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GOD'S PLAN FOR MANKIND & CHRIST'S RETURN

We are now almost at the end of the year 2006. Making allowance for the time required for the great tribulation, it seems that the earliest possible theoretical date for the return of Jesus Christ is the year 2010. And even that date is highly unlikely, unless the prophesied end-time events that trigger the start of the great tribulation would start in the next few weeks, which I don't believe at all to be the case! I believe that the date for Christ's return is definitely later than the year 2010. I believe that ANY predicted date is in error, and I further believe that at this specific point in time it is simply not yet possible for ANYONE to predict the correct year of Christ's return. Dates that may seem logical or plausible to me or to anyone else are guaranteed to be in error!

This article explains why that is the case.

All dates that have ever been set or speculated as possible for Christ's return have been based on certain assumptions. And those assumptions are wrong. Therefore the conclusions reached by using those assumptions are also wrong.

To understand this matter regarding the time of Jesus Christ's return correctly, we need to re-examine God's plan and purpose for mankind.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MANKIND

God the Father and Jesus Christ determined to create a Family of beings like Themselves, in effect sharing Their own existence with a vast number of other spirit beings like Themselves. They decided that They would create the Family of God, which would be named after God the Father (Ephesians 3:14-15). They decided to first create angels (i.e. messengers), who would be used as helpers, or as "ministering spirits", in the achievement of Their greater plan (Hebrews 1:13 - 14).

God the Father and Jesus Christ are two distinct Beings, each with a totally independent mind. But even though Jesus Christ has a fully independent mind, yet He has voluntarily set His mind to "instinctively" think the same way that God the Father thinks, unconditionally embracing the identical philosophy of life, which philosophy is called "love". In creating a Family, God did not want beings that would be robots, or beings that were pre-programmed by instinct. No, God wanted beings that had free minds, BUT who had voluntarily submitted those minds to think the way God thinks, in effect permanently adopting the identical approach to life that Jesus Christ has exemplified in His relationship with God the Father.

The task God the Father and Jesus Christ (known as "the Word" at that time) had set Themselves contained a major challenge even for God. The easy part was to create other spirit beings (the angels), and later also physical beings (human beings). The difficult part involved giving both, angels and human beings, a truly free mind and a free will, with the ability to make independent choices. God was very clear on WHAT CHOICES God WANTED these beings to make, choices that were voluntarily in submission to God's will and intentions, and which would express a desire to think along the same lines that God thinks, fully embracing God's purposes and intentions and way of living. But giving these beings a free will automatically included THE POSSIBILITY that they would not agree with God's way of thinking, with God's philosophy of life, that they in fact might oppose or resist God's intentions, that they might even embrace a philosophy of hostility towards God's goals and intentions.

This was the inherent risk in God's plan.

The attribute of a free will having the ability to make independent choices, and to mold its own way of thinking according to the independent choices it would make, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong usually referred to as "CHARACTER". He spoke about character in many of his writings. Here is one place where Mr. Armstrong discussed this "difficult part" in achieving the goal God had set.

"But there was one super-important quality that even God's creative powers could not create instantly by fiat — the same perfect, holy, righteous CHARACTER inherent in both God and the Word! This kind of character must be DEVELOPED, by the CHOICE and the INTENT of the one in whom it comes to exist."

"So mark well this super-vital truism -- that perfect, holy and righteous character is the supreme feat of accomplishment possible for Almighty God the Creator -- it is also the means to His ultimate supreme PURPOSE! His final objective!" (From the book "The Incredible Human Potential")

The creation of holy, righteous character in another being is difficult even for God, and it contains an element of risk. God is the One who is taking that risk.

To eliminate the risk inherent in giving a free will and an independent mind to the other beings God would create (i.e. angels and later human beings), God devised a plan TO TEST all these individuals with independent minds. The testing processes were designed to show conclusively whether God would be able to trust these independent minds He had created in an unqualified way, or whether there might be some circumstances under which God would not be able to trust these independent minds. God also designed the testing processes in such a way that at their conclusion the results that had been achieved would be PERMANENTLY INCULCATED into the free minds that had gone through these testing processes. This point is addressed by the Apostle John, who tells us that those who are born of God "cannot sin" (1 John 3:9); meaning that those who pass the test will have God's way of thinking and behaving permanently ingrained into their minds.

To use an analogy: We might compare the independent minds to freshly mixed wet cement. The testing processes provide opportunities for the cement to be shaped and molded into an endless variety of shapes and forms, some good and some bad. As the testing continues, so the cement dries out. At this stage, while it has not yet dried completely, it is still possible to make some minor changes in order to correct flaws that have become apparent, though only with some difficulty. But eventually a stage is reached where the cement has set, and it has become impossible for it to be changed into any other form or shape. It must either be accepted "as it is", or, if that is not acceptable because of certain obvious flaws, it must be broken up and discarded. It can no longer be manipulated or modified.

The process God devised for testing the character of the angels He had created was somewhat like the above process. After a long exposure to the "testing conditions" which God had established, their character was set. One third of all the angels went through their testing on this planet earth, under the leadership of the one we know as "Satan". They all failed the test and their characters have become permanently set in opposition to God's ways and standards. They all became "demons". The other two thirds of the angels were also tested, probably under the leadership of the one identified as "the archangel Michael". They went through their testing period in some other undisclosed location and circumstances, but they all passed the test, and they have therefore become known as "the holy angels" (Matthew 25:31; etc.).

The whole process of testing the free minds of the angels had been something new for God the Father and Jesus Christ. They had allowed a long period of time for the process, and at the end of that time They had achieved a success rate of two-thirds. Put another way, the testing process had revealed a

one third failure rate; one third of the free independent minds They had created had become set in hostility towards God's philosophy of life. Expressed in Mr. Armstrong's terms: where God personifies the "GIVE-way of life", Satan and his demons had permanently embraced the "GET-way of life".

God learned from His experience in testing the minds of the angels! Since God had unconditionally, i.e. in good faith, given all the angels an immortal existence, therefore God had to then determine how He would deal with the one third of the angels who had chosen to set their minds in opposition to God's way of life. Thus far God has determined to allow the angels that sinned to be here on earth with human beings; but they are "reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4; also Jude 1:6). In effect, God determined to force human beings to confront Satan's hostile attitude towards God's way of living by exposing us from birth to that attitude. Those who had failed (Satan and the demons) became the tools for testing those that would come after them (human beings).

The risk God had taken in giving the angels a totally free will had resulted not only in one third of the angels having failed, and therefore having to be excluded from the future eternity God has planned; it had also resulted in a major destruction of the material universe which God had created as a living habitat for the angels and, eventually, for the whole Family of God.

However, the failure rate amongst the angels did not deter God the Father and Jesus Christ from continuing with their plan towards building a Family of beings like Themselves. But the things They had learned did cause Them to make some modifications to the plan They had originally established. The goal remained the same, but the way towards achieving that goal was modified.

Based on what They had learned from testing all the angels, God determined to set in motion a "7000-year plan" for creating and testing human beings for a part in the Family that God had determined to build. God also determined that He would at that stage not replace the universe that had been so severely damaged by Satan's rebellion. Since it was inevitable that SOME human beings would also not accept God's way of life (that was clear from the fact that some of the angels had also failed) and would therefore have to be destroyed, therefore God postponed the creation of a new universe, and instead only "patched up" the damage Satan had caused (i.e. the account of the recreation in Genesis 1), leaving the creation of a totally new universe for the time after all human beings would have completed the testing process. THEN God will remove all traces of both, the sins of the angels, and the sins of human beings. The entire present universe will then "pass away" (2 Peter 3:10-12), and only then will God create a new universe and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

At this stage we should clearly understand one basic point. Whenever God gives complete free moral agency to a category of beings He has created (i.e. human beings), God is also relinquishing control over exactly how many of those beings will fully accept His way of life, and how many of them will reject God's way of life. In plain English: by giving human beings completely free minds, it was also impossible for God to know in advance just how many human beings would respond positively to God, to then be granted salvation; and how many human beings would reject God's way of life, to then face utter destruction.

GOD'S PLAN AT THE TIME OF ADAM

I believe that when God created Adam and Eve, God intended to allow EXACTLY 7000 YEARS for working with human beings, testing their free wills. At the end of that period God intended to terminate the process and accept into His Family those human beings who had shown themselves to have developed holy, righteous, godly character. While God would have hoped for "a high return", God would have accepted whatever number of people had met His criteria, even if that number was lower than His expectations. But God would not have had any control over exactly how many human beings would have responded positively towards His way of life, since all those human beings would have had free minds

with the potential to reject God's ways.

The process God intended to use with mankind would have been parallel to the way God had tested the angels, which process had yielded a two thirds success rate. This process would be carried out over a long period of time, and would therefore have required for human beings to have a LONG life-span, to allow ample time for testing.

God never breaks His word, never! God had created the angels in good faith, assuring them up front that He had given them an immortal existence. It is not a matter that God somehow cannot "kill" the angels (i.e. blot out their existence), because God COULD do that if He wanted to do so. The fact that Jesus Christ ceased to exist as a spirit being for over 33 years is proof enough that God can indeed blot out the existence of any spirit being, if God were to choose to do so. It is really a case of God having made a commitment up front to the angels He had created, that they would live for all future eternity, that THEREFORE they cannot die. It is God's commitment to His word that keeps God from blotting out all the angels that sinned.

Having learned that some of the beings with free, independent minds would resist God's way of life, God now planned ahead for dealing with such opposition to His purposes. So instead of giving man an immortal existence up front, as He had done with the angels, God instead gave man a mortal existence to start with, with the potential to "upgrade" that existence to immortal life within His Family, IF man would meet God's requirements for such an "upgrade".

Apart from making man mortal, God intended to expose man to a testing process quite similar to the one He had used with the angels, one that required a long time. However, God wanted to see how man would respond to Satan's "get" philosophy. If man was indeed going to be highly receptive to Satan's way of thinking, then God was prepared to implement a modified version of the way He ideally intended to work with man. Therefore God devised an up-front test for man, to decide which of the two options God would implement in working with mankind. Both options would cover the same overall period of time, exactly 7000 years.

The two options with which God confronted Adam and Eve were:

OPTION 1:

IF you reject the tree of the perception of good and evil and instead take the fruit of the tree of life, THEN you will never experience death; you will live for the entire 7000 years, at the end of which you will be changed into a spirit being, a son of God. After the initial testing with the two trees, Satan would have been permanently banished away from any access to mankind, and access to God's Holy Spirit would have been freely available to all human beings from birth onwards. Also, Jesus Christ would have stayed here on earth in person for the entire 7000 years, ruling over mankind. None of Adam and Eve's children would ever have been exposed to any influence from Satan. And perhaps God intended for no additional human beings to be born after the first 6000 years, to ensure that every human being, who would eventually become a member of God's Family, would have experienced at least 1000 years of physical life? However, there would also have been no Savior, no Messiah, no sacrifice by Jesus Christ for any human being to appeal to. And those human beings that rejected God's way of life would at some point have been destroyed.

Perhaps God considered that this option might also have a two thirds success rate, as was the case amongst the angels, since under this option human beings would have been just as much aware of God's existence and powers (with Jesus Christ always being on earth) as were the angels before them? And God would have accepted that success rate of two thirds of all human beings ever born as those that would end up in His Family.

[Comment: It is clear that God DESIRES a 100% success rate. That is also what God had desired with the angels. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is “not willing that any should perish”. So IF God sees that many are indeed “perishing” with the plan God is using, THEN that will motivate God to make changes to the plan, to increase the success rate. But God is also realistic, and God knows that some free wills will never accept His standards, no matter what conditions God may provide.]

OPTION 2:

On the other hand, IF you take of the tree of the perception of good and evil, THEN death will enter into the human experience, and your life-span will be limited to be less than 1000 years. That is still a long life-span, but Satan would be around (would that have been for only the first 6000 years, or would that have been for the full 7000 years?) to tempt and influence human beings to accept his selfish way of thinking. While the ready access to God’s Holy Spirit (pictured by the fruit of the tree of life) would be cut off, God would still have made His Holy Spirit available to all those human beings who would meet God’s criteria, shown by their willingness to “walk with God”.

Also, this choice meant that Jesus Christ would NOT remain on earth for the entire period, that Jesus Christ would then at some point come as a human being, live a life without sin and then give His life as a sacrifice, as payment for ALL human sins. This option also did not set any specific numbers of human beings who would end up in God’s Family. And this option did NOT make provision for what we refer to as “the second resurrection”! The long life-span, coupled with access to forgiveness and to God’s Spirit, would take care of giving all human beings adequate opportunities to respond positively to God’s offer of salvation.

Now by taking the fruit of the tree of the perception of good and evil, Adam and Eve effectively selected option two above for themselves and for all their descendants. God then for the next 6000 years removed option one above from the menu of possible ways to deal with human beings. This is what Mr. Armstrong used to mean when he said that God in effect “sentenced man to be cut off from God for 6000 years”.

The reason God removed option one as a possible way of dealing with humanity was that the speed with which Adam and Eve had succumbed to Satan’s temptation showed God that not only would this course of action not produce a two thirds success rate; it would produce a failure rate way in excess of 99%. And that was not acceptable to God. Therefore God set option two above into motion.

So note carefully!

Even after Adam and Eve had sinned, it was STILL God’s intention to give all human beings ONLY ONE OPPORTUNITY for a physical life. A second physical life (i.e. for those in the second resurrection) was still not a part of God’s plan at the time of Adam’s sin. There would only be the first resurrection, and the one we call the third resurrection; but there was still no provision for the second resurrection.

Here is what God, right after Adam and Eve had sinned, still intended things to look like:

1) God had given this earth a perfect solar year of exactly 360 days, each year consisting of 12 lunar months of exactly 30 days each. God intended to allow exactly 7000 years, each 360 days long, for working with mankind. That would have been exactly 2,520,000 days. That is $3 \times 7 \times 10 \times 12 \times 1000$ days, one thousand times the product of the four numbers God uses to represent different aspects of perfection (i.e. 3, 7, 10, and 12). That is the total number of days God had set aside for working with mortal human beings.

2) At the end of those 7000 years God planned to change those human beings that had met His criteria

into spirit beings (by a resurrection for those who had died, like Abel and Enoch). Then the whole present universe would have “dissolved” or “burned up”, and it would have been replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. In effect, God would build His whole Family in one step. The concept of “first fruits” was not a part of that original plan.

3) Man's sin had immediately created the need for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That sacrifice would provide man with access to forgiveness of sins, provided man met God's conditions for such access to forgiveness. Revelation 13:8 refers to Jesus Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. The Greek expression “apo kataboles kosmou” in this verse is better translated as “FROM THE THROWING DOWN OF MANKIND”! In plain English, the decision that Jesus Christ would give His life as a sacrifice for our sins was NOT made when God first created Adam and Eve; that decision was only taken when Adam and Eve sinned! When they sinned, it was not just mankind that was “thrown down”; the whole plan that God IDEALLY planned to set in motion was thrown down, to be replaced by a plan that required the sacrifice of a God-Being Savior.

4) Human beings were going to be limited to a life-span of just short of 1000 years. By our standards that is an unbelievably long life-span, but such a long life-span was needed to give God the confidence that He could really trust those human beings He would eventually resurrect into His eternal Family.

5) Human beings and all animals were to be vegetarians. God had not intended for any man or any animal to have a diet that included eating meat. This is spelled out in Genesis 1:29-30. No killing for food was originally intended by God.

6) After they had sinned, Adam and Eve were denied automatic access to the Holy Spirit, but such access was nevertheless still available to man. However, where initially such access was freely available, now such access to God's Spirit required man to first have “a repentant frame of mind”, a mind that had consciously and deliberately rejected Satan's standards and Satan's selfish ways of thinking. After repentance man would have had a long lifetime to prove his commitment and steadfastness to God, reaping the rewards of abundant blessings along the way.

7) Even after they had sinned, God wanted Adam and Eve to have such a long life-span, so that they could repent, confess their faults and weaknesses, and still respond correctly to God. In effect, the long life-span was intended to give them the same opportunity for salvation that we, who are in God's Church today, have. Had Adam developed the same attitude towards God that Abel and Enoch and Noah developed, then God would also have given Adam His Holy Spirit, to help him maintain that right attitude, nurture it, and hold fast to it. Adam had 930 years to sort out his relationship with God. And upon genuine repentance Adam would have received God's forgiveness and God's Spirit to help him cope from then onwards.

8) The long life-span God gave man before the flood is clear proof that at that time God had not yet conceived the idea of “a second resurrection” for man. The long life-span shows that God wanted to give man enough time to repent and “make good” in this lifetime, because that was the only chance ALL HUMAN BEINGS had: accept God's way of thinking and way of living, and then eventually become a part of God's Family; or else be blotted out for ever. The idea of a second resurrection was only developed by God AS A RESPONSE to the way human beings conducted their lives, which was a way of total opposition to God's intentions and desires.

9) It was important that man have the opportunity to live a long time. And it was not God's intention that any human being's life be cut short. Even criminals were to have the chance to live a long time, giving them ample time to repent. That is precisely why God did not want Cain killed by anyone! Even though Cain was guilty of having murdered his brother Abel, God did not want ANYONE to take Cain's life. Therefore God set “a mark” upon Cain, with a threat of the most dire consequences for anyone who

would dare to take Cain's life (Genesis 4:15). Even as today God is willing to forgive our guilty past upon genuine repentance (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; etc.), so God wanted Cain to still have the opportunity to repent. This whole approach was predicated upon the premise that every human being has only this one lifetime to qualify for becoming a part of God's Family. The mark God set on Cain is clear proof that God Himself was against the death penalty for any crime in the time before the flood.

10) God was still optimistic that a fair number of human beings would voluntarily accept His way of life, the way of unconditional submission to God's will and instructions. After all, with Adam's first two sons (i.e. Cain and Abel) God had a 50% success rate: while Cain turned out bad, Abel had really turned out just as God had hoped, genuinely submissive to God, whole-hearted in his obedience. And besides, God was going to still let Cain have a long life-span to have the opportunity to repent, to "do well" and to also then be accepted by God (Genesis 4:7). If God had not had this optimistic expectation of a reasonable success rate amongst human beings, then God would also not have set this version of His plan in motion.

11) But Abel's responsiveness to God was a rarity amongst the descendants of Adam and Eve. Almost 100% of human beings turned out to be so wicked, so perverse, and so depraved, that it actually SHOCKED GOD! This is expressed by the Bible telling us that "IT REPENTED THE ETERNAL THAT HE HAD MADE MAN ON THE EARTH" (Genesis 6:6). In effect, God was sorry that He had set this version of His plan in motion.

12) We see something in this Scripture that is repeated over and over throughout the Bible. Time and again we human beings disappoint God, we fall short of the hopes and expectations God had for us, and we let God down. And whenever that is the case, then it invariably causes God to introduce some modifications into the way His plan is continued from then onwards.

13) After putting up with man's rebellious and evil ways of living for 1536 years, God made a decision! That decision was that exactly 120 years later He would just wipe out all mankind and start all over from scratch, as it were, with just one family (Genesis 6:3). At this point Noah was 480 years old, and his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives had not yet been born. God was clearly planning ahead for the drastic action He would take.

14) There is something here that we generally tend to miss. Genesis 6:5-7 says: "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I WILL DESTROY MAN WHOM I HAVE CREATED from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them."

The point is this: UNLESS GOD MADE SOME CHANGES to implement AFTER the flood, exactly the same conditions would develop again. Nothing would be different, once mankind had again multiplied sufficiently.

Think of God as an inventor, or as the One directing a major project. What do you do when the course you are pursuing leads to a dead-end? What if the way you are doing something simply does not give you the results you want to achieve? What do you do?

WHY, YOU MAKE SOME CHANGES! AND YOU LEARN FROM THE THINGS THAT DID NOT WORK!

15) The first 1656 years of human history (i.e. up to the start of the flood) had reaped an appallingly small harvest for God: less than one out of every one million human beings had actually responded positively towards God! Those 1656 years had produced no more than a handful of people who "walked

with God", i.e. people who totally and unconditionally submitted their lives to God. God had not really anticipated this almost universal rejection by humanity of God's way of life. After 1656 years God's plan for working with mankind was definitely "behind schedule", as far as the number of "fruits" it had produced is concerned. And without major modifications there was no prospect that this appallingly low positive response-rate by human beings would ever change; the over 1600 years that God had patiently watched human conduct and behavior had made that abundantly clear. The failure rate before the flood had been greatly in excess of 99% of all human beings born.

16) The reason for the flood was to provide the right circumstances for God to introduce A NEW DISPENSATION, a new way of working with man towards the achievement of the goal that God had set, of building a large Family of God. The goal remained the same, but the way towards achieving that goal was RADICALLY CHANGED after the flood.

The low success rate God had achieved over that 1656-year period did not cause God to "downgrade" His expectations to more "realistic" returns. No, it actually had the opposite effect on God. The major changes God introduced after the flood actually reveal a far more ambitious plan! The changes God made at that time will ensure a far higher success rate than experience would have caused one to expect.

GOD'S MODIFIED PLAN AFTER THE FLOOD

God had accepted that unless He made some changes, His goals would not be achieved. The flood is proof of this acceptance by God. It was the totally free minds that God had given to human beings that were the problem. By definition, God could not force those minds to accept His basic philosophy of life, His way of thinking. As it had turned out, human minds had universally embraced Satan's selfish ways of thinking; and very, very few individuals had been willing to depart from that selfish way of thinking.

The acknowledgment of this fact led God to adopt a multiple-phase plan in working with mankind. No longer would God attempt to work with all human beings alive. Here are the details in that changed plan.

1) Perhaps already when Adam and Eve had sinned God divided the overall 7000-year plan into two blocks of time? If that was not the case then, then certainly now God made this division. The first block would, in round numbers, consist of 6000 years; and the second block would consist of 1000 years.

2) No longer would God attempt to give every human being his one chance in this present life. Instead, God had introduced "THE SECOND RESURRECTION" into His plan for mankind, making provision for dealing with the vast majority of human beings AFTER God had first achieved one specific short-term goal towards the establishment of the Family of God.

3) According to this plan God Himself would select specific individuals to work with in this present life. They would be individually "called" by God. While such a "calling" by God still did not guarantee success in every case, since those called still had their own free minds, it nevertheless DRASTICALLY IMPROVED the success rate that God would achieve. The success rate with this approach was likely to be back at around 50%, a vast improvement from the less than 0.1% rate achieved with the earlier plan.

4) The FOCUS of God's plan was changed. Originally God had set a specific limited TIME period for the achievement of His plan. That time period was exactly 7000 360-day years.

However many human beings would have responded positively to God, God would have accepted into His Family. But God had no control over how large that group would be. In that process God could only control how many human beings would ever be born; but whether or not they became a part of His Family depended on how they themselves would choose to use their minds.

The new focus set A TARGET NUMBER OF PEOPLE. God determined that He would use “phase one” (i.e. the first period, consisting of 6000 years) to achieve a target of EXACTLY 144,000 INDIVIDUALS! Where in the old plan the time allowed had been the priority, and the numbers achieved had been in second place, in the new plan the exact number to be achieved in “phase one” became the top priority, and the time allocated took second place.

In plain English: In the revised plan it became MORE IMPORTANT to God that the EXACT number He had set would be achieved; and whether that was achieved in exactly 6000 years, or whether it might take slightly longer than 6000 years, was not really important to God. The goal to be achieved became more important to God than the time-frame that God had allocated for the achievement of that goal.

THE REASON why the time-frame became somewhat flexible, once God had set a fixed target number of people, is that God still had to make allowance for the free will and the independent free minds of the individuals who would make up that fixed target number He had set.

I want to make this point very clear, because it has major ramifications for the date when Jesus Christ will return.

In dealing with totally independent free minds, which are faced with the challenge to develop holy, righteous, godly character, God had (at least) two options:

EITHER God establishes a fixed rigid time-frame within which human beings will be given the opportunity to develop this character. In that case God has no control over the EXACT number of people who will respond correctly and become a part of His Family. In this case God will simply accept all those that meet His character requirements.

OR God establishes a fixed precise number of individuals who will develop this godly character. In that case God has no advance control over the EXACT number of days it will take to achieve that precise number of individuals with godly character. In this regard please also keep in mind our track record with God, that collectively we human beings have CONSISTENTLY disappointed God and we have consistently fallen short of God's expectations. When God says that a specific number of free minds WILL develop godly character, then that may take longer than God had hoped for. We who have been called by God, may respond the right way to God, but we may still be dragging our feet in the process, kind of like Lot dragging his feet when he was told to leave Sodom.

When God called the Apostle Paul, Paul repented the very same day! That is recorded in Acts 9:4-6. Such a spontaneous response to God is extremely rare. How many weeks or months or even years did WE take, from the time that God first started to open our minds to His truth, before WE made such an unconditional commitment to God? Did God give up on us because we took longer than a few days or weeks to make our commitment to Him, or did God continue to patiently work with us, to bring us to that point where we, with our own free wills, made the deliberate decision to put God first in our lives? And how much testing must God expose us to before God can have absolute confidence that He can really trust us unconditionally? Can you understand the difficulty in trying to legislate a specific period of time for a specified number of individuals to unconditionally submit their minds to God?

For God to fully test the character of 144,000 individuals may take slightly longer than God had intended for the process. And taking “slightly longer than planned” is not a major concern to God; God has unlimited time at His disposal.

I indicated earlier that with these modifications in His plan after the flood God “raised the bar”, setting in motion a far more ambitious plan. From Satan's perspective (he had been extremely active in influencing man) God's plan had yielded no more than a mere handful of people in over 1600 years,

making it likely that God would struggle to have even 100 people after the full 7000 years given to man. Satan can also make projections. And if God had not made any changes, that might indeed have been the case. But with the changes He made, God predicted not just a return of 144,000 overall. No, God predicted “a first crop” of 144,000, to be followed by a vastly greater crop later. Satan might well have viewed the first 1600 years as God playing “a losing game”. But the changes God introduced after the flood changed all that!

5) With the introduction of the second resurrection into the picture, God no longer needed to give man such a long life-span. Rather than drastically cutting man's life-span by 90% in one go, God did this in stages. After the flood God cut man's life-span in half, to just under 500 years. Then at the tower of Babel God again cut man's life-span in half, to just under 250 years. When Israel was in slavery in Egypt, God again cut man's life-span in half, to just under 125 years (Moses lived to age 120 years). Thereafter man's life-span was further fine-tuned to around 80 years of age. The exceptions to these general guidelines are relatively few.

The point is: the drastic shortening of the human life-span is proof that God had made a change in His plans for mankind. And it is the introduction of the second resurrection into the picture that removed the need for really long life-spans.

6) Another change that God introduced immediately after the flood is the introduction of meat into the human diet. This is clear from Genesis 9:3, which states:

Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

This stands in contrast to the instruction God had given Adam in Genesis 1:29.

In plain English, God told Noah that he could eat animals. Implied would be the “clean animals”, which had been designated as “clean” even before the flood (Genesis 7:2), and this is later spelled out in great detail in Leviticus chapter 11. I suspect that rebellious human beings had resorted to eating animals even before the flood? The change in man's diet to include meat is accepted by God's servants in the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ Himself certainly also ate meat during His ministry. A reference to God's intentions for man's diet before the flood is not intended to imply that God desires us today to be vegetarians. Leviticus 11 is very clear regarding the animals God has declared fit for human beings to eat.

7) Another change God introduced immediately after the flood is that the relationship between human beings and all animals would change. From after the flood onwards animals would fear man, something that had not been the case before the flood. That is explained in Genesis 9:2.

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

8) Another change God introduced immediately after the flood is the introduction of THE DEATH PENALTY! This is made clear in Genesis 9:5-6.

And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

This is in stark contrast to the way God had deliberately protected the life of the murderer Cain. Again, this first of all reveals that God has introduced A CHANGE into His plan for mankind. With the

introduction of the second resurrection, it was no longer important that murderers have the opportunity to live a long life after having committed murder. They will have an opportunity to repent when they come up in the second resurrection.

9) I mentioned under point #4 above that in dealing with independent free minds God could either set a specific time-frame for working with people, with the consequence that the exact results, in terms of numbers achieved, would be undecided until the very end; or God could set a specific number of individuals who would respond positively to God, with the result that the time-frame might need to be somewhat flexible (it might need to have some “wobble room”). Trying to combine both of these goals in one step would represent a conflict of interests, given the freedom God had extended to the human mind. A truly free mind cannot really be commanded to repent “on schedule”.

Now when we examine the three phases God has allotted to His revised plan for dealing with man, we see that God has in fact used BOTH of the above approaches:

A) THE PERIOD FROM ADAM - CHRIST'S 2ND COMING: For this period God has set the exact number of individuals who will respond to God to be exactly 144,000. That is what Revelation 14:1-4 tells us, that there will be exactly 144,000 in the first resurrection. While it was God's intention (I would guess) to achieve this goal in exactly 6000 years, God did leave Himself some “wobble room”, meaning that God actually nowhere commits Himself to this exact figure of 6000 years. It is a figure we are forced to deduce from certain Scriptures, but this figure itself is actually never mentioned in the Bible. We are the ones who would like to tie God down to be limited to exactly 6000 years. But God Himself never mentions this figure. (Shortly I will present some clear proof for God's use of “wobble room” for this period of time.)

B) THE PERIOD OF CHRIST'S MILLENNIAL RULE: For this period God has set the precise time-frame to be exactly 1000 years. See Revelation 20:4 for this figure. In specifying a precise period of time, God is leaving open just how many people will respond to Jesus Christ's rule over them. The indication in Revelation 20:7-8 is that even under Jesus Christ's personal rule VAST NUMBERS of human beings will still espouse Satan's selfish philosophy of life, and will then need to be destroyed.

C) THE PERIOD ALLOTTED TO THE PEOPLE IN THE 2ND RESURRECTION: For this period God has also set a precise time-frame, which is exactly 100 years (Isaiah 65:20). Again, this means that God is also leaving it open as to exactly how many of the people in the second resurrection will respond positively to God. They will have totally free minds, and nobody can decide to repent “for them”. Hopefully most of them will repent and accept God's offer for eternal life within His Family, though it is equally likely that SOME of them will never accept God's way of thinking.

[Comment: The people from the millennium and those from the 100-year second resurrection period will be tested by God under identical conditions, and they will all be inducted into God's Family at the same point in time; even as all those in the first resurrection will all be inducted into God's Family at the same time. So we can say that God builds His Family in two steps: step one is for those in the first resurrection, and step two is for all those who follow later.]

Now let's look at some EVIDENCE for this change in God's plan for working with human beings.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE ANNUAL CYCLE

You who are a member of the Church of God understand that the annual feasts and Holy Days that God has ordained are used by God to reveal some very significant details in God's plan of salvation. For many years you have known the meaning attached to each annual Holy Day.

So consider the following information very carefully.

Back in Genesis God started the year with the first new moon in the autumn (northern hemisphere).

At the time of the exodus from Egypt God did NOT introduce “a calendar change” as such. Until then the solar year had always consisted of exactly 12 lunar months with exactly 30 days each, exactly 360 days to every year. That system continued after Moses and past the time of King David. But what God DID do at the time of the exodus is introduce a change regarding THE START OF THE YEAR. This is spelled out in Exodus 12:2, which reads:

This month (Hebrew here really means “new moon”) shall be unto you the beginning of months (new moons): it shall be the first month (new moon) of the year to you.

God here instructed Moses that from that time forward the year was to start with the first new moon in the spring, exactly six months earlier than until that time.

This is something you surely already knew. The question is: WHY did God change the start of the year? Was there something wrong with the way God had originally (i.e. back in Genesis) set up the yearly cycle? OR HAD SOMETHING CHANGED?

Consider:

1) Back in Genesis 1 God had started with “Day 1 of the first month”. But with the change for the start of the year, that “Day 1” in Genesis NOW became “Day 1 of the 7th Month”. And THAT day happens to represent “the coming of Jesus Christ”. We call it “the Day of Trumpets”. Day 1 back in Genesis 1 had in fact been “the first day of the month Tishri”.

[Comment: For the sake of simplicity I use the Jewish names “Nisan” and “Tishri” to refer to the first month and the seventh month respectively. These names were introduced by God’s servant Ezra after the Babylonian captivity. However, the way the Jewish calendar today establishes the dates for “Nisan” and “Tishri” is not the same way that those dates were established in Ezra’s time and during New Testament times. The problem lies not in the names “Nisan” and “Tishri”, but in the way the dates for those two months are determined in the Jewish calendar today. The use of these names predates the calculated calendar used by the Jews today.]

2) Now God had originally set up the annual cycle and the start of the year (to be with the first new moon in the autumn) BEFORE Adam and Eve sinned. When they sinned, that annual cycle had already been established by God.

3) So the original annual cycle reflects God’s intended plan for mankind BEFORE MAN SINNED.

4) And the changed annual cycle reflects God’s modified plan for man AFTER MAN SINNED.

5) The original annual cycle started with the coming of Jesus Christ (i.e. the Day of Trumpets, first day of Tishri). But this setup made no provision whatsoever for “the Passover” and “the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread” and “the Day of Pentecost”. WHY did God not make any provision for these three significant periods? WHY didn’t God plan the Passover into the annual cycle He originally established? WHY?

6) Isn’t it clear that the original annual cycle illustrates that originally God made provision for only three events: THE DAY OF TRUMPETS (representing the coming of Jesus Christ to this earth); THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (representing the binding of Satan); and THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (representing

ALL human beings who would ever be granted salvation entering into the Family of God).

7) THAT WAS GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN WHEN HE CREATED ADAM & EVE! AND THAT IS WHY GOD ORIGINALLY STARTED THE YEAR IN THE AUTUMN!

8) Now when Adam and Eve sinned, then that IMMEDIATELY established the need for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It also immediately created REPENTANCE as a requirement for access to God and to God's Spirit. Put another way, their sin immediately created the need for "the Passover" and for "the Days of Unleavened Bread".

9) Those who would meet God's condition of repentance would have received access to help through God's Spirit (e.g. Abel, Enoch, Noah). The long life-span that God gave people in that era theoretically ensured adequate time for them to have "a change of heart" (i.e. to repent), and to then live for a considerable period of time in full harmony with God's way of life.

10) THE NEED for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread had arisen as soon as Adam and Eve sinned. But God did not at that time change the start of the year. This means that God did not yet choose to indicate that the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread would PRECEDE "the coming of Christ". With the annual cycle starting with Tishri, there was no way to place ANY event before Tishri 1 (the day that represents the coming of Jesus Christ).

11) The 1656 years before the flood showed God conclusively that the plan He had set in motion would not produce the results God desired to achieve. So God used the flood to make a break with the old plan, and to usher in major modifications to His plan.

12) AFTER THE FLOOD God introduced two new steps into His plan. These two steps would vastly improve the success rate for God's plan in creating a Family. The two modifications God introduced into His plan after the flood are:

13) God INSERTED one resurrection ahead of the harvest He had planned all along. God inserted the first fruits (those in the first resurrection) into the plan ahead of the general harvest. This insertion is represented by the Day of Pentecost.

14) At the same time God also APPENDED a resurrection to the end of the great general harvest. This is represented by the Last Great Day.

15) More than 800 years after the flood God then chose to reveal these added steps by making the annual cycle start 6 months earlier, and at the same time God gave Israel His annual feasts and Holy Days.

16) So the annual observances laid out in Leviticus chapter 23 reveal God's CHANGED plan of salvation for mankind. Briefly:

A) By starting the year 6 months earlier, God was showing that "the coming of Jesus Christ" had been postponed by (in round numbers) 6000 years. Tishri 1 now became the first day of the seventh month.

B) Man's access to God depended on "the Passover", access to forgiveness made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

C) "The Days of Unleavened Bread" then present the conditions human beings must meet in order to have access to Christ's sacrifice. Without the Days of Unleavened Bread the Passover loses its power to be of help to human beings. No forgiveness without the resolve to turn away from Satan's selfish way

of living.

D) "Pentecost" then represents the new step God had introduced into His plan, a first harvest of a very specific number of human beings into His Family. They will play a crucial role in the achievement of a far greater second harvest later.

E) Only then do we come to "the Day of Trumpets", which was the starting point of God's original plan for mankind. This originally represented the coming of Jesus Christ. In the changed plan, being postponed by 6000 years, it came to represent the SECOND coming of Jesus Christ.

F) As planned from the beginning, "the Day of Atonement" represents the binding of Satan. It had always been planned to bind Satan. Originally that would have been very early (perhaps on the 10th day, the Tuesday of the second week in Genesis?) in man's existence. When man sinned, the binding of Satan was postponed. It will take place soon after Jesus Christ returns.

G) "The Feast of Tabernacles" represents humanity becoming a part of God's Family. Originally God had planned to have all human beings (who would meet His criteria) join His Family at the same time. In the changed plan this feast represents those who make up the second harvest into the Family.

H) "The Last Great Day" God simply appended to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was God's response to the things God had learned from His dealings with human beings over the 1656 years leading up to the flood. This day represents those who come up in the second resurrection.

And that is what the changed start of the year reveals; that God postponed the things He had planned originally by 6000 years, and in the process God refined His plan to include two additional steps (i.e. Pentecost and the Last Great Day).

Can you see how God's instruction to Moses to start the year 6 months earlier made provision for the changes God had introduced into His plan?

Let's continue.

BACK TO GOD'S MODIFIED PLAN AFTER THE FLOOD

Consider the following: the fact that God was willing to add a 100-year period to the end of the 7000 years, in order to reap a far greater harvest than would be possible if God held to the original 7000 year limitation, is PROOF that God is far more concerned with the results that are achieved than with "sticking to specific time-frames"! After all, IF God is willing to expand the originally intended 7000 years into 7100 years, WHY would God not be equally willing to expand the originally intended 6000 years into 6020 or 6050 or even 6100 years? To me the fact that God has not limited Himself to exactly 7000 years is proof that God will also not limit Himself to exactly 6000 years, IF certain goals have not yet been achieved.

Consider further: At the time of Adam's creation God had established the perfect 360-day solar year. That continued till after the flood, and past the time of Moses, and past the time of King Saul and King David. Somewhere along the line, as we human beings continued to let God down with predictable monotony, God saw that He would run out of time, that 144,000 individuals would simply not be "ready" by the end of 6000 years. So somewhere around 700 BC, very likely in the days of King Hezekiah, God changed the orbit of the earth around the sun. God lengthened the solar year to approximately 365.25 days (while also changing the length of the lunar month at the same time).

[Comment: In the history of Israel we have two incidents where God intervened in the natural cycles of

the heavens. In the case of "Joshua's long day" it was Joshua who requested God to intervene in a specific way in the heavens. This is recorded in Joshua 10:12-14. In the case of the shadow going "ten degrees backward" in the days of King Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 20:8-11) it was GOD who offered to perform a sign in the heavens. This sign was of God's choosing. I suspect, though I obviously cannot prove this, that God used this opportunity to lengthen the solar year from exactly 360 days to the present 365.25 days.]

By lengthening the solar year by five and one-quarter days, God in effect postponed the year "6000". Today we have the year 2006 AD. So (speaking in approximate numbers) for the past 2705 years every year has been five and one-quarter days longer than was the case for more than 3000 years after Adam's creation. The extra 14,201 days since 700 BC amount to more than 39 FULL 360-DAY YEARS! In other words, TODAY would actually be the year 2045 AD, if only God had not lengthened the solar year from 360 days to 365.25 days. Can you understand this?

If God was really concerned about sticking to "exactly 6000 years", then He would not approximately 2700 years ago have lengthened the solar year. That lengthening of the solar year has added over 14,000 days to the plan for testing human beings. This is part of the flexibility God has built into the time-frame He has set for testing human beings.

Consider the time when God created Adam and Eve. Bible chronologies show that God brought on the flood 1656 years after He had created Adam and Eve. The flood itself was just over one year long. After the flood we have chronologies that lead from the flood down to Abraham. The Bible records that it was 430 years from when Abraham was 99 years old to the year of the exodus from Egypt. The Bible also records that from the exodus it was 480 years to the 4th year of King Solomon's reign. The reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah are recorded, down to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the 11th year of King Zedekiah. And secular histories accurately record the passage of over 8600 consecutive new moons in Babylon (i.e. a period of about 700 years) starting before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and going past the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. And there is an accurate record of the passage of years since the time of Christ's ministry.

So the point is this: while some people may argue about the year of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, or while people may debate a specific date in Old Testament times, there is no way that the creation of Adam and Eve could possibly have been LATER THAN 4000 BC! Earlier, yes; but not later. And so some historians have concluded the year 4004 BC (Ussher, etc.) as the creation year, while others may propose dates like 4026 BC. But nobody (apart from the Seder Olam, which is a deliberately distorted record) would propose a date like 3990 BC, or 3980 BC, etc.! The creation date for Adam and Eve could not possibly have been "three-thousand-nine-hundred- ANYTHING", because there are simply too many years recorded to fit into any date later than 4000 BC.

We are NOW in the year 2006 AD. What this means is that by now DEFINITELY MORE THAN 6000 YEARS have passed since God created Adam and Eve! It makes no difference whether that is 6004 years or 6010 years or 6020 years. The point is that it is more than 6000 years! And that is without taking the "extra 39 years", due to the longer annual cycles, into consideration.

Therefore the conclusion is inescapable: The second coming of Jesus Christ is definitely more than 6000 years after the creation of Adam and Eve! And that is even without including the 4 or 6 or 8 or more years, which will still have to pass before Jesus Christ will in fact return. Already TODAY we are past the year 6000 after Adam's creation, irrespective of how many years STILL have to pass before Jesus Christ will return.

And since every single prediction of Jesus Christ's return is based on the assumption that the second coming of Jesus Christ must take place within a 6000-year framework, starting with the creation of Adam

and Eve, therefore every single prediction regarding when Christ will return has been wrong! And by God not limiting Himself to the 6000-year period we have tried to impose on Him, it means that even right now there is no way that ANYBODY could possibly predict when the second coming of Jesus Christ will take place.

Before taking another look at Christ's second coming, let's continue with a look at God's plan for mankind.

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE MILLENNIUM

One thing God learned from His experience in testing the angels is that the type of leadership provided has a profound impact on the results that are achieved. Satan had provided a bad, selfishly motivated type of leadership, and 100% of the angels under that leadership went bad. The archangel Michael, on the other hand, had provided a God-fearing right kind of leadership, and 100% of the angels under that leadership turned out good (though we are not told the details about that testing).

So for Jesus Christ's millennial rule God will do the following:

- 1) Not only will Jesus Christ provide the perfect godly type of leadership for human beings to see and follow; but there will be 144,000 trained and tested human beings, who have been resurrected to immortal life, to assist Christ in providing that right kind of leadership. They will rule with Christ as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10). That will provide the right kind of leadership on an enormous scale. This world has never seen, let alone benefitted from, the simultaneous presence of 144,000 perfect, godly leaders, who all without question accept and back up and fully support the leadership of the One who is above them, Jesus Christ.
- 2) Satan will be banished for the full 1000 years. So he will not be able to influence a single human being during that entire period.
- 3) Jesus Christ will then implement all the ways of dealing with man that He had **ORIGINALLY** intended to implement. See again all the points included under "option one" with which God had confronted Adam and Eve before they sinned. This would include:
- 4) Man not dying during that period. People will live up to 1000 years, with those born during the millennium living an accordingly shorter period of time. And then they will all (except those who are killed because they follow Satan, Revelation 20:7-9) live for another 100 years, the time given to those in the second resurrection.
- 5) Jesus Christ and the 144,000 will be here on earth for that entire time. They will be the teachers of mortal human beings, the way Jesus Christ had **INTENDED** to be the Teacher of Adam and Eve, and their children, had they not taken the forbidden fruit.
- 6) All humanity will have one pure language.
- 7) The natures of animals will be changed, to be the way God had originally created it. A description is found in Isaiah 11:6-9.
- 8) The perfect 360-day annual cycles and the perfect 30-day lunar cycles will be re-established. Christ's millennial rule will be 360,000 days long. Then Satan is loosed for a short while, before being bound again. And then those in the second resurrection will be given a lifetime of exactly 36,000 days.

[Comment: God will restore the perfect 360-day solar year and the perfect 30-day lunar month right after

the great tribulation. This restoration of the perfect heavenly cycles is described by the “sixth seal” of Revelation 6:12, where the expression “a great earthquake” is an incorrect translation, and it should really be translated as “a great SHAKING”, and implied is “a great shaking of the heavens”.]

9) Even with that perfect godly leadership, and with easy access to all the blessings inherent in God’s way of life, God still knows that A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE will retain an inner selfish motivation for their actions and conduct; they will not really accept God’s way of thinking. These are the people who will spontaneously respond to Satan’s appeals when he is loosed; they follow Satan and they are then destroyed.

The innermost motivations of a free independent mind (both, with angels and with human beings) have nothing to do with logic and reason. This is something we tend to not understand; and so we think that we can CHANGE that innermost thinking in other people simply by presenting sound reasons and sound logic for the change we desire to see. But it seldom works! The reason is that we ourselves SET our minds to think a certain way. We mostly do this unconsciously, to the point of being unaware ourselves of how we have set our minds.

But God is aware of this process! And a mind that has set itself to think selfishly will never be changed by logic or by reasoning. It can only be changed by what the Bible calls “REPENTANCE”! Repentance refers to the concept of changing our way of thinking, away from Satan’s selfish way of thinking, and towards God’s selfless way of thinking. Repentance involves consciously accepting a totally different motivation for everything we do. And it must start in the mind.

So at the end of Christ’s 1000-year rule all those who have not changed their innermost way of thinking will be weeded out and destroyed by fire from heaven. God indicates that this will be a vast number of people, by saying that “the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:8).

10) Once Satan has again been removed, the second resurrection takes place, and every person in that resurrection is given a 100-year life-span. They will live under the identical conditions, under which the people during the millennium will have been living.

11) At the end of that period all those (from the millennium and the 100-year period) who have inculcated into their very minds God’s way of thinking will be changed into immortal spirit beings, to form the latter harvest into the Family of God.

12) Then this entire universe will be burned up, including all the wicked who never let go of Satan’s way of thinking. For them that will be “the second death” (Revelation 20:14). And then God creates a new universe and a new earth.

And that then completes the process. The goal of building the Family of God will have been achieved.

Let’s take a look at something else that some people tend to misunderstand.

GOD WILL MAKE CHANGES WHEN NECESSARY

In Hebrews 13:8 Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and today and forever”. This is a reference to Jesus Christ’s character and commitment to God the Father and His will. Jesus Christ is consistent, and the things He will approve of and those things He will not approve of are predictable. This verse has nothing to do with God making changes to the details of how His plan will be worked out.

In Malachi 3:6 Jesus Christ is recorded as saying: “For I am the Eternal, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed”. Again, it is Jesus Christ, the person, the character, who does not

change. The context is one of human beings (here the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob) once again having let God down. And it is because of God's character, of His commitment to His word, that He determined not to destroy Israel. This statement also has nothing to do with how God would bring His plan to pass, and whether God would make some changes along the way.

It seems to me that God constantly refined His plan, as things developed. Throughout the Bible God is shown RESPONDING to man's actions, much like a chess player responding to his opponent's previous moves. Each subsequent move that God makes is really a response to the preceding move made by man. The very concepts of first fruits and of the second resurrection were a response to how badly man was doing with the plan that had been in effect before.

All along the way God has made changes to the execution of His plan, to increase the chances for a greater return. And the changes God implemented also affect the ultimate relationships that will be established.

Thus:

1) When God created Adam and Eve, I believe God planned to build His Family in one large step. ALL who would eventually have become a part of God's Family would have been on an equal level. This intent continued even after they had sinned. There would have been no "first fruits". It is only in the period approaching the flood that God made a major modification to His plan.

2) It had become very apparent to God just how difficult it was for human beings to fully accept His, God's, way of thinking. So God then implemented a two-tier plan, with a first and a second resurrection. The enactment of this plan was an acknowledgment that the vast majority of human beings would never cope under the then present conditions.

3) So God refined the process by God the Father Himself personally selecting the few specific individuals that God would work with in this age (John 6:44, 65). By God Himself selecting the people (i.e. by God "calling" specific people), it certainly increased the chances of success enormously. With the people He had specifically called, God would do everything necessary to ensure success from His end (Philippians 1:6); but that still did not remove the freedom of the mind of the person in question, and so even some of those people could end up not accepting God's way of thinking and living, and as a result missing out on a part in God's Family.

4) It is a recognition of the greater degree of difficulty involved in fully submitting our lives to God now, in this present age, that God also increased the rewards for those who do so. That is why the first resurrection is called "a better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35), one that offers rulership with God (Revelation 5:10), and one that offers permanent access to the very dwelling place of God the Father (Revelation 3:12). God created this condition of higher positions within the Family of God in recognition of the greater difficulties faced by those who respond to God in this present age.

5) God "appended" the Last Great Day to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, to show that the second resurrection was added to the end of the millennium. The very fact that the second resurrection only involves a 100-year period, when God had originally planned out a precise 7000-year period, is proof that the second resurrection was not a part of the original plan, just like the following things also were not a part of God's original plan: to bring on a worldwide flood, to divide humanity into different language groups, to have human kings rule over Israel, to let the people of Israel go into national captivities, etc. The second resurrection is a modification to God's original intentions, a response to the way things had developed.

Now let's take another look at the question of the return of Jesus Christ.

WHEN WILL JESUS CHRIST RETURN?

Most people in God's Church have wondered about this question. I have speculated about the answer to this question, as have others. And we've all been wrong. Every prophecy chart that has ever been drawn up to determine the time for Christ's second coming has been wrong.

WHY have all these efforts been wrong?

BECAUSE GOD THE FATHER HIMSELF HAS NOT YET MADE THE DECISION WHEN TO SEND JESUS CHRIST BACK TO THIS EARTH!

And if God the Father Himself has not yet made this decision, then it is extremely foolish for us to attempt to "work it out", as if any number of calculations could somehow reveal to us when God the Father simply must make a specific decision.

Jesus Christ's own disciples asked Him about the signs that would identify His return. This is recorded in Matthew 24:3. After describing various indicators, Jesus Christ then said very plainly: "BUT OF THAT DAY AND HOUR KNOWS NO MAN, NO, NOT THE ANGELS OF HEAVEN, BUT MY FATHER ONLY" (Matthew 24:36). Mark's account adds one detail to this statement. Mark 13:32 says: "BUT OF THAT DAY AND THAT HOUR KNOWS NO MAN, NO, NOT THE ANGELS WHICH ARE IN HEAVEN, NEITHER THE SON, BUT THE FATHER".

So what was Christ saying here?

Was Christ speaking about A SECRET God the Father was keeping from all the angels and even from Jesus Christ? NO!

God the Father does not keep ANY secrets from Jesus Christ. Why would He or why should He? Would Jesus Christ say "all things that the Father has ARE MINE ..." (John 16:15), if God the Father was keeping secrets from Jesus Christ? Can you picture Jesus Christ asking God the Father: "When are You going to send Me back to earth?", and the Father replying: "That's a secret I am not going to tell You right now"? Would Jesus Christ say: "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30), if the Father was keeping secrets from Him?

No, the reason Jesus Christ at that time did not yet know when God the Father would send Him back to this earth is because God the Father had not yet made that decision.

Understanding that back around 30 AD God the Father had not yet made the decision in which year Christ's second coming would occur has a very profound consequence. And simply stated that consequence is this: there is absolutely no way that the second coming of Jesus Christ can possibly be predicted by any chart of any kind! IF there was any way that certain events could be charted, which would predict the second coming of Jesus Christ, THEN Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32 would simply not have been true! So far as mathematical understanding is concerned, compared to Jesus Christ and the holy angels in heaven, people like Albert Einstein are mere pre-school toddlers. If there was any way to calculate Christ's return in advance, then the angels would know that date.

There is a reason why God the Father had not made that decision back around 30 AD, and why in all likelihood God the Father has not even made that decision right now, in 2006 AD. Do you know what that reason is?

YOU are that reason! And I am that reason!

Consider Acts 3:19-21.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

God the Father will send Jesus Christ back to this earth. But the requirement for the Father to do so is not a specific year in history. The requirement stated here is A CONDITION! The condition is that Christ must stay in heaven UNTIL something specific happens, until all things have been restored.

One condition for Christ's second coming is also spelled out in Revelation 19:7.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

"His wife" is a reference to the 144,000 people who will make up the first resurrection. And it is the wife HERSELF who has to do this; God can't do this for her.

We need to understand that real repentance and the development of real, godly character is simply not something that can be commanded to occur "on schedule"! What happened "on schedule" during the first 1600 years after Adam's creation was a huge, enormous disappointment for God! If God were able to command real repentance and a total, unconditional commitment to His ways to take place "on schedule", then this would obviously remove free moral agency from the people involved in that process; they would have no control over their own voluntary commitment to God and His ways.

I mentioned in the beginning that in deciding to create a Family this way, God the Father and Jesus Christ were taking a risk! Jesus Christ took an enormous risk to become our Savior. They were willing to take the risks involved because God is positive by disposition, always hoping for the best, always willing to bless "in good faith". Within the context of the risks God was willing to take, in order to offer us human beings an opportunity to live with Him for all future eternity, the matter of whether God allows only exactly 6000 years for this phase of His plan, or whether God leaves some flexibility in the time He allows for this phase, is really very insignificant!

So where are we in the context of when Jesus Christ will return?

Don't get the idea that everything is somehow "up in the air" and out of control. God the Father is the One who personally does the calling of every single individual who ends up in the first resurrection. And I believe that we have passed the stage where God does indeed now have those 144,000 names in His Book of Life (Philippians 4:3).

However, God's positive nature comes into this again. God adds our names to the Book of Life when we first respond positively to God. Our names are entered into the book right at the start of our testing period, before we in fact have shown ourselves to be true to God. The admonition in Revelation 3:5 makes this clear. IF we overcome, THEN Jesus Christ will "not blot out" our names out of the Book of Life. Our names are already in there, but they COULD still be blotted out, if we were to fail the testing God will expose us to.

I believe we are now in that stage where there are 144,000 names in the Book of Life before God. Many of those names, in fact I suspect most of them, are already at the stage where they can no longer be blotted out, because the people involved have completed and passed their testing (Abraham, Isaac, David, Paul, etc.). But SOME of those 144,000 names in that book (including, I suspect, yours and mine)

are at the stage where their testing is not yet complete. Testing always takes time.

I don't want you to infer that I believe God has somehow not yet found enough people to fill the available 144,000 slots. God is at this point, I believe, not looking for MORE people to add to the group headed for the first resurrection. At this point God is testing the people He has ALREADY selected. And yes, IF some of those He has selected do indeed fail the testing, THEN God also has available a potential "manpower pool" from which to draw "replacements" to fill those spots. We must "hold fast" so that the crown intended for us is not given to someone else (Revelation 3:11). Those potential "replacements" do not at this stage have God's Spirit, but neither have they "bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4). They are people God could easily consider calling for an opportunity for the first resurrection, if any of us drop out.

In the Book of Revelation we see that when the seventh seal is opened, seven successive trumpets are blown. In chapter 9 trumpets #5 and #6 are blown. Then we have an account about "a little book" and the "two witnesses" inserted into the story. In the middle of the discussion about this "little book" we have an interesting statement. Revelation 10:6 says that this mighty angel swore that "THERE SHOULD BE TIME NO LONGER". This translation is not a true reflection of the intent of this statement, since "time" obviously continues. What this statement really means is that there will be "NO MORE DELAY"! Translations which have correctly understood the statement here to be a reference to "delay" include the ASV, NAS, NIV, NKJV, RSV, Darby, Rotherham, etc.

The point is that even up to the time allocated to "the sixth trumpet" there COULD BE some "delays". That's what Revelation 10:6 is inferring. It is only from the time when the seventh trumpet is blown, referred to in the next verse, that the time-frame becomes rigid and inflexible! This statement, that from that point onwards there will be no more delays, indicates the flexibility God has allowed Himself in the fulfillment of His plans for the events preceding that point in time.

I don't believe that God is tied to any fixed schedule prior to the start of the last approximately three-and-one-half years before Christ's return. And even in that final period God has still left Himself some "wiggle room" (i.e. if one trumpet is given a little longer, then another will end up a little shorter, etc.), right down to when the seventh and final trumpet is blown.

So when will Jesus Christ return?

I suspect that at this stage, in 2006 AD, God the Father has not yet made that decision. Apart from being confident that it will not be before 2010 AD, I really have no way of knowing; and, I might add, no desire to try to second-guess what God the Father will decide in this regard. The only thing I really have is a desire, even more than a duty, to pray: Father, please send your kingdom soon (Matthew 6:10).

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