through the trials of those days, people who will be ready for the second coming. The church is depicted as “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth” (Revelation 12:1-2).

Here, the church is described as giving birth to Jesus¹¹. Subsequent verses tell how Satan inspired Herod the Great to kill all the babies in Bethlehem in order to prevent the birth. Revelation 12 then tells about persecution of the church during the Dark Ages, and again, in the last days there is an especially fierce attack by Satan. “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). The “rest of her offspring” carries the meaning of the remnant of the church in the last days.

The last days church is mentioned many times in Revelation, but one text in particular is very important. “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). This is the second time that the church just before Jesus comes is said to be faithful to keep His commandments. Christians should give greater consideration to God’s law; only the ceremonial law prefiguring the first advent of Jesus was “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

The church is often referred to as the Bride of Christ.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy.
For I have betrothed you to one husband, that

¹¹ While it is easy to assign the identity of this woman to Mary, the mother of Jesus, that is a simplistic approach that fails to show the depth of meaning intended.

I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.
2 Corinthians 11:2

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New
Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from
God, prepared as a bride adorned for her
husband. Revelation 21:2

If the church is the bride, then Jesus is the Bridegroom. Matthew 25:1-13 tells a parable about a Middle Eastern wedding in which the Bridegroom comes to claim His bride. The parable is rich with meaning, but our focus is only on what happens to the ten virgins, representing the church. Five were wise and went into the wedding. Five were foolish and failed to enter. It says, “the door was shut” for the foolish virgins. The fact that some of the church members were excluded from the wedding indicates that these members had a form of godliness only. Their exclusion symbolizes the pre-advent judgment.

When Jesus entered through the door into the Most Holy Place, the door was shut. Those who followed Jesus (spiritually) into the Most Holy Place went in with him, and those who did not were excluded. The foolish virgins said “‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But He answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’”

Many understand that the wedding is the second coming, but it is not. It is Jesus claiming His bride at the end of the pre-advent judgment. The judgment identified who were the true believers; the roster was finally compiled. Daniel 7:13-14 describes the scene, “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” He did not come to Earth (for the second coming); He came to the Father,

the Ancient of Days, to claim His church. This marriage occurred in heaven.

Previous to this, verse 9 described the pre-advent judgment. The second coming is described at the end of Daniel in verse 27. Thus, the marriage of the Bridegroom to His bride, the church, occurs between the pre-advent judgment and the second coming, and it occurs in heaven.

Jesus told a parable to teach this point.

and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. Luke 12:36-37

This parable has the same elements as the wedding in Matthew 25: waiting for Lord, a wedding, a knocking on door, an opening of door. Notice that the Lord was away for the wedding. The church is not present because it occurs in heaven with the Father. The Lord returns to Earth after the wedding to receive His people and take them to heaven. Then the wedding feast occurs.

After Jesus takes His church home to heaven, He will serve the redeemed the reception feast.

And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29

That you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke 22:30

Thus, after all the cases in the pre-advent judgment have been decided, Jesus receives His kingdom in heaven and marries His church. He then comes at the second coming to take His bride to the reception in heaven, the marriage supper of the Lamb. At the end of the millennium (see Chapter 8), He brings His bride home to the Earth made new. “I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

We need to be there at this feast. We should live so that He will be eager to make us citizens in His kingdom. We should forget about the allures of this world. There should be no more searching for loopholes and avoiding our duty. There should be no more taking the easy path. We should focus our every energy on serving Him. This revelation of the Mystery of Godliness should fill us with joyful expectation.

The Mystery Finished

In the Preface, several topics important to the Mystery of Godliness are identified. Some of them are very important theological aspects of the plan of salvation, but they were eliminated from inclusion in this book because they are not discrete and sequential steps in the discovery of God's mystery.

The Preface identified a few other topics that are discrete, sequential occurrences in the unfolding of the mystery, but they are advanced subjects, requiring significant understanding of the entire Bible. Therefore, they are not a good fit for this book, which is intended to provide easy access to the mystery for those who are novices in the Word. Nevertheless, what follows is a brief description of these topics, without a defense of their veracity¹². One of these events includes the finishing of the mystery.

Last Day Events: Last day events are presented primarily in the book of Revelation, especially chapters 13 to 18. These chapters, as well as other chapters of Revelation, are highly symbolic, drawing heavily on events, allegories, types, and symbolism of the Old Testament. The book of Daniel is strongly connected to Revelation. The past is clearly the key to understanding the future.

¹² A more detailed coverage of these topics is provided in Connor, Steven. *What in the World is Going On?* unpublished book available upon request, Aiken, South Carolina, December 2018.

After the pre-advent judgment is completed¹³, these final events begin to unfold. Among the events of the last days is satanic persecution of God's church led by apostate Christian churches and empowered by world governments. Satan impersonates Jesus with a false second coming. Another activity of the last days is the presentation of the warning messages of Revelation 14, called the three angel's messages. These messages are presented with great power provided by the Holy Spirit. There is a great test of loyalty to reveal who among those living are truly faithful to God. There are the seven last plagues that rain judgment on the Earth and its rebellious inhabitants, especially those persecuting God's people.

Second Coming: The climax of the last days events is the coming of Jesus. He comes with 10,000 times 10,000 angels. Those remaining people who were not saved (The Bible calls them, the wicked.) are killed by the brightness of His coming. Jesus calls His faithful people from the grave, glorifies their resurrected bodies, and lifts them up to join Him in the air. The righteous living then join that happy throng, and Jesus takes them all to heaven for the marriage supper of the Lamb. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

John declares that at this point "the mystery of God would be finished" (Revelation 10:7). Everyone then knows what the mystery was all about. Throughout history, many considered the preaching about it to be foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). However, even God's people have not been as informed as they could have been had they focused more on heavenly things. "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who

¹³ Although we know the very day of the beginning of the pre-advent judgment, we do not know when it ends. There are no time prophecies beyond the start of the pre-advent judgment. To learn when this judgment began, see Connor, Steven. *What in the World is Going On?* unpublished book available upon request, Aiken, South Carolina, December 2018.

has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The Millennium: The saints spend 1,000 years in heaven. Satan and His angels are left on Earth but they have nothing to do; they are trapped in the prison of a desolated Earth. The saints have the opportunity to inspect the records in the judgment books. They may be surprised to learn that some people are in heaven that they did not expect would be there. There may also be some who were considered spiritual giants but are not there. The books will reveal the reasons. Also during this time, the entire history of creation and salvation will be made plain. The Mystery of Godliness will no longer be a mystery, but many details will be learned. Every question will be answered. All the “whys” of the suffering on Earth will be satisfied. The various interventions of angels on behalf of God’s people will be revealed.

The Final Judgment: When the 1,000 years are completed, Jesus brings the Holy City, heaven itself, including God’s throne, to Earth with all the saints. At that point the lost from every age of Earth’s history are raised from the dead (the second resurrection, Revelation 20:6) and surround the city. God gives them a panorama view of history: all the opportunities for salvation that were ignored, all the willful decisions to rebel against God, the guilt of each person for every sin; all this made obvious to each one. They will be forced to admit that God is just, “every knee shall bow,” but the acknowledgement is not repentance. Satan stirs up the multitude that surrounds the City to take it by force. A lake of fire reigns down and destroys Satan, his angels, and all the wicked people (the second death, Revelation 20:6).

Sin has finally been exterminated from the universe. It is God’s strange act that in order to destroy sin, He had to destroy the wicked who clung to their sin. Next God creates the Earth made new in which God’s government reigns as it would have before Adam and Eve sinned. This continues for all eternity. Praise God!

CHAPTER 9

What Will You Do?

We have explored the major steps in the unfolding of God's *Plan* to restore the universe and fallen beings to their original purpose. Does this knowledge affect your life? Will you live differently knowing the glorious *Plan* prepared before the foundation of the world? Eternal consequences depend on your decision.

Revelation 14:4 states that the last days church will be faithful and that they "are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." In this book, we have followed the Lamb as He came to this Earth to live as "God with us." We now have the opportunity to study that life in the four gospel books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We can read in the remainder of the New Testament what the apostles learned from that experience. The culture of heaven is presented in the New Testament, and it is vastly different from that to which we are accustomed. Are we willing to change?

We have followed the Lamb as he died on the cross. We have opportunity to examine His sufferings and death. When we learn that "Christ was treated as we deserve that we might be treated as He deserved," we can be led to surrender our will to Him, confessing our sins, and committing to resist sin in the future. "He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the

life which was His”¹⁴. Will these facts not lead us to accept His death as the substitute for the death penalty we deserve?

We followed the Lamb into the Holy Place as He ministered His blood as an atonement for our sins. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). He died to make it possible. He resurrected to plead our case before the Father, provided we repent of our sins and let Him be Lord of our lives.

We followed the Lamb into the Most Holy Place. It is there that we can be fully cleansed of sin and be ready for His coming. The pre-advent judgment is given in favor of the saints. The Father is justified, based on the merits of Jesus’ blood, to fully cleanse us before taking us to heaven, restored to the condition of Adam and Eve before sin but with the experiences to keep us from sinning again.

Given Jesus has provided for our salvation, can we just relax about salvation? Is it possible to believe the truth of the gospel but not be changed by the gospel? Are there Christians today who conform to the beliefs and practices of the gospel and are still not saved? Let that not be you.

Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Can it be any more plain that an entirely new direction in life must be taken. Does this sound like being saved is something that just occurs because we intellectually ascent to the truth of the gospel? With surrender, Jesus will provide His Holy Spirit to enact that change as we surrender daily. The change will occur as rapidly as we are willing.

The Apostle Paul, certainly a godly man, still had to say, “I die daily.” Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Do you not like the sound of “deny” or “taking up a

¹⁴ quotes from White, E.G. *The Desire of Ages*, page 25, Pacific Press Publishing Association, now Nampa, Idaho, 1898.

cross”? In reality, we only deny ourselves the right to pursue destructive patterns of living. In so doing, we gain for ourselves the opportunity for a happier life here on Earth and an eternal life of joy.