

COSMIC

CONFLICT

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

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‘For you have said in your heart:
‘I will ascend into heaven, I will
exalt my throne above the stars of
God; I will also sit on the mount of
the congregation on the farthest
sides of the north; I will ascend
above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.’

Isaiah 14:13, 14



A COSMIC Power Grab

In 1483, two boys vanished without a trace. These were no ordinary children. They were the heir to the British throne and his younger brother. To this day, the disappearance of 12-year-old Edward V and nine-year-old Richard, Duke of York, remains one of history's greatest mysteries.

Several months before, their father, King Edward IV, had died suddenly. As was customary, the children were moved—at the command of their uncle, the Lord Protector—to the Tower of London for safekeeping until Edward V's coronation. But before young Edward could be crowned, he and his brother were declared illegitimate. Consequently, their uncle ascended the throne as King Richard III.

What became of the two princes? After their uncle was crowned, they were never seen again. Some think they escaped. Many believe they were murdered. Most historians point the finger at Richard III himself. Did he, in a grab for power, eliminate his two closest rivals—his innocent nephews? No one has ever discovered what really happened.

A far greater power grab has pitted another two princes against each other—"the prince of this world" (John 12:31 KJV) against "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15). The Bible reveals that even before the creation of our planet, an attempt was made to usurp the throne of the universe. That rebellion bloomed into an insidious smear campaign, one that is still being conducted.

It is the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan.

Have you ever wondered:

- How could an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-righteous God stand by and permit the humiliating injustices, debilitating diseases, and inhumane atrocities that happen to people every single day?
- Did God create all this evil? And if He did, then is He not the kind of God He claims to be? Did He just start our world and walk away? Or worse, is He a sadist who sits back and watches our suffering for entertainment?

Such questions are at the heart of this war. The answers to these questions will ultimately determine which side of the war you're on. This magazine is designed to help you get answers and to make informed decisions from a factual, biblical standpoint. Jesus Christ has revealed the truth to all these crucial and challenging questions.

So, get ready to experience an unparalleled journey that will take you from the origins of this war; through the pages of Bible history, down to our day; and traveling into the near future, to the final outcome of this cosmic conflict. It is our hope and prayer that at this journey's end, the great mystery of good and evil will finally make sense and the true character of God will be revealed.

Let's begin.



PART 1

God, Love, AND THE UNIVERSE



AN AMAZING FACT

The first deep-field images produced by the James Webb Space Telescope in July 2022, which greatly expanded the amount of the universe that humans can observe, revealed thousands of previously undiscovered galaxies in just a tiny sliver of the cosmos. Each of those galaxies contains an estimated average of 100 billion stars.

The universe is vast.

Many scientists believe it to be about 93 billion light-years across. In reality, due to our limited perspective, that is only an educated guess. However, the Bible tells us that there is One who sees through all space and time and from whom no mystery is hidden:

Can you search out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?
They are higher than heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol [the grave]—what can you know?
Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea (Job 11:7–9).

What can we really know about God when our perspective is so limited?

As we begin considering the problem of evil and suffering in our world, we will first look at two important aspects of God revealed in the Bible: 1) God as Creator and 2) God as love. Though Scripture tells us that God is much greater than the vastness of the universe, it also reveals that He desires for you to know Him intimately. It is through the Bible that we can obtain an accurate and comprehensive picture of Him.

The Creator God

The Bible opens with these words: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). It’s a statement about God repeated many times in Scripture: “I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by Myself” (Isaiah 44:24).

However, the Bible also reveals something else: “God ... created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). The apostle Paul explained:

For by Him [Jesus] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

And the apostle John, who called Jesus “The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13), said:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1–3).

Note that the Word *was* God; it is not merely *like* God. The Bible affirms that Jesus *is* God. He is “the express image of His [God’s] person” (Hebrews 1:3); and “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). “Jesus ... being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:5, 6).

Paul also explained, “There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). God the Father and Jesus are different only in their roles in the Godhead; both God the Father and Jesus Christ are divine and eternal. Christ also explained that the Father’s character and His own are the same: “If you

had known Me, you would have known My Father also” (John 14:7); “I and My Father are one” (10:30).

What Is Love?

One of the Bible’s most profound descriptions of God is also one of its most straightforward:

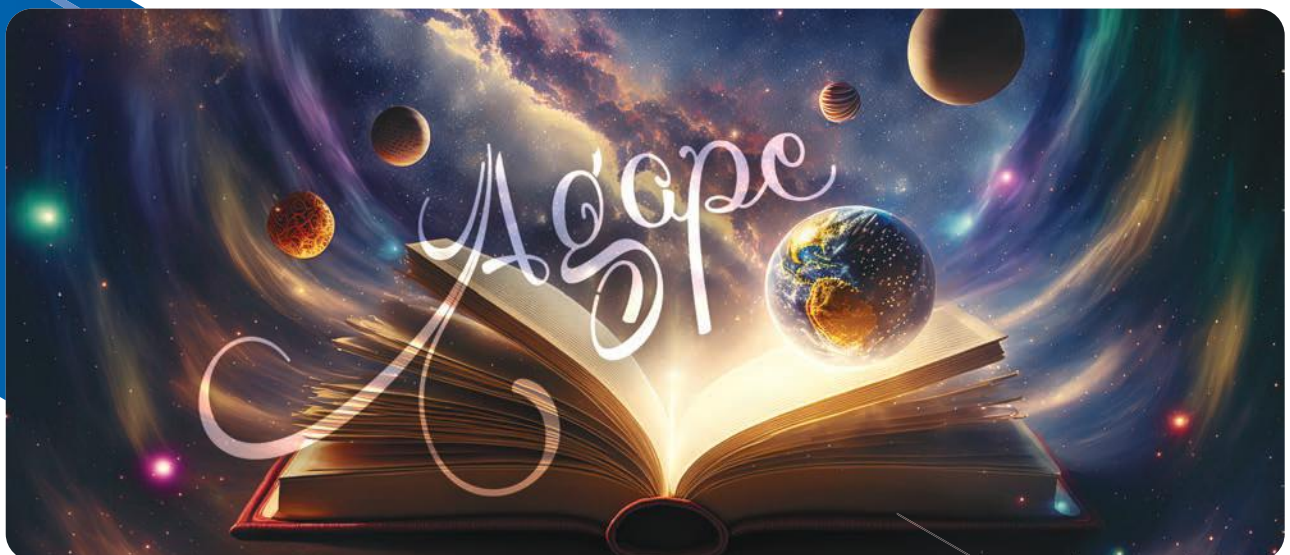
| God is love (1 John 4:16).

That is, God’s very nature, His character, is love. “The Father Himself loves you” (John 16:27). What is this love—and what does it really mean, especially in a world filled with suffering and evil?

The word “love” in these passages is a specific kind of love, called *agape* in the original Greek. For most people in our modern-day society, this type of love is unfamiliar. Look at how we typically use the word “love” in English: We say that we “love” chocolate or we “love” a song on the radio, but then in the same breath also say that we “love” our spouse. We *feel* a deep sense of attachment and call it “love.”

Agape, on the other hand, is not a feelings-based or self-focused love. Rather, it is an unconditional, self-sacrificial, active love that desires the highest good for others, even at the expense of one’s self. In other words, everything that God does is for the benefit of others. Yes, absolutely everything! Let that sink in.

God can love perfectly because He is both omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-





THE KINDS OF LOVE IN THE BIBLE



There are four different Greek terms translated as “love.” *Eros*, a word denoting romantic feelings or sexual desire, and the definition we most associate with love, is the only one of the four not specifically used in Scripture. Here are the other three:

- **STORGE:** a natural feeling of affection, like between family members (Romans 12:10). It is used only once in the New Testament and in combination with *philia*.
- **PHILIA:** a strong feeling of loyalty or attachment to friends, family, or community (Matthew 10:37; John 11:36).
- **AGAPE:** unconditional, moral, beneficent, self-sacrificial love, like God has for us (John 15:9; Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13).

powerful). Scripture proclaims that God “is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16); “For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6).

Furthermore, God calls Himself “I AM” (Exodus 3:14), telling us that He is self-existent. He exists independently of anyone or anything else. The Bible also says that God’s “ways are everlasting” (Habakkuk 3:6), that in Him “there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). God says, “I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). God is the same forever—and is the only Being who never changes.

When we put all these pieces together, we can conclude that all God has done, all God is doing, and all God will ever do is for your personal good. That is simply who God is: *agape*. There is no one greater, stronger, or smarter who can make Him be or do otherwise.

A Universe Made by a God of Love

God, who “created all things,” created the entire universe. He created those billions of galaxies and billions upon billions of stars. He created the largest planet, the tiniest species of insect, and He created and breathed life into humanity. Over all this, He reigns: “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

Every kingdom has a rule of law, commonly known as a government. What kind of law do you think God’s kingdom has? The foundation of God’s government, the basis of the administration of the cosmos, is none other than *agape*—selfless love. As Romans 13:10 explains, “Love [*agape*] is the fulfillment of the law.”

God’s law, often called the **law of love**, has been written down for humanity in the Bible and can most clearly be found in the **Ten Commandments** (Exodus 20:2–17). They are, in essence, a reflection of God’s character of love.

Jesus was once asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36).

He responded, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (vv. 37–39). In this passage, Jesus used the term *agape*. To what “law” was Jesus referring? The Ten Commandments.

The Logic of Love

God simply exists and doesn't need anything to exist. Otherwise, He wouldn't be God. He doesn't need to eat, breathe, or take in any other form of energy to survive—like we must do. That means He doesn't need to do anything for Himself because He doesn't need anything. Thus, all that God does is outward, for others, all the time. God's love is pure selflessness; it is *agape*.



In Romans 13:8, Paul said, “He who loves another has fulfilled the law,” before going on to list five of the last six Ten Commandments as examples of the law. He then stated that “the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (v. 9).

That’s also what Jesus did! He distilled, or “summed up,” the Ten Commandments into two groups: The first four commandments (Exodus 20:2–11) are an expression of *agape* for God, what Christ called “the first and great commandment”; the last six commandments (vv. 12–17) are an expression of *agape* for one’s fellow man, what Christ deemed “the second.” Accordingly, a person cannot do the second great commandment without the first, for “he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:21). “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God” (v. 7, emphasis added).

The Ten Commandments are the written expression of God’s law of love.

Doesn’t a government established upon *agape* sound like paradise? According to the Bible, a kingdom ruled by that kind of law abounds in goodness and justice. It’s perfect—and it will never be anything less than that. As for its citizens, the Bible says:

“Happy is he who keeps the law”
(Proverbs 29:18).

“Keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you” (Proverbs 3:1, 2).

“He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

But if God is love and if He is an all-powerful Creator, then why is our world filled with violence, evil, and death? Why would a God of love permit the very worst atrocities?

Theodicy: The Problem of Evil

The word “theodicy” is defined as the vindication of God’s omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence in light of the existence of evil and suffering in our world. Indeed, many people see such evil and question whether God is truly love or whether

He exists at all. Take these statements from two popular atheist philosophers:

- “Epicurus’s old questions are yet unanswered. Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?” —David Hume¹
- “This is the age-old problem of theodicy, of course, and we should consider it solved. If God exists, either he can do nothing to stop the most egregious calamities or he does not care to. God, therefore, is either impotent or evil.” —Sam Harris²

Millions of people, like these men, have wrestled with similar questions about evil. And they have concluded that evil could not possibly exist if “God is love.” Or, if God does exist, they claim, He cannot be who the Bible says He is.

1 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Project Gutenberg, 2002), part 10, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4583/4583-h/4583-h.htm>.

2 “An Atheist Manifesto,” TruthDig.com, December 7, 2005, <https://www.truthdig.com/dig/an-atheist-manifesto>.

Do you agree? If God is the supreme Ruler of the universe and has built His realm upon His law of unconditional, self-sacrificial love, then why is our world so far from resembling that? How is it that our lives are so full of the opposite of *agape*—full of pain and suffering, tragedy and grief?

To answer these questions, we must examine what love is in more detail.


Free Will

If you hold someone at gunpoint, demanding that she love you, could she truly love you? If you promise to deposit \$1 million into someone’s bank account so long as he agreed to love you, could he ever truly love you? Or would these actions merely produce a pretense of love—acts done not out of love but out of fear or greed?

In other words: Can love be mandated?

Think about it. Love cannot be forced. Indeed, *agape* love is the opposite of force, because *agape* is, by definition, an act of free will. Only you—and not anyone else—can make the decision to sacrifice yourself for others. If someone forced you to do so, that wouldn’t be self-sacrifice.

Not only does the doer of *agape* exercise his own free will, but he also respects the free will of others. *Agape* is unconditional: God loves you whether you love Him or hate Him. No matter what, God will act on the principle of working toward your highest good without ever crossing the boundary of your free will.



Feelings-based love, like *storge* or *philia*, is natural and, therefore, involuntary. You either feel that way, or you don’t. *Agape* love, on the other hand, is voluntary. It’s a decision you knowingly and deliberately make regardless of how you feel.

It's like a dad who wants his daughter to eat healthy meals. The dad desires this because he loves his child. He wants her to live a long, able, gratifying life. The dad prepares delicious dishes, avoids buying junk food, and lovingly teaches his daughter about the wonderful effects of eating a well-balanced diet. But if the daughter refuses to practice those principles as an adult, the dad is not going to tie his child to a chair, pry open her mouth, and force-feed her broccoli. That wouldn't be *agape* love.

How much more so does God, the embodiment of *agape*, never force anyone to love or obey Him against his or her own will? Jesus gave this analogy: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus **knocks** on the door of your heart to request

entrance. He doesn't break it down; He doesn't pick the lock and sneak inside. Jesus initiates a relationship with you, but *you* decide whether or not to engage in a relationship with Him. Jesus knocks, but *you* need to be the one to open the door.

God didn't create you to be a robot programmed to do His every whim. He created you with powers of reason—to think, to discern, to comprehend. "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD" (Isaiah 1:18). You have free will *because* God is love.



Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (John 14:23). "If" denotes choice—the choice to love God or not. *If you love God with *agape* love, it results in the keeping of God's law.*

This shows us that God's law is not an arbitrary mandate. Inherent in God's law of *agape* love is free will for the entire universe. It means that the other scenario is plausible: If you do *not* love God, then you will *not* keep His law. God gave you the choice to do that too. You have the choice to make selfishness the law of your life. Rather than selflessly working for the good of others, you could work to bring about your own gain using whatever means necessary—intimidation, deception, even force. Doesn't that resemble life on our planet as we know it?

Indeed, as you will find out, that is exactly what happened.



PART 2

THE REBELLION



AN AMAZING FACT


Venus is unlike any other planet in our solar system. First, it spins clockwise on its axis, as if it were upside down. Second, it is the only planet similar in size to Earth. It's even been called Earth's "sister," but its toxic atmosphere could never support human life. Venus is also the second brightest object in the night sky, with such luminosity that it is sometimes mistaken for a UFO—and it's often visible during the day; hence, it is called the "morning star."

How did evil come to Earth?

We can't imagine that a good and loving Creator God (Genesis 1:31) would create sin that would destroy His own beautiful work. The Bible says, "You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness" (Psalm 5:4). Indeed, evil did not begin with God but with someone else:

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

The Hebrew word translated as "Lucifer" is *helel*. It means "shining one" or "brilliant one." In ancient times, this word was also used for the planet Venus



because it shown brilliantly in the morning sky. The NASB translates *helel* as "star of the morning." But who is this mysterious being?

A Created Being

Two principal passages in the Old Testament provide us a history of this "morning star." One passage is found in Isaiah 14, the other in Ezekiel 28.

To whom are these two passages referring? Isaiah 14 transcribes a "proverb against the king of Babylon" (v. 4), while Ezekiel 28 is "a lamentation for the king of Tyre" (v. 12). Each passage addresses a monarch who was a real historical figure. But look closely at the imagery of these two chapters.

In Ezekiel, the prophet says, "You were in Eden, the garden of God" (v. 13). We know that the human race was expelled from Eden (Genesis 3:23, 24). So, this passage cannot be talking about the literal king of Tyre, a human who lived thousands of years later. Who is it about?

In the biblical account, the following intelligent beings are said to be in Eden: God,

Adam, Eve, the serpent, and the angels who stood guard after Adam and Eve's banishment. (See 2:8–3:24.) The Bible discloses this about the serpent: He is "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9). Thus, the devil was the serpent in Eden.

The prophet also states, "You were the anointed cherub who covers" (Ezekiel 28:14). Here, Ezekiel is referring to an angel. Let's learn more about this cherub:

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created (12, 13).

This angel was "created," as "all things" are, by God the Father "through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9). We also see that God created this angel with "perfect ... beauty" and covered him with many precious gems. Imagine what that would have looked like—the brilliance, as the "morning star" shines at dawn.

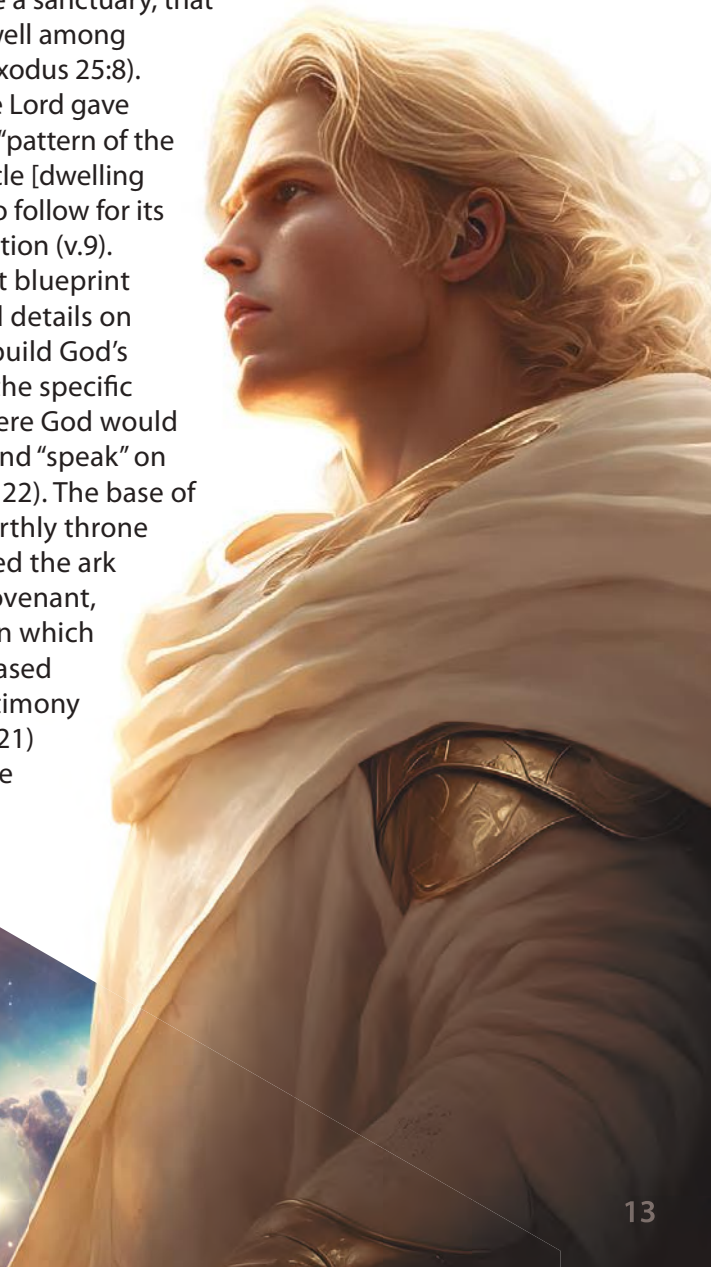
A Covering Cherub

The passage also tells us what position this angel held in heaven:

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 (Ezekiel 28:14).

What were the duties of "the anointed cherub who covers"? When the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, God instructed Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Then the Lord gave Moses a "pattern of the tabernacle [dwelling place]" to follow for its construction (v.9).

That blueprint included details on how to build God's throne, the specific spot where God would "meet" and "speak" on Earth (v. 22). The base of God's earthly throne was called the ark of the covenant, a chest in which was encased "the Testimony that" (v. 21) God gave



to Moses. That Testimony is also known as the Ten Commandments (31:18).

The lid of the ark was called “the mercy seat” (25:21); and on its “two ends” were “two cherubim of gold” (v. 18). God instructed that these figures be positioned in a distinct way: “The cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat” (v. 20). The constant attention of these figures was to be upon the foundation of God’s government, the Ten Commandments, upon which rests God’s seat of mercy. These cherubim were emblems of very real beings.

Indeed, the entire sanctuary was an emblem; it was “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). “The pattern” given to Moses was a “copy” taken of God’s dwelling place in heaven. It is this sanctuary in heaven that is “the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (v. 2). Psalm 99:1 says, “The LORD reigns; ... He dwells between the cherubim.”

There are two angels in heaven whose duty is to cover God’s throne. They stand on either side of God, and they are to steadfastly watch over God’s law of love. This angel in Ezekiel 28 was one of these two privileged angels.

But something changed.

A Change of Heart

You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you (Ezekiel 28:15).

Notice that God created this angel perfectly and consistent with His loving nature. He did not create this being with a defect or weakness. Instead, “iniquity” came *from within* this covering cherub.

What is “iniquity”? It is another word for evil, for sin. What is sin? “Sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Thus, sin is the breaking of God’s law, the Ten Commandments. (See also James 2:9, 11.) All suffering and evil in this world can be traced

back to a violation of God’s law of love.

This angel ultimately broke and distorted the very law he once cherished, preserved, and covered. It may seem inconceivable how one can be in the literal presence of God, experiencing His goodness, yet reject Him. How did this happen?

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor (Ezekiel 28:17).

This covering cherub stopped beholding God and focused his sight inward, onto himself. He became selfish and prideful. In James 1:25, we read that one must “[look] into the perfect law of liberty *and* [continue] in it” in order “to be blessed” (emphasis added). This angel’s fall into sin was a process. It began with a selfish thought that was cherished, leading to many wrong choices over time. “By the *abundance* of [his] trading [he] became filled with violence within” (Ezekiel 28:16, emphasis added), “by the *multitude* of [his] iniquities” (v. 18, emphasis added). In a



The devil broke the law by loving himself more than God and more than others.



The Scriptures are clear: This beautiful, powerful angel ultimately turned into the devil, the father of all evil.

Bible concordance, the word “violence” is also translated as “wrong,” “injustice,” “false.” This angel chose—and *kept on* choosing—to dwell on self until his mind was full of devious and depraved thoughts. His choices, made of his own free will, so changed him until he was no longer perfect.

What comes after pride?

Your heart is lifted up, and you say, “I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods” (v. 2).

Envy follows pride. This created being no longer wanted to be just an angel; he wanted more—he wanted to be like God. There is a parallel passage in Isaiah 14:

You have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High [God]” (vv. 13, 14; see also Psalm 7:17; 47:2; 57:2).

The Origin of Sin

It is too distinct to miss; these two passages are describing the same created being. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel refer to his brightness. Both emphasize his pride. Both document his desire to be like God. And both passages detail his downfall.

Remember, this angel is “fallen from heaven” (Isaiah 14:12). Jesus identified who this was:

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18).

Satan, the devil, is the “morning star” who fell. He was the covering cherub created in perfection. He was that angel whose pride caused him to covet God’s throne. And he is the originator of *all* sin:

“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8). That “iniquity ... found in” Lucifer was the first sin to befall the universe (Ezekiel 28:15).

War in Heaven

Isaiah’s declaration of a “fallen” angel means much more than a physical tumble. The Hebrew word for “fallen” is *naphal*, which means “cast out” or “defected.” That is what happened with the devil:

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).

Lucifer was expelled from his heavenly home. Why? He defected from God’s government. In the original Greek, the word translated as “war” is *polemos*, which can mean a literal battle but also a dispute. Our word “polemic” is derived from it and is defined as contentious rhetoric against the principles or opinions of another. Look at the passage in Revelation again. There is no talk of bloodshed, but there is mention of the devil’s rhetoric: He “deceives the whole world.” This war in heaven was a war of words—the devil’s propaganda against the Word of God, His principles and character.

The fundamental principle of God’s government is His law of love. The devil’s “polemic” spoke out against God’s *agape* love. Remember, *agape* is unconditional, self-sacrificial love aimed at accomplishing the highest good for others. Lucifer once lived by this principle. But when his thoughts turned away from others and to himself, he defected from the motive of love.

Look at the number of times the word “I” is used in Isaiah 14:13, 14. The devil’s principles are in opposition to God’s law; the devil’s way of life is sinful and self-centered. Not only that, he wants to impose his destructive principles of sin on the universe



Who Is Michael

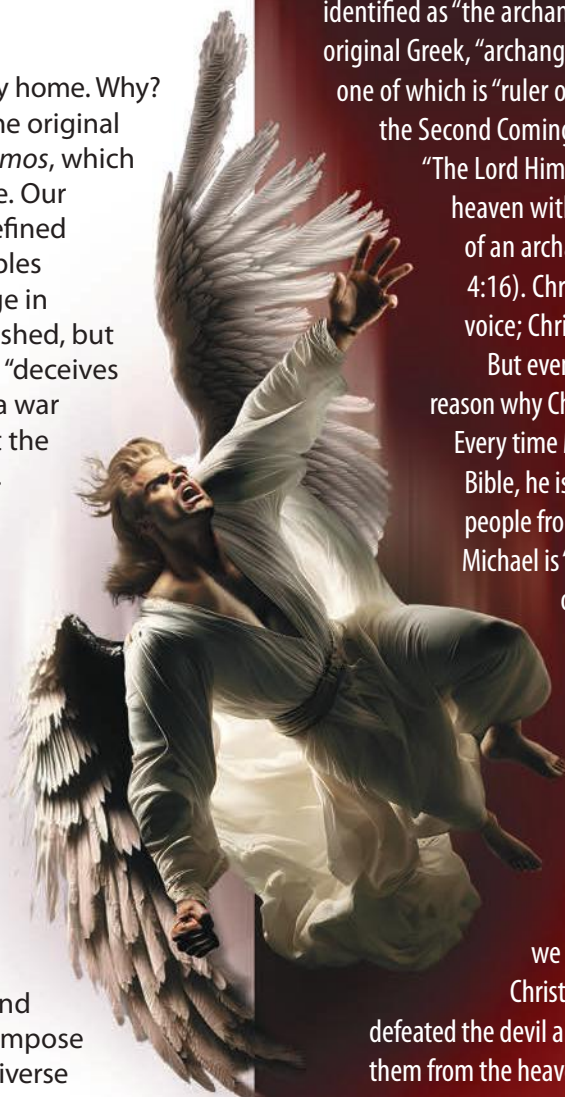
IN REVELATION 12:7?

The name Michael means “who is like God.” There are a handful of times that Michael is mentioned in the Bible. In three of those, Michael is referenced as a “prince” (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). Christ is called the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) and the “Prince of life” (Acts 3:15). Michael is also identified as “the archangel” in Jude 9. In the original Greek, “archangel” has various definitions, one of which is “ruler of the angels.” In describing the Second Coming, the apostle Paul stated, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Christ has an archangel’s voice; Christ is the Archangel!

But even more fascinating is the reason why Christ is called Michael. Every time Michael appears in the Bible, he is depicted as protecting His people from their enemies. In Jude 9, Michael is “contending with the devil” over “the body of Moses.”

In Daniel 12:1, Michael “stands watch over the sons of [Daniel’s] people.” Michael is a depiction of Christ in the times when He defends you from the forces of evil. And this is the Christ we see in Revelation 12; it was Christ—God the Son—who

defeated the devil and his angels, evicting them from the heavenly kingdom.





by replacing God's law. Remember the devil's main goal: "I will be like the Most High." The war in heaven was his first effort to accomplish this overthrow.

Why the Devil Lies

Let's look further into the devil's accusations. God's government of *agape* ensures the best outcome for everyone. To overthrow God's government, the devil needed to get heaven's citizens to support his government instead, which ensures the best outcome for him alone. How do you get people to work against their own interest? You would need to convince them that God's government was *not* for their best good. In other words, you would have to lie.

In Revelation 12, the devil is depicted as a "dragon" (v. 9) whose "tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (v. 4). Isaiah 9:15 explains, "The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail." In other words, the devil's "tail" represents his lies. Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. . . . There is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The devil told the first lie.

In Revelation 12:4, we learned that the devil's persuasive lies caused a group of "stars" to fall to the earth. Notice the parallel in verse 9, in which the devil's angels are "cast to the earth." The "stars" are a symbol for angels. The devil lied to his fellow angels.

Imagine what that must have been like. Lucifer was the first being to ever lie. We can conclude, then, that the other angels had never heard a lie before.

They had no reason to disbelieve anyone, especially one they thought to be wise. How their world must have been shaken as they listened to Lucifer's slander: If God's government was not for their good, then that meant God did not want what is best for them. It meant that God is not who He says He is.

But not only did he lie about God, the devil also lied about himself. He needed the angels to believe that *his* policies and *his* laws and *his* authority were better than God's. The Bible says that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14 ESV). The father of lies paints himself in a garb of goodness while projecting his own self-absorbed character upon God.


Those lies led to a civil war against the Creator.



Don't be fooled by "the tradition of men" (Colossians 2:8). Satan is the master of disguise. Instead of the popular portrayal of horns, bat wings, goatee, and a pitchfork, it is likely that he will appear as the most beautiful creature you've ever seen. "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Allowed to Live

Recall Isaiah 14:12: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" The Hebrew word for "fallen," *naphal*, has another meaning: "perish." That's one other similarity between the

A dramatic scene of a volcanic eruption. In the background, a massive plume of white and grey smoke billows into the sky from a mountain range. The ground is dark and desolate, with some small structures and debris. In the foreground, a figure with long, light-colored hair, wearing a dark, hooded robe, is kneeling on the ground, looking down. The overall atmosphere is one of destruction and despair.

passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel; they both declare that God will ultimately destroy the devil.

Your pomp is brought down to Sheol [the grave], and the sound of your stringed instruments; the maggot is spread under you, and worms cover you. ... You shall be brought down to Sheol [the grave]" (vv. 11, 15).

"I will cast thee to the ground. ... I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth ... and *never shalt thou be any more*" (Ezekiel 28:17–19 KJV, emphasis added).

The imagery is clear: The devil will die; not only that, his death will be permanent.

Yet the question remains: Why hasn't God already destroyed the devil? Why was Lucifer allowed to lie and rebel in heaven? Why—looking down through the ages of our blood-soaked planet, knowing the horror, misery, and pain that sin would inflict—did God not exterminate the devil immediately after his rebellion? He certainly has the power to do it.

Think about it from the perspective of the angels. If Lucifer had confided to you his misgivings of God's love, if Lucifer had suggested that God wasn't looking out for your good, and then the next day, God incinerated Lucifer,

what would happen to your trust in God? Perhaps in your mind would linger the thoughts: *Maybe Lucifer had been right about God. Maybe God silenced him to*

So much for the common notion of the devil as the custodian of hell for all eternity. Lucifer is not inherently immortal. He is neither a myth nor a cartoon. He is a real created being and, like all created beings, is subject to death. Scripture says that only God is inherently immortal (1 Timothy 6:16).

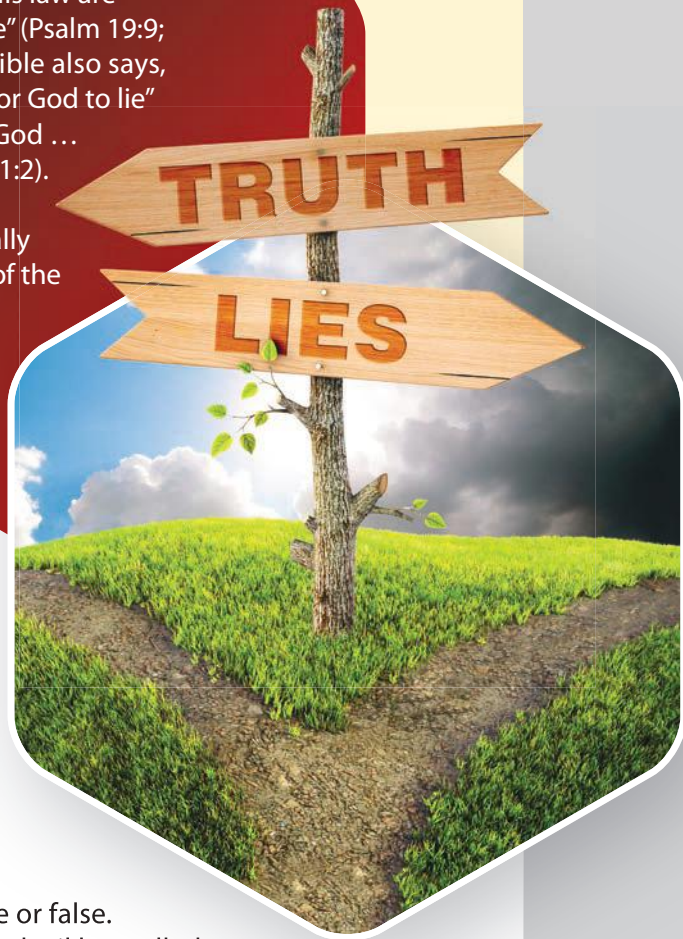
keep the truth hidden. Maybe all God really cares about is Himself. Maybe God's whole kingdom is a fraud, and how Lucifer wanted to run things would actually be better.

Destroying Lucifer would have reinforced all his accusations. It would have left the angels to feel that they were under the thumb of an all-powerful, all-knowing Creator who, at the first sign of suspicion, would snuff you out of existence. You wouldn't dare voice concerns, lest you meet the same fate. Worst of all, you wouldn't serve God out of love—but out of fear. That's coercion. And as we've learned, such a life would nullify a kingdom of *agape* and the principle of free will. God is not love if His creation cannot love Him by free choice.

If God had instantly killed Lucifer, the seeds of doubt the angel had planted would actually have germinated and spread. Remember, the entire universe had always lived in accordance with God's law of love. Every creature had known only truth and harmony. The angels had never experienced the effects of sin. Lucifer had built for them a fantasy of lofty delusions of a life without God's law. His instant destruction would have strengthened doubts about God and the danger of sin. It wouldn't have solved the problem of evil; it would have made it worse.

What God is doing—and has been doing ever since the war in heaven—is exposing the fallacy of Satan's accusations against Him. Once an accusation has been made, it must be proven either

God and His law are described as "true" (Psalm 19:9; John 3:33). The Bible also says, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18); "God ... cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). The character of God is diametrically opposed to that of the devil, the father of lies.



true or false.

The devil has called God a liar; God says that the devil is the liar. Whom do you believe?

God had to delay the devil's destruction to give the entire universe a fair opportunity to see the dreadful results of the devil's government. Then all could see who the real liar is. God is allowing each of us to exercise our free will—to *choose* to love, serve, and obey Him—just as a God of love would do.

And in the coming chapters, you'll see exactly how God is proving this.



PART 3

The Fall OF HUMANITY



AN AMAZING FACT

In 1987, the world was captivated by the story of “Baby Jessica,” an 18-month-old girl who fell 22 feet into an abandoned well in Midland, Texas. For 56 hours, rescuers from around the country worked nonstop to free her from the eight-inch casing. Eventually, they dug an adjacent shaft and tunnel to reach her.

While she lost a toe and bears a scar on her forehead, today Jessica is a healthy mother living a productive life.



Though 22 feet is an alarming height, especially for a toddler, the fall of mankind was much greater in more ways than one. We’ve learned about the origin of evil; now we’ll discover how that evil came to planet Earth.

The first sentence in the Bible explains, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). As Genesis takes us through what God created, it consistently reminds us that His creation “was good” (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). At the end of the sixth day, it says: “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was *very good*” (v. 31, emphasis added).

The Bible does not want you to miss the point: There was no evil at Earth’s creation—no pollution, prisons, funeral homes, or children falling into abandoned wells. The earth was created sinless; it was perfect.

In the Likeness of God

The pinnacle of God’s six days of work was creating people:

God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own

image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (vv. 26, 27).

Humanity was made “in the image of God,” setting us apart from the animal kingdom. Notice the repetition in the passage. God does not want you to miss this point. No other creature—not fish, birds, cattle, or insects—was made in the image of God.

Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, lived in harmony with God’s kingdom, His law of love. Perfectly made in God’s image, they were a powerful witness to the Creator’s love. And, as God does for every intelligent creature, Adam and Eve were given free will.

Two Trees and Free Will

In the next chapter of Genesis, we’re told about two distinct trees that God created in Adam and Eve’s home, the Garden of Eden (2:8, 15). These trees were called “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (v. 9).

Of the first tree, God said that those who took of it and ate would “live forever” (3:22). Of the second tree, God said, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (2:16, 17). Thus, these two trees represented two opposing options:

1. Choosing the tree of life would result in life.
2. Choosing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would result in death.

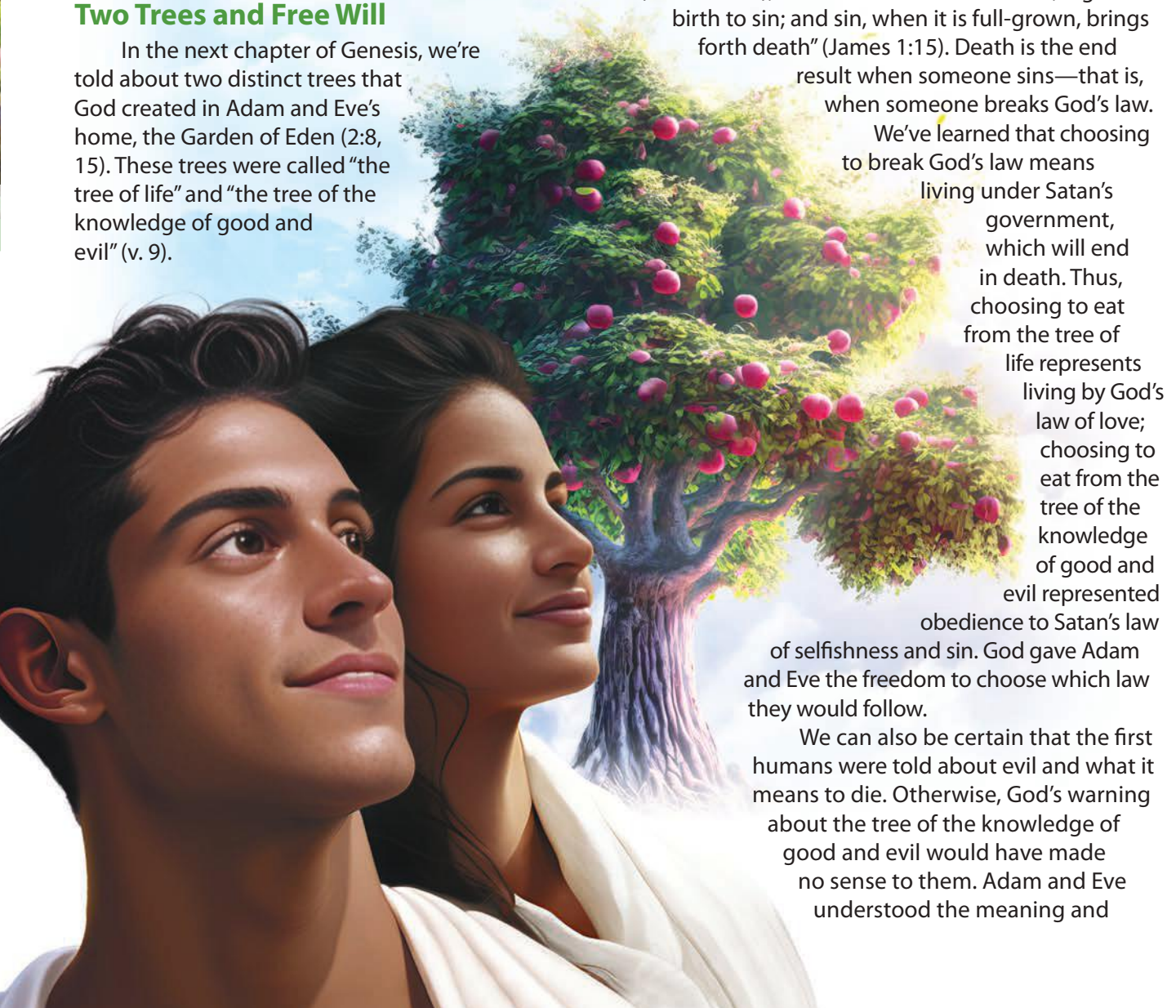
The Bible says: “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4); “when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15). Death is the end result when someone sins—that is, when someone breaks God’s law.

We’ve learned that choosing to break God’s law means

living under Satan’s government, which will end in death. Thus, choosing to eat from the tree of life represents living by God’s law of love; choosing to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented

obedience to Satan’s law of selfishness and sin. God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose which law they would follow.

We can also be certain that the first humans were told about evil and what it means to die. Otherwise, God’s warning about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would have made no sense to them. Adam and Eve understood the meaning and



consequence of sin; they also were acquainted with God's law of love. The Creator told all this to them so that they could make an informed decision. Would a just God who loves His creation do anything else?

The Fall

For a time not defined by Scripture, both Adam and Eve chose the tree of life and abstained from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They obeyed God's commands and experienced the blessings of living a life of *agape* love.



Some wonder how a seemingly small infraction of eating fruit could result in being condemned to death. But the two trees were a public demonstration of a deeper heart choice—between trusting God's law or believing Satan's lie.

But one day, Eve ventured near the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:1–3).

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

—Exodus 20:3

We've already learned that Satan, the archdeceiver, was the serpent (Revelation 12:9; 20:2). The talking snake must have been a fascinating sight to Eve. Now couple that with Satan's "cunning" rationalization. He started his deception by asking Eve a question about God's commands: "has God indeed said," or "has God *really* said." Hidden in that question was an attack on God's word—a question crafted to instill uncertainty about obeying the Creator.

The serpent continued:

You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4, 5).

God said plainly that eating from the tree would cause death; Satan said that it would not, directly contradicting God's words. Furthermore,

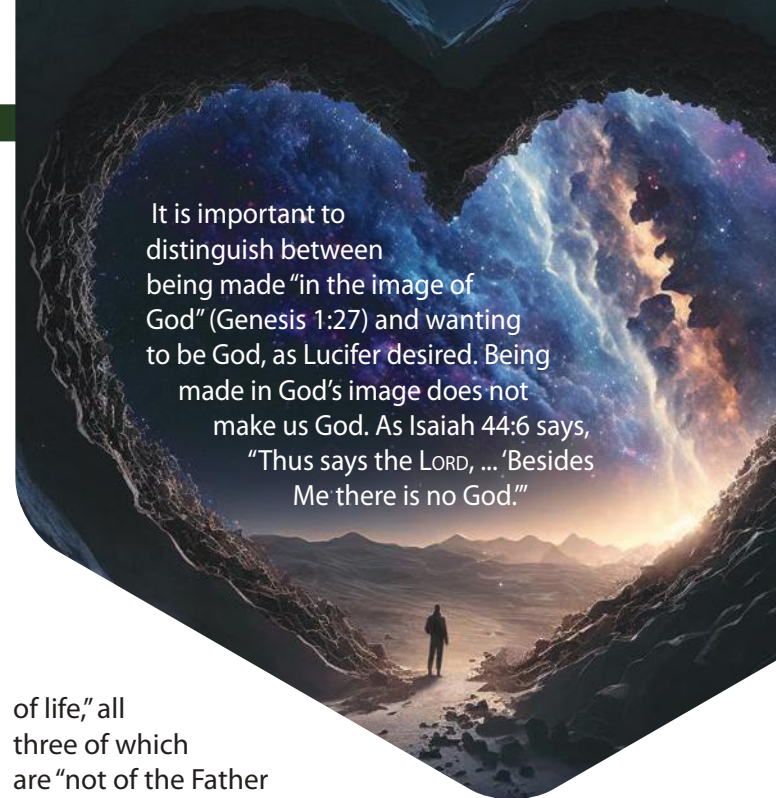
he slandered God's character, insinuating that the Creator was selfish and untrustworthy. Satan also threw in delusions of grandeur, "You will be like God," which echoed his own covetousness: "I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). Then, he topped off his lie with a false promise: Rebellion against God would not be destructive—but beneficial. This was Satan's contentious rhetoric. How similar his tactics were in the heavenly courts above!

And just as it did with a third of the angels, Satan's rhetoric worked:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

Let's examine why Eve made the decision that she did. First, she thought the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked "good for food." Relying on her own senses, she believed that the fruit was physically safe to eat. Second, she saw the tree "was pleasant to the eyes." Again, her sight determined that eating this food would be a wonderful experience. ("Pleasant" in the original Hebrew can mean covetous desire.) Third, she believed she would be made wiser—transformed even—by eating it, for it appeared to make a snake talk.

These three steps can be categorized as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride



of life," all three of which are "not of the Father [God] but [are] of the world" (1 John 2:16). And "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (v. 15). That is what happened to Eve. She turned from *agape* love for others to love of self. Eve sought her own gain, believing her judgment superseded God's will. Eve believed Satan instead of God; she then chose to deliberately disobey God. She made herself the god of her own heart—just as Satan had.

The Results of Sin

Who was telling the truth, the devil or God? Everyone knows that humans are mortal. People die. Every day in the world there is death all around us. Thus, we can know that it was God

Our perspective is corrupted when we follow our lusts. Though God had provided Adam and Eve with abundance, Satan convinced Eve to latch onto the single tree God had not given them. The Bible says, "The LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).




who told the truth and the devil who lied. Eve admitted as much when she said, “The serpent deceived me” (Genesis 3:13).

But interestingly, the Bible says that the devil did speak some truth, mixing it with his lies. Genesis 3:7 states that after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, “the eyes of both of them were opened.” God then declared, “Man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil” (v. 22). Satan said that would happen, but notice that his outright lie, “You will not surely die” (v. 4), clouded the impact of the truth, just as a glass of water is tainted by a single drop of poison.

When their eyes were opened, the pair did not experience a wondrous enlightenment, as Satan had implied; instead, they experienced shame, fear, and guilt (vv. 7, 8, 10). Neither was their station elevated to God-like status; they did not become omnipotent or omniscient. When God said that mankind had become like Him, He meant that both He and mankind had encountered evil. While Adam and Eve had *heard* about evil, the encounter with the serpent had been their first experience with it. They chose to participate in evil—this intimate knowledge of evil and its results was not God’s plan for humanity.

The Bible reveals this fascinating fact: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam *knew* that “the serpent [had] deceived Eve by his craftiness” (2 Corinthians 11:3). He knew the serpent was not to be trusted; he knew Eve was now slated to die. Yet Adam ate the fruit, choosing to die with his bride. Adam’s decision showed that he cherished something more than God. He had allowed Eve’s misguided persuasions to



The serpent introduced sin to humanity, but the choice to sin was made willfully by man alone. God was neither the instigator nor the propagator of sin on Earth.

hold more sway over him than the commands of his heavenly Father (Genesis 3:17).

But when God asked Adam if he had eaten from the tree, he blamed Eve *and* God: “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (v. 12). Adam’s sense of loyalty crumbled as the selfish effects of sin took their grip upon him. His first thought was to evade responsibility and consequences; he tried to preserve himself, the opposite of *agape* love.

And so, just as Lucifer before them, Adam and Eve were expelled from their home:

So [God] drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (v. 24).

Therefore, “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Yes, tragically, “there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). All of us

have broken God’s law of love and are, therefore, condemned to die.

The First Move

But we have God to thank that this is not the end for us. Here is how God responded to Adam and Eve’s sin:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (Genesis 3:8–11).

This moment is key to understanding God’s love. Notice that after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, it was God who made the first move of reconciliation. Adam and Eve’s sin did not prevent God from pursuing them. Notice that God didn’t



simply call down from heaven; He was “walking in” Eden. (We’ll soon examine how far God went to walk with men on Earth.) Jeremiah 31:3 says, “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’”

Notice the questions God asked Adam and Eve. But isn’t God omniscient? Yes, He already knew the answers to those questions. Let’s apply what we know about God’s character. God is *agape* love, which means that all He does is for the benefit of others. Thus, God was asking questions not for Himself but for the benefit of Adam and Eve. All of God’s questions were for one purpose: for mankind to acknowledge their sin. In other words,

God was giving Adam and Eve an opportunity to confess. And they did
(Genesis 3:12, 13).

The Rescue Plan

God’s response to Adam and Eve’s confessions was to first address the serpent, the one who instigated humanity’s fall into sin. God gave this promise:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15).

One day, there would be a “Seed” of Adam and Eve, a representative of the human race, who would do battle with Satan. Both sides would be wounded, but Satan’s wound would be fatal. The promised Seed would “bruise [the serpent’s] head.”

This Seed is mentioned again several chapters later to Abraham: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (22:18). This Seed is identified by the apostle Paul: “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). The Seed prophesied by God to defeat the devil is Jesus. “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20).

Like the rescuers who drew “Baby Jessica” out of the well, God had a plan to save Adam and Eve and



**“We love
Him because
He first
loved us.”**

— 1 John 4:19

the entire human family from the pit of sin—from eternal death. God revealed that plan to Adam and Eve in that first promise. “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). “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11, 12). Through Jesus, the Son of God, the promised Seed to Adam and Eve, they could regain what was once lost, eternal life—and so can every person who has ever lived.

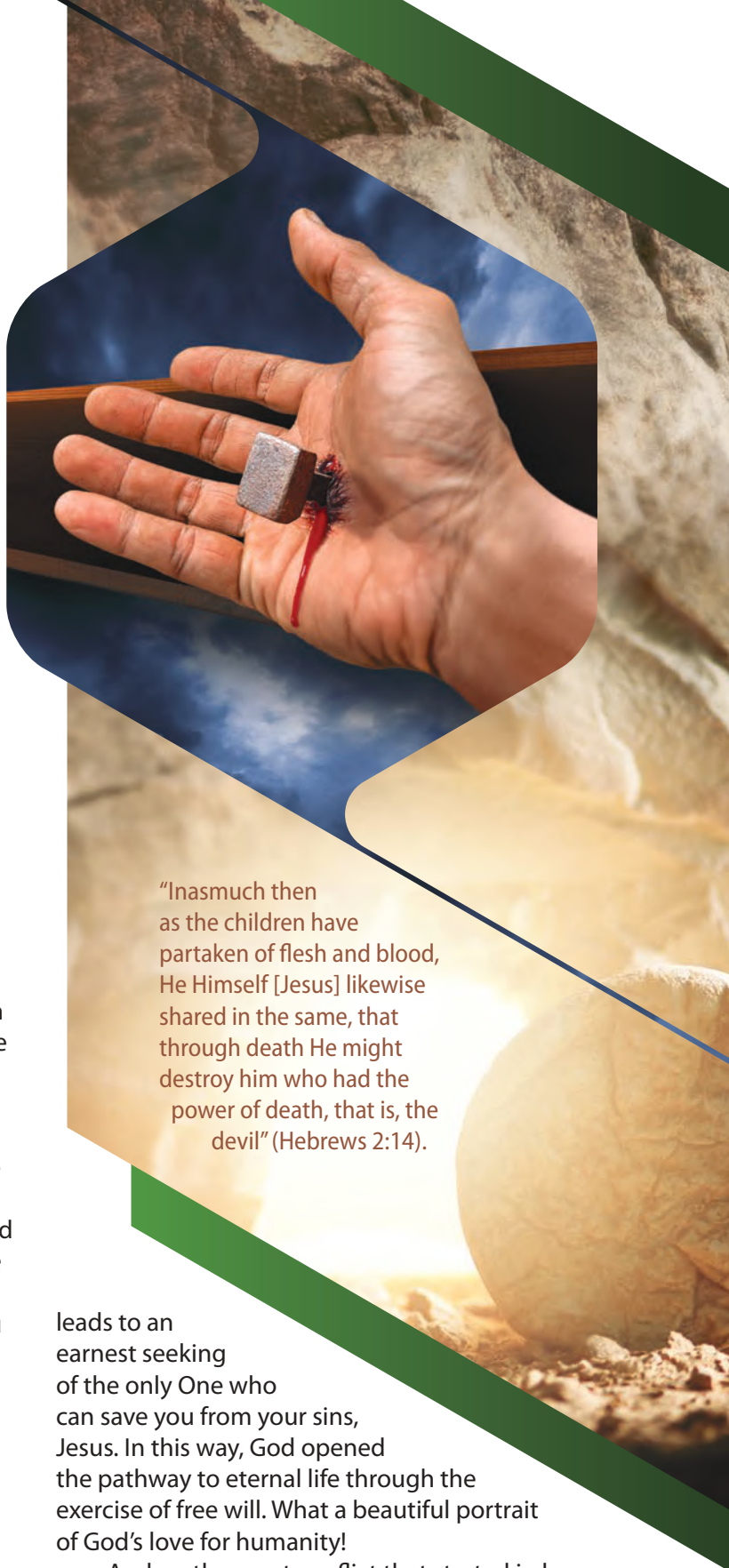
Amazingly, God devised this plan of redemption *before* He created our world: “Our Lord Jesus Christ ... chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. ... In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7). God’s intention has only ever been to save your life because He has only ever been *agape* love.

Questions and Free Will

Imagine the reassurance that Adam and Eve must have felt upon hearing God’s promise. Trust in God had to be repaired from the seeds of doubt the devil had planted. God was not their oppressor; He was their Savior!

God’s questions facilitated that conclusion. If God had just appeared where Adam and Eve were hiding, He would have taken away their choice to come to Him on their own. If God had merely scolded them for doing wrong, then they would never have had the opportunity to acknowledge and freely admit their own sin. Without genuine freedom, you are robbed of the ability to hate sin or to love God.

By allowing Adam and Eve the freedom to confess their sin, God gave them space to see the reality of their condition. They were sinners. They could apologize. They could try never to do it again, but that didn’t change the fact that they deserved death. By their own admission, they were guilty. When a person comes to that awareness, he ultimately realizes that he needs a Savior. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He [Jesus Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Voluntary confession



“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

leads to an earnest seeking of the only One who can save you from your sins, Jesus. In this way, God opened the pathway to eternal life through the exercise of free will. What a beautiful portrait of God’s love for humanity!

And so, the great conflict that started in heaven became a battle on our planet. Four millennia later, that promised Seed did come—and that titanic battle between Christ and the serpent was fought, just as God had prophesied ...

PART 4

Victory AT THE CROSS



AN AMAZING FACT

The war was over, but Hiroo Onoda kept fighting. When Japan surrendered to the Allies on September 2, 1945, ending World War II, Hiroo was conducting guerrilla attacks in the Philippines. For the next 28 years, he hid in the jungles, believing the war had not ended and that reports of Japan's surrender were enemy propaganda.

Finally, on March 9, 1974, his former commanding officer came to formally relieve him of his duties.



Imagine Hiroo's response when he finally learned the war was over. You might be equally shocked to learn that, in a very real sense, the cosmic war is also already over.

Satan's rebellion in heaven began a war between two governments—God's government of love versus his government of sin. Satan alleged that God's government was a lie, claiming his own government would be better for the universe. Thus, the war could be settled only when Satan's accusations were proven either right or wrong.

After Satan deceived Adam and Eve and took dominion of Earth, our planet became the arena for Satan to display his government. He was "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 KJV). Over the four thousand years that followed, human history revealed the fruits of sin.

Then something extraordinary happened: Jesus Christ came in human flesh to live and die in Satan's world.

An Irrefutable Demonstration of Love

Before sending Adam and Eve out of the garden, God did something significant for them: "The LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). God slew an innocent animal. Why? The world's first death actually

pointed forward to the death of Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That innocent animal sacrificed to clothe the first pair was a symbol of Christ, whose “blood ... cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Even amid the devastation, God gave humanity reason to hope. Four millennia later, Jesus fulfilled that promise.

The purpose of Christ’s life on Earth was to show the *agape* love of God—unconditional, sacrificial, and always acting for the highest good of others. The greatest demonstration of this love is seen in Christ’s death: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16).

After the Fall in Eden, humanity was doomed to die. We couldn’t have changed that fact. No amount of good deeds or money could fix it. We couldn’t do anything about it, but Someone else could. Jesus became our Substitute: “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ... He bore the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:6, 12). Christ took the death destined for us and re-opened the pathway of life that had been closed off.



law of *agape* love. Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9); “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, ... that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life” (6:38–40).

Out of love, God purposed to give salvation to all who believe. Jesus, God in the flesh, wanted you to have the chance at eternal life more than He wanted to preserve His own. He made the choice against His natural inclination of self-preservation: “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 2:8).

This is true sacrifice. Instead of dying, Jesus could have chosen to wash His hands of our planet. Instead, He chose to lose all. God became human—“that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1 John 1:2). Jesus, the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of the universe, “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form

The Free Gift

The fulfillment of *agape* is seen abundantly in Christ’s sacrifice.

Christ didn’t *want* to die. He felt like any human would in that situation. Three times He prayed, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matthew 26:39). However, Christ’s life was ruled not by feelings but by *agape* love. He said, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” Christ achieved His mission—to show that the God in heaven truly lived and reigned by His




of a bondservant" (Philippians 2:7), allowing Himself to be "despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3; see also John 1:11). "He was wounded," "bruised," "oppressed," and "afflicted" (Isaiah 53:5, 7)—yet He did not abandon us. No, Christ died for us because He loved us with *agape* love. "He loved [us] to the end" (John 13:1).

The Life of Christ

The love of God was also revealed in the life of Christ, who condescended to leave heaven to live amid that which He hates—sin. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus was born on this planet "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), into a body that was subject to all the inherited weaknesses of a race bearing the impact of sin for thousands of years.

But Christ coming "in the likeness of sinful flesh" does not mean that He sinned. He "committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). Indeed, Jesus could not have been our Substitute unless He was sinless, a feat He accomplished to not only save our lives but also to serve as our example. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow" (v. 21). Christ "bore our sins in His own body ... that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (v. 24).

The cross of Christ saves you from eternal death; the life of Christ gives you eternal life. After His death, Jesus was resurrected (Matthew 28:5, 6; Luke 24:6). Likewise, "just as Christ was



"God our Savior ... desires *all* men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:3, 4, emphasis added); He is "not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, emphasis added). Christ's death provided eternal life for all (1 John 2:2)—but tragically, not everyone wants to be saved.



raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (v. 6) but "put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). That "new man" is the character of Christ.

This is God's promise to you! That's why Christ became "flesh and blood" (Hebrews 2:14). That's why "in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (v. 17) and "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (4:15)—so humanity could know that we too are able to live a righteous life.

How to Be Righteous

But after we accept Jesus' sacrifice for us, how is it possible to live His righteous life? We are sinners. We can't just snap our fingers and stop breaking God's law: "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Romans 7:15).

The Bible explains, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). When the Holy Spirit "dwells with you" (John 14:17), He changes your character to be like that of Christ.

Thus, "Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19), "[dwelling] in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17). The Bible affirms, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus said, "I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Just as Christ submitted His will to the Father's, you are to continually submit your will to God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, "that He may abide with you forever" (v. 16).

Don't become discouraged!

Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we "are being transformed." Transformation is a process. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

Lastly, notice in Ephesians 4:24 who puts on the new man: "You put on the new man." Once again, God has given you free will. He does the transforming of your character, but *you* need to allow the Holy Spirit into your heart so that "God ... works in you" (Philippians 2:13).

An Irrefutable Demonstration of Evil

You can be certain that the old serpent, the devil, was on the watch for the Seed prophesied to crush his head (Genesis 3:15). From the moment the devil heard the angels announce Christ's birth on Earth, when He came as a helpless babe "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), Satan attempted to destroy Him. Revelation 12:4 says, "The dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born." Indeed, Satan tried killing the infant Jesus through King Herod (Matthew 2:13–16).

But it was Christ's sinless life that finally exposed Satan's true nature. Jesus was only a young man in His thirties when the "chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death" (Mark 14:1). Notice, it was necessary that their murderous plot

be accomplished by deceit. Christ was blameless; it was impossible to incriminate Him except through made-up charges.


The Bible also reveals: "Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them" (Luke 22:3, 4). It was "the devil ... [who] put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot" (John 13:2). The plot was put into motion. Satan's instigation incited Jesus' wrongful arrest, trial, conviction, and finally, His crucifixion.

The Unfallen Worlds Are Watching

"God ... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1, 2; see also Colossians 1:16). Revelation 5:13 uses the phrase, "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them," which is an expression that encompasses everything in the universe. The verse goes on to say that all these creatures praised God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us here what so many people today are itching to know: We are not the only intelligent beings in the universe. God made other worlds and set up other "principalities," or rulers, in this vast domain. But don't expect today's popular UFO sightings to be inhabitants from these other worlds. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Christ symbolizes the shepherd who retrieves his one lost sheep, a representation of planet Earth:

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ... I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:4, 7).



All members of the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, serve one another in order to serve others. The Godhead operates on the principle of **selflessness.**

Christ said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (5:32). It is sinners who need repentance. The Shepherd's other sheep, the unfallen worlds, don't need repentance because they have not fallen into sin. If you were a citizen of one of those worlds, would you dare venture onto Satan's ground—or would you avoid Earth like the plague? It's much more reasonable to conclude that any "alien invaders" are already quarantined on our sin-filled planet: Satan and his angels.

The Bible says, "We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9). How likely is it that the intelligent creatures of the unfallen worlds are also watching the cosmic controversy unfold? Indeed, God is their Creator as well; any revelations of His character and government would be of utmost interest to them.

Satan Is Judged

Imagine being one of these heavenly observers of this conflict on Earth. You witnessed Christ's righteous life, watching the embodiment of *agape* love in every interaction with sinful humanity. Then you saw Satan send the Son of God through the most horrific torture, through injustice, ridicule, abuse, and finally to suffer those excruciating hours upon the cross. Yet "when He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

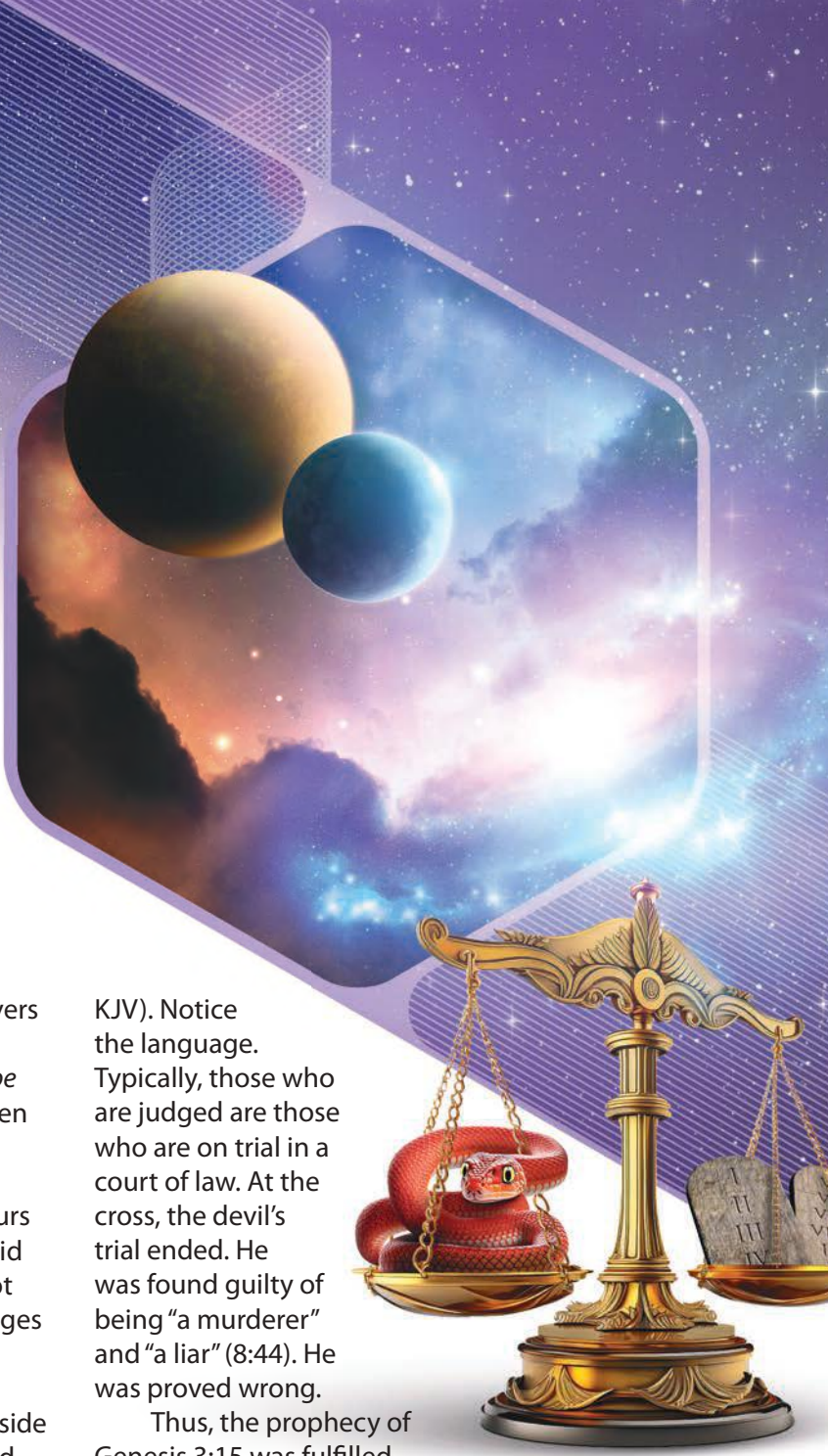
At the cross, we see the two governments, represented by those two princes, placed side by side in opposition. The death of Jesus not only revealed God's righteous character; it also unveiled the devil's true nature. It showed Jesus' power of love and Satan's love for power. Now all the devil's accusations about God were proven to be nothing but lies. Satan wasn't a hero standing up to an oppressive king. Satan wasn't looking out for our best interests, nor was he hard at work for the betterment of the universe. He was a villain wanting to hijack the Life-giver's throne. That was the endgame of his pride. At the cross, Satan lost the sympathy of the universe.

The Savior declared before His crucifixion, "The prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11

KJV). Notice the language. Typically, those who are judged are those who are on trial in a court of law. At the cross, the devil's trial ended. He was found guilty of being "a murderer" and "a liar" (8:44). He was proved wrong.

Thus, the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled in the battle at the cross: Christ's death, engineered by Satan, was but a wound to the Savior's "heel," for He was resurrected. Yet it was simultaneously the fatal blow to Satan's "head," for it sealed his doom. "It is finished!" were Christ's last words upon the cross (John 19:30). The war was over! Satan was unseated as "the prince of this world."

So here we are today, more than two thousand years after the war ended. And the question remains: Why does evil still exist? Why is there *still* sin, suffering, and death in our world? We'll get to those answers next ...



PART 5

THE END OF EVIL— Probation



AN AMAZING FACT

During the Industrial Revolution, railways took the transportation industry by storm. Passengers could, for the first time, travel 100 miles in just a few hours. But they also produced an unforeseen problem: time. There was no universal timetable by which to schedule a train's arrival and departure. But on November 18, 1883, at precisely noon, the United States implemented four standard time zones as a solution. Today, the whole world runs off standardized time.



The universe is running on a timetable too. The Bible says, “He [God the Father] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus Christ]” (Acts 17:31). This is it, what so many have been wondering about and pleading for—the destruction of evil and suffering.

But why has God been waiting for this specific time to finally end evil? Did He arbitrarily choose a day—or is there a specific reason? If so, what is it? For answers, let’s start from where we left off—at the cross.

After the Cross

After His death and resurrection, Christ met with His people, giving them hope of life after death and eternal salvation (Acts 1:1–5; 1 Corinthians 15:3–7). He also gave them the great commission:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15, 16).

Then, Jesus “was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (v. 19) in order to “[make] intercession for us” (Romans 8:34). And, as promised, Jesus sent His people the Holy Spirit, who transforms hearts and gives power to proclaim the gospel (John 16:7–14; Acts 1:4–8).

As for Satan, after being defeated at the cross, his singular objective was revealed:

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time (Revelation 12:12).

After the cross, Satan’s rage was directed against the human race—and in particular, God’s church, “the woman” (vv. 13–17).

A “woman” in the Bible is often used as a symbol for a church (Jeremiah 31:32; Hosea 2:20; Ephesians 5:23). Churches can be faithful or unfaithful. The woman of Revelation 12, clothed with light, represents God’s faithful church, one true to her husband, Christ. But for such purity, she became Satan’s new target.

The Bible makes it clear that the central motivation for the cosmic conflict is Satan’s hatred of Christ. But ever since His ascension to heaven, Jesus has been beyond the reach of the deceiver—so the devil now directs his wrath at the object of God’s love: “Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

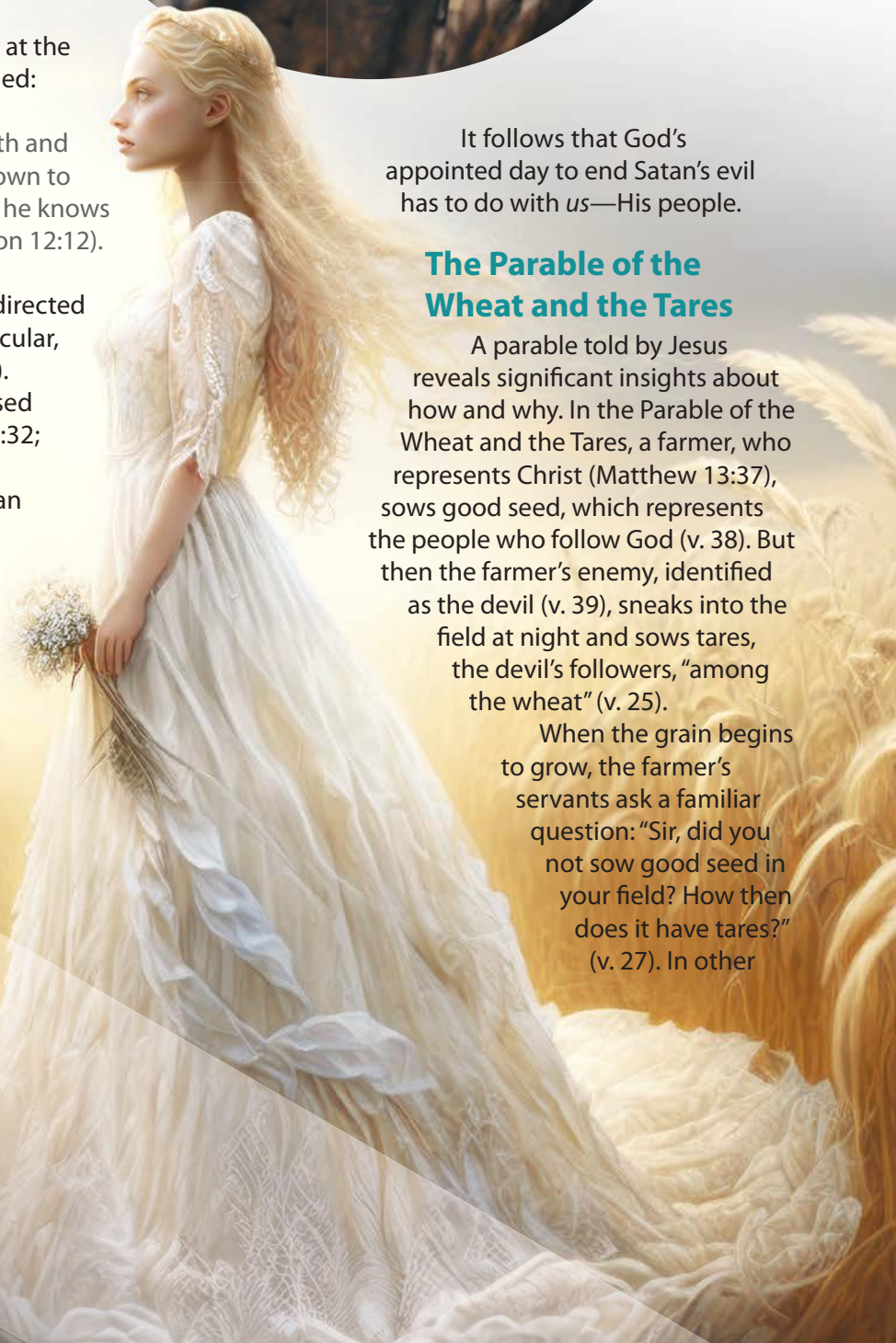



It follows that God’s appointed day to end Satan’s evil has to do with *us*—His people.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

A parable told by Jesus reveals significant insights about how and why. In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, a farmer, who represents Christ (Matthew 13:37), sows good seed, which represents the people who follow God (v. 38). But then the farmer’s enemy, identified as the devil (v. 39), sneaks into the field at night and sows tares, the devil’s followers, “among the wheat” (v. 25).

When the grain begins to grow, the farmer’s servants ask a familiar question: “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?” (v. 27). In other





words, if God created a perfect world, why is there evil in it? The farmer's response reveals: "An enemy has done this" (v. 28). As we learned in Part 1, evil exists because of the "enemy," because of the devil—not God. Again, this is the issue of theodicy.

The farmer's servants then ask if they should pull up the tares; that is, they want an immediate removal of evil. But the farmer prevents this—just as God has delayed the destruction of sin. "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them" (v. 29). This is the reason why God hasn't put a final end to sin yet: It's because of the people.

The farmer continues, "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (v. 30). The farmer appoints a time in the future to judge which crops are wheat and which are tares. The appointed time, "the time of harvest," Jesus denoted as "the end of the world" (v. 39 KJV). This parable is talking about the very time God has set to "judge the world" (Acts 17:31), the time when He will end evil.

The Second Coming

Christ further explained:

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness (Matthew 13:40, 41).

This day of judgment is the Second Coming. Christ said to His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

"And they [all the tribes of the earth] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather

together His elect from ... one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30, 31).

Christ furthermore explained, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). All human beings "will be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12), which is the Ten Commandments (v. 11).

The parable confirms this. First, look at those who are branded as tares: They are identified as "those who practice lawlessness," the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4 KJV). Second, those separated as wheat are called "the righteous" (Matthew 13:43). We have learned that to be righteous means to be innocent before the law.

The parable is illustrating the standard of the judgment. A righteous person is forming a character like Christ's. Conversely, a person who follows the devil's lawlessness is forming a character like his. Therefore, the final judgment of humanity at the end of the world is based on an individual's character. Your identity, whether wheat or tare, is determined by your character.

A person recreated in the character of Jesus receives one reward; a person who has the character



Through Christ,
you have the opportunity
to be changed from a
weed into wheat.

of Satan receives another. Christ brings only two rewards at His return. The reward for the wheat, those with Christ's character, is being gathered into the barn. They will live forever "in the kingdom of their Father" (Mark 13:43), which is ruled by the law of love. Incidentally, in Revelation 22:12, "reward," *misthos* in the original Greek, can also be "wages." The reward for the tares, those who have the devil's character, is "the wages of sin" (Romans 6:23)—punishment and destruction in "the furnace of fire," that is, hellfire (Matthew 13:42).

A Time of Probation

What precedes judgment in a court of law?

The devil and his angels aren't the only ones who are on trial; sinful people are also. Humans are being judged either innocent or guilty. We have all been breakers of God's law. In other words, we have earned death as our "reward."

But Christ's sacrifice mercifully bought us a trial period to determine whether we can be fully reintegrated into the holy society of God's universe, or whether we will pay retribution for what we've done. In short, our life on Earth is our **probation**, given by God so that we can make a free-will choice between Him and Satan. It is that choice that ultimately determines our own judgment and the sentence we receive at the end of the world, whether eternal life or eternal death.

At the cross, the devil's lies were fully exposed to the watching unfallen universe—but not to us. We are the only creatures still overtaken by his deceptions (Revelation 12:9). God is waiting on us to choose.

Our probation is the reason Satan's wrath is trained on us. God's love for us is why he was defeated; Christ's sacrifice resulted in the certainty of his downfall. The defeated devil hates Christ. In what way could he cause Christ the most pain now? The devil knows that harassing those Christ loves would be as if to "crucify again ... the Son of God" (Hebrews 6:6). If you don't choose salvation,

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STORIES OF THE CONTROVERSY: The Temptations of Christ

Tales of the Cosmic Conflict

In this magazine, we've included several stories from the Bible that illustrate the cosmic conflict in action. A real war is being waged, intersecting the supernatural and the human realm. These stories offer glimpses into this battle and reveal the true characters of Christ and Satan.

One of the most intense battles of the great controversy is found in the Gospel accounts:

Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry (Luke 4:1, 2).

The stakes had never been higher in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Jesus had come "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3) onto Satan's home field. Satan now had the opportunity to convince Christ to sin—to break His own law.

When the Messiah was exhausted and starving, the devil tempted Him to sin three times. First, he questioned Jesus' divinity and told Him to use His divine power to satisfy His hunger: "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Second, he placed Jesus on Jerusalem's temple and taunted Him to misapply a promise in Psalm 91: "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up'" (v. 6). Third, he showed Jesus all the world's kingdoms and implied that they could be

His without going to the cross: "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me" (v. 9).

Remember what happened in Eden? When tempting Jesus, the devil used the same cunning deceptions that he did with Eve. Seeking to instill doubt, Satan twisted God's Word and attempted to provoke selfish desire. He dared Christ to serve Himself. But by the third temptation, Satan's motive was fully exposed: He was seeking to receive worship as a god.

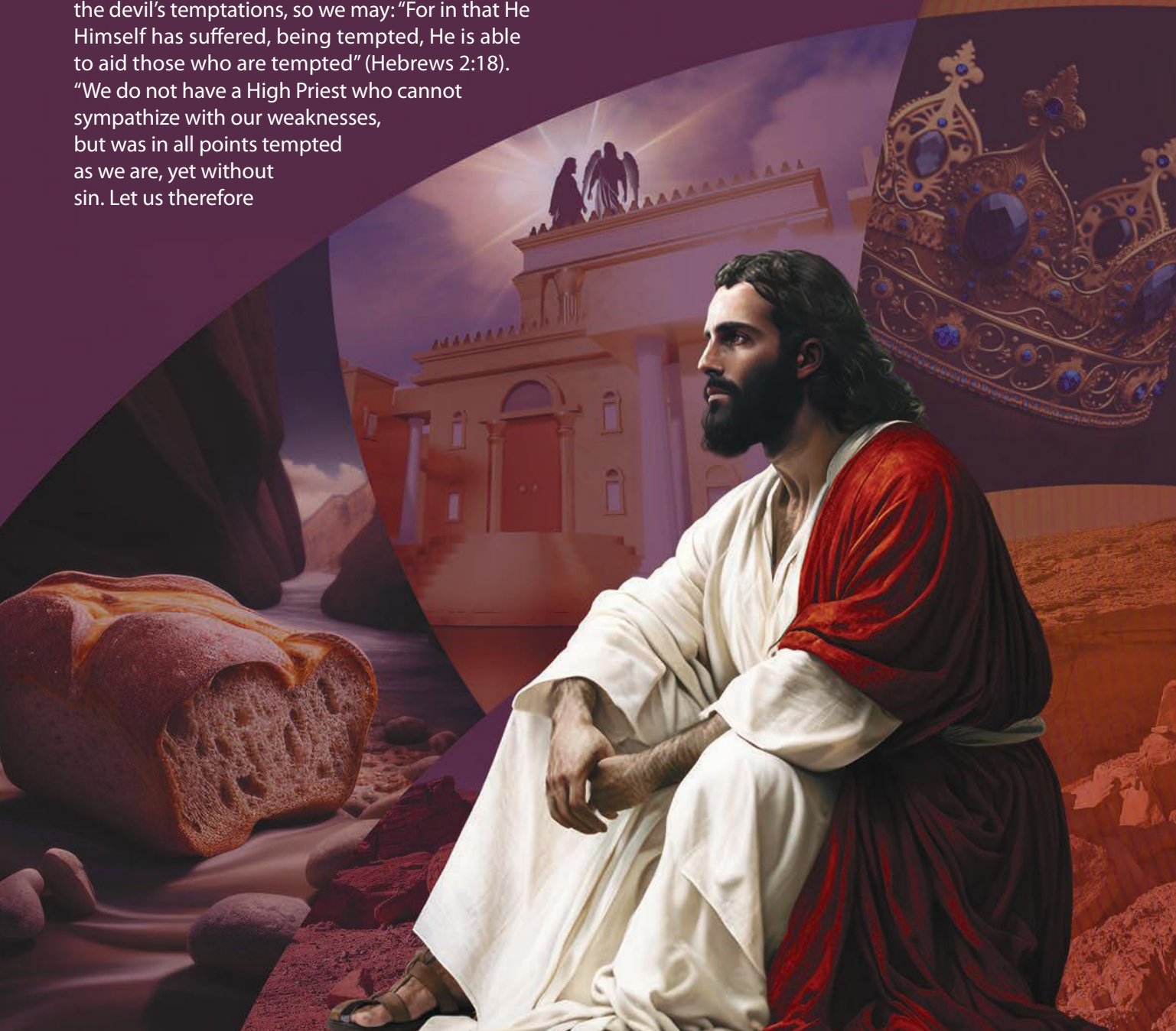
If Christ had succumbed to these temptations, it would have been out of selfish motives, out of pride. He would have sinned; all would have been lost for the human race.

But Christ did not succumb. Instead, He resisted all three temptations by quoting Scripture, wielding "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). To Satan's first attack, Christ answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). To the second, Christ said, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'" (v. 7). And to the last, Christ commanded, "Away with you, Satan! For it

is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve" (v. 10). The Bible says that "then the devil left Him" (v. 11).

This is a powerful example of how we are to live our lives! "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Just as Christ overcame the devil's temptations, so we may: "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore

come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:15, 16). We can walk the path of salvation because Christ did not yield to the devil, but submitted to the Word of God, in the wilderness.



Continued from page 37.

then the Savior's suffering and death were made of no effect for you. That's why the devil is working overtime—to make sure your probation on Earth ends in destruction.

Full Maturity

Let's look deeper into the meaning behind "the time of harvest" (Matthew 13:30). Every farmer knows there is an ideal time to harvest crops: when those crops have fully matured, completing the process of development—when they are at their best quality. The farmer must carefully watch because the timing is critical.

Let's apply this to what the wheat in the parable represents: God's people. "You [are] ... eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm [guarantee] you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7, 8). "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23), "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present

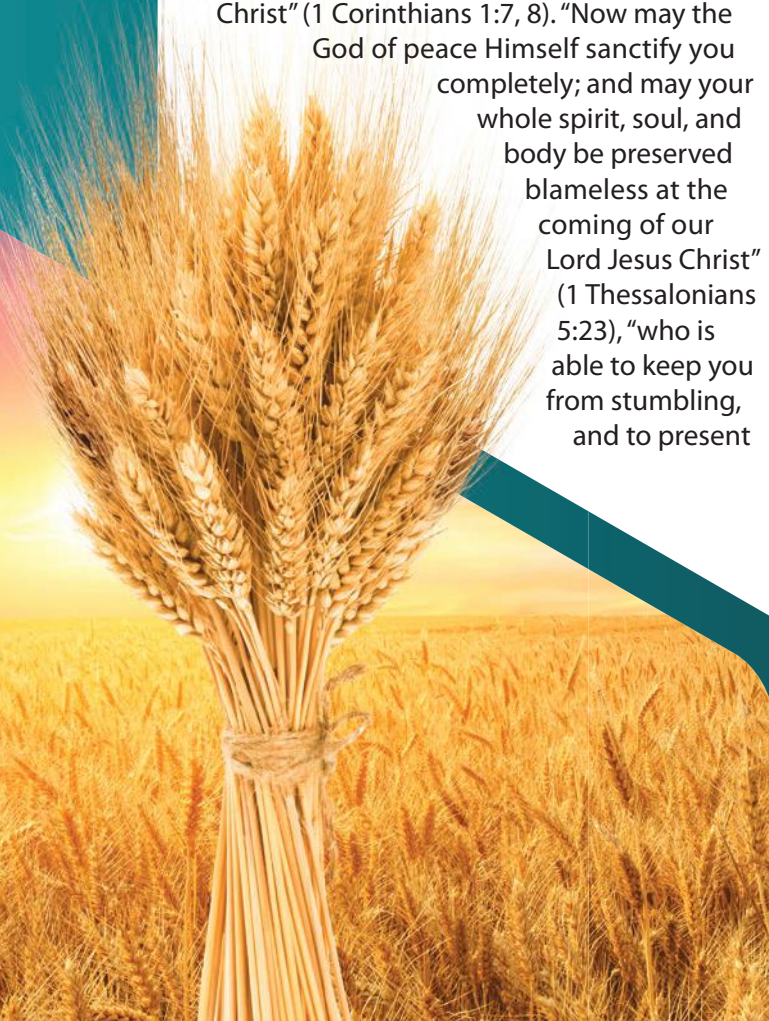
you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24). The Bible is urging all believers to an ultimate objective: to be "blameless," to be "faultless." To be blameless is to be innocent; to be faultless is to be righteous.

The Bible states that when Christ returns, there will be a group of people living at that time who will have reached full maturity. They are described as being "redeemed from the earth" (Revelation 14:3) and "from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (v. 4). The firstfruits of a harvest are those first ready to be picked.

The Firstfruits of the Harvest

This class of people is also represented as "virgins." In the Bible, a virgin woman represents a church faithful to God (2 Corinthians 11:2). It means that this group is wholly consecrated to God. "These are the ones who follow the Lamb *wherever* He goes" (Revelation 14:4, emphasis added). "In their mouth was found no deceit" (v. 5). This group is completely truthful, as they have dwelling within them "the Spirit of truth," the Holy Spirit, who "[guides them] into all truth" (John 16:13). And lastly, "they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:5); that is, they are "faultless" (Jude 24)—*righteous*. There is no deviation from their love of God. They are fully submitted to Him.

This group is portrayed as "having [the] Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). "Name" in the Bible is often a symbol for one's character. (See Genesis 25:26; Exodus 34:5–7.) The forehead in the Bible is synonymous with the mind, a word that is interchangeable with the heart. "Says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33; see also Deuteronomy 11:18). Indeed, this verse describes the working of the Holy Spirit as He transforms your character into that of Christ's, for "he who keeps His commandments abides in Him. ... And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24).





In describing a prophecy that will occur “before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31), God declared, “I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (v. 29). At the end of the world, the Holy Spirit will complete writing the law, God’s character, upon the hearts of all those who have chosen to receive Him.

These firstfruits, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will be 100 percent law-abiding citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

The Tares

Notice, though, that the wheat are not the only ones to mature by harvest time: “Let *both* grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:30, emphasis added). The tares ripen as well.

The Bible foretells a growing persecution of God’s people at the end of time (24:9–13). The book of Revelation explains this in detail. It prophesies that just before the Second Coming, the devil will lead church and state to enforce a system of false worship, resulting in just two groups in the world—those who follow the law of God and those who follow the manmade law of the beast, the devil’s primary end-time power (Revelation 13). Does this sound familiar? It is another way to describe the wheat and the tares.

God’s people will then be persecuted by the beast power (16:13, 14; 17:13, 14). This intense

end-time warfare mirrors the great battle at the cross: As Satan persecuted Christ on Calvary without cause, so will he do to God’s innocent people. They are targeted simply because of who they are: keepers of the law of God. And in the devil’s government, that means they are worthy of death:

“The image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (13:15).

Those formed in the devil’s image and operating by the devil’s lawlessness are striving to the devil’s same end—to murder the innocent. Nothing has changed; evil at its full maturity always results in the destruction of all that God stands for.



Sin, if left unimpeded, would eventually destroy the rest of the universe.

Safe to Save

What must the unfallen inhabitants of the universe be thinking about the human race, the ones who brutally crucified their Creator? Through Christ, that very same humanity can now be counted among these unfallen worlds as citizens of God’s kingdom (Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:16).

Yet, so many of us throughout history have disregarded the Savior. Are the unfallen worlds awaiting us with open arms—or do they think we are still a liability?

Weeds, like the poisonous bearded darnel, look exactly like wheat when they first sprout. The young

shoots are impossible to tell apart—but once the darnel is fully matured, its seeds turn black.

How will those unfallen worlds be certain that those of us professing to follow Christ aren't actually bearded darnel in disguise, carrying the seed of sin within us and one day falling into sin again, endangering the entire universe anew? How can they know for certain that human beings are safe to save? How can they tell the wheat from the tares?



The firstfruits, that end-time group of people, will be proof to the entire universe that God can take a human being trapped in the deepest dungeon of sin and recreate him in the perfect image of Jesus: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:16, 17). The firstfruits are the evidence that human beings in Christ are safe to save.

Christ prophesied,

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

The original Greek word translated as "witness" is *marturion*. It means "testimony," "evidence," "proof." Thus, the gospel will go forth as proof to the entire world just before the Second Coming. At its most basic, the gospel is the good news that you are saved by Jesus: "The gospel ... is the power of God to salvation. ... For in

it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:16, 17). A person made righteous by God is a walking gospel!

Think about this future day: The everlasting gospel will have been proclaimed to the farthest ends of the globe. Every person living will have witnessed the true character of Christ as displayed in His people and will have had the opportunity to choose salvation through Christ. The tares, those who cling to the devil's government of sin, will be without excuse. Their rejection of Christ's invitation to eternal life will condemn them, not only in the judgment but in the eyes of the onlooking universe. It will be revealed to all that the tares are the real threat to the universe—not God, not His law, not His people.

God, in His infinite wisdom, appointed this very day for the harvest to secure our salvation forever, so that the wheat would not be uprooted with the tares. God's mission is to save, preserve, and redeem: "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:56). God is not a careless, distant, or unsympathetic Creator; He is far from having forgotten your suffering. On the contrary, "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Peter 3:15).

Satan and the Law

Have you heard that the law of God doesn't matter anymore? Have you been taught that the Ten Commandments were done away with at the cross? Do you consider obedience legalism? Do you think that you will be saved *in your sins*?

This neglect of the law is no coincidence. The last verse of Revelation 12 reveals the devil's focus as the end of the world nears: "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*" (v. 17, emphasis added).

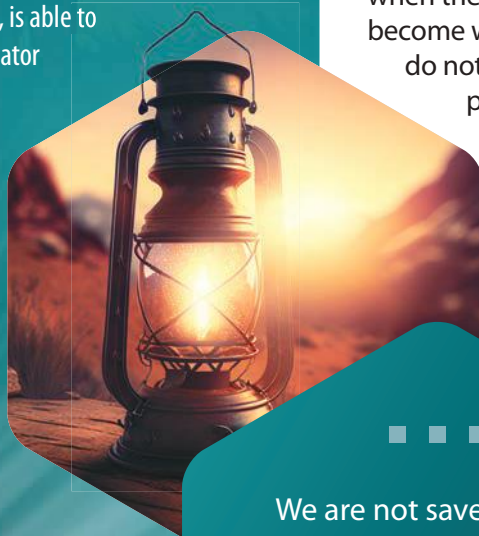
Does this mean that the only people who will be saved are those who have *completely* overcome sin in their lifetime?

No, the term “firstfruits” implies that there are other fruits.

The Bible teaches that God judges us according to the knowledge of Him that we attain in our lifetime: “To him who *knows* to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17, emphasis added); those who teach the things of God, like religious leaders, “shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). In one of His parables, Jesus said a “servant who *knew* his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did *not know*, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few” (Luke 12:47, 48, emphasis added). You’re judged based on the amount of light you had in life.

Furthermore, humanity, simply by living in and observing the natural world, is able to discern something about the Creator God (Romans 1:19, 20). Even unbelievers “by nature do the things in the law” (2:14) and “show the work of the law written in their hearts” (v. 15). Even they have an amount of knowledge to show “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (v. 16).

“God is a just judge” (Psalm 7:11). There are those who have gone to the grave who had lived up to all the light given them, and who would, when shown all the light there is to know, continue to live up to it all. One thing is certain: At the end of the world, there will be no sin found among any of the saved. “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). All, whether having died before or still alive at the Second Coming, will be law-abiding citizens of God’s kingdom.



We are not saved by our good works; however, when we are saved by grace, our lives will produce the fruit of good works (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Matthew 7:20).



The devil’s primary target at the end of time is the law of God and all those who are determined to keep it.

He has perpetrated lies to deceive millions, well-meaning Christians included. By his insidious deception that God has abolished His law, Satan has gotten people to believe that they are saved when they are really lost: “You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

If the devil can get you to discard the law of God, in whatever way possible, then you will actually be following his government instead. You will actually be choosing Satan over God—and you will get the same sentence as Satan in the judgment. The devil knows exactly what he is doing.

Why would the devil be so fixated on accusing us of our sins if God’s law had been made null and void? Is this not the very law by which the universe is governed, from the beginning of time and for all eternity? Is this law not a focal point of the cosmic conflict? Don’t be deceived. The devil is doing his utmost to keep God from recreating a perfectly law-abiding people—because when God does, the devil will have lost his case against humanity in the courts above.

STORIES OF THE CONTROVERSY:

Plucked from the Fire

After forsaking God, the tribe of Judah was taken into captivity by the nation of Babylon (Jeremiah 52:27–30). But the Lord had not forgotten His people. He prophesied that after 70 years, the Jews, now under the rule of Persia, would return to their homeland to rebuild their temple and reestablish the true worship of God. And just as God foretold, it came to pass (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23).

But the devil saw in this an occasion to attack. This battle is revealed in a vision given to the prophet Zechariah:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him (Zechariah 3:1).

Joshua was the first high priest after the Babylonian captivity. He had returned with other Jewish leaders to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 2:1, 2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1–8). In Zechariah’s vision, he stood before “the Angel of the LORD,” who is identified in the next verse as “the LORD” (Zechariah 3:2)—that is, Jesus. As high priest, Joshua stood as a representative of God’s people. In particular, the high priest served as an intercessor between God and the people, “to make propitiation [pardon] for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17). The high priest symbolized the true High Priest, Jesus (6:20), who “is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2).

Interestingly, the original Hebrew word translated as “oppose” in Zechariah 3:1 is *satan*, which means “the adversary”; it comes from the

root word “to accuse.” Revelation 12:10 describes Satan as “the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night.” Accusations are typically presented in a court of law. This cosmic conflict is being fought out not only through our earthly lives but in the highest courtroom in the universe—and it’s being fought over the law of God.

While Joshua was pleading for forgiveness for the people’s sins that had landed them in Babylon, Satan was magnifying those sins. He was attempting to prevent their pardon. Notice that Satan was speaking truth: Jerusalem had rebelled against God.

But look at Christ’s response: “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zechariah 3:2).

The Scriptures then record how Jesus commanded that Joshua, who “was clothed with filthy garments” (v. 3), should be given clean clothes to wear: “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes” (v. 4). The “filthy garments” represent the “iniquity,” or sins, of Joshua and the people. (See also Psalm 51:3–7; Isaiah 64:6.)

“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). Christ covered His people in clean robes because Joshua came in sincere, voluntary confession. Christ was able to pluck a people designated for the fire of destruction and give them another opportunity on the path of salvation.

The cosmic conflict is on full display here! While Satan is doing his utmost to pin our sins to us and thereby ensure our eternal death, Christ is doing His utmost to save us from those sins and give us the gift of eternal life. Satan is our adversary; God is our Savior.

Notice how this battle over Joshua hinged on choice. The people needed to call on the Lord. They needed to want to repent and be saved. It was when Joshua acted upon the decision to intercede that Satan was provoked to accuse the people. So don't be surprised or discouraged if Satan attacks you right when you have

decided to go to the Lord. You can claim the promise that when you cry out to God in confession and repentance, and Satan stands up against you to accuse you of all your sins, you have a Savior who will pluck you like a brand from the fire.



STORIES OF THE CONTROVERSY: Yet Will I Trust Him

IN one of the oldest books of the Bible, we are shown some of the rules of engagement in the cosmic conflict. The first chapter of Job recounts a meeting with God and “the sons of God” (v. 6). Interestingly, the Bible also calls Adam “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), as he was formed by God (Genesis 2:7). Many Bible scholars believe that these “sons of God,” therefore, are representatives from other worlds, other intelligent beings whom God created.

But there was someone else there too—Satan.

God addressed Satan, asking, “From where do you come?” (Job 1:7).

Satan replied, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it”—just as he once “walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones” (Ezekiel 28:14) in God’s heavenly throne room. The devil was proclaiming Earth as his domain.

God responded by pointing out Job, a citizen of Earth who stood against Satan by being faithful to God (Job 1:8). Satan, however, repeated the same allegation he had made in heaven and in Eden:

Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? ... But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face! (vv. 9–11).

Here, Satan was claiming that God wasn’t telling the truth: Job wasn’t abiding by God’s law of love; that is, Job did not love God supremely but cared only for his riches, his comfort, himself. The devil was again casting doubt upon God’s character—and Job’s.


As a result, God gave Satan leave, within certain limits, to prove his claim (v. 12), which Satan did by stealing and destroying Job’s property and killing his children and servants (vv. 13–19). Notice that it was Satan who lied, for it was he, not God, who “[stretched] out [his] hand” against Job.

When Job refused to turn from God (vv. 20–22), Satan pressed his claim further, blaming the limitations God had set (2:4, 5). God then gave Satan leave again, removing all His protection from His loyal servant except for a single restriction: Satan must “spare his life” (v. 6).

Consequently, Satan “struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (v. 7). Still, amid all his suffering, Job remained faithful (v. 10). Again, Satan was the one causing pain, disease, havoc, and death—while God was the One preserving life.

While Job was utterly confused and frustrated by his suffering, he never forsook God: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (13:15). Job loved God unconditionally. Thus, Satan was proven wrong and God right. Ultimately, God restored to Job what he had lost—and then some—blessing him with more children and property (42:12–16). God saves *and* restores what Satan destroys!

This is a story of theodicy: Is God evil because He permits evil? People often have difficulty with that question when studying the book of Job because of what God permitted. But let’s examine further the character of Job: “There [was] none like him on

A composite image featuring a man in a dark hood looking upwards against a cosmic background of galaxies and planets. The man's face is in profile, looking towards the upper left. The background is a vibrant space scene with a large orange and red galaxy, a blue planet, and a bright star with a lens flare. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, purples, and oranges.

the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who [feared] God and [shunned] evil" (1:8). Job freely chose to live under God's government of love. Job trusted that God loved him with an *agape* love, which meant that, consequently, God would always do what was best for him. And what God did was to save Job's life—and undoubtedly, Job's eternal life. God is not evil; His primary concern is for your salvation.

But God did even more. Remember who was observing this exchange between God and Satan—"the sons of God," the rest of the

universe. They now saw further evidence that God was right and Satan was wrong. The suffering of Job further justified God's ultimate objective: the eradication of sin from the universe and the vindication of God by the unfallen angels and worlds.

PART 6

THE END OF EVIL—

The Last Judgment



AN AMAZING FACT

In 1994, several members of a jury in the United Kingdom secretly consulted a Ouija board to decide the verdict of a man suspected of double homicide. A month after the case was decided, another juror informed the court of what had happened, triggering a retrial.

The conduct of the jury turned an already gruesome case infamous, but not even that trial can compare to the injustice that will be endured by believers in the last days.

When the character of Christ is demonstrated fully in God's last-day people, the devil's fury will erupt; God's people will be sentenced to death by the beast power (Revelation 13:15).

But before they are executed, Jesus will return (19:11–19). The trial of humanity will have been decided. The harvest time will have come; the tares will be separated from the wheat.

"With the breath of His lips He [Christ] shall slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4). "And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse" (Revelation 19:21). "At that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth" (Jeremiah 25:33).

But to the wheat, Jesus brings life, delivering His faithful subjects from all ages of the world. First Thessalonians 4:16, 17 tells us, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

First Corinthians 15:52 adds, "For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Earthly bodies, wracked with the effects of sin, will "be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. ... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (vv. 51–53).

This description is key. At the Second Coming, it is only the individual's physical body that is changed in an instant; character is not. It's already been set, either as wheat or tare: "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 22:11). "The day of Jesus Christ," the Second Coming, is the finish line; by then, God's people will have been sealed by the Holy Spirit (Philippians 1:6). God knows from that point that a righteous person will never become unrighteous and an unrighteous person will never become righteous.

Thus will the fate of every human being who has ever lived be decided: The tares from all ages will be dead on the earth; the wheat from all ages will ascend to heaven with their Savior, "and ... shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The Millennium

But the judgment is not over yet. The saved leave behind a planet devastated by sin (2 Peter 3:10). And as long as the devil is still alive, sin remains a threat. All the lost people will be dead, yes—but not the devil and his angels:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished (Revelation 20:1–3).

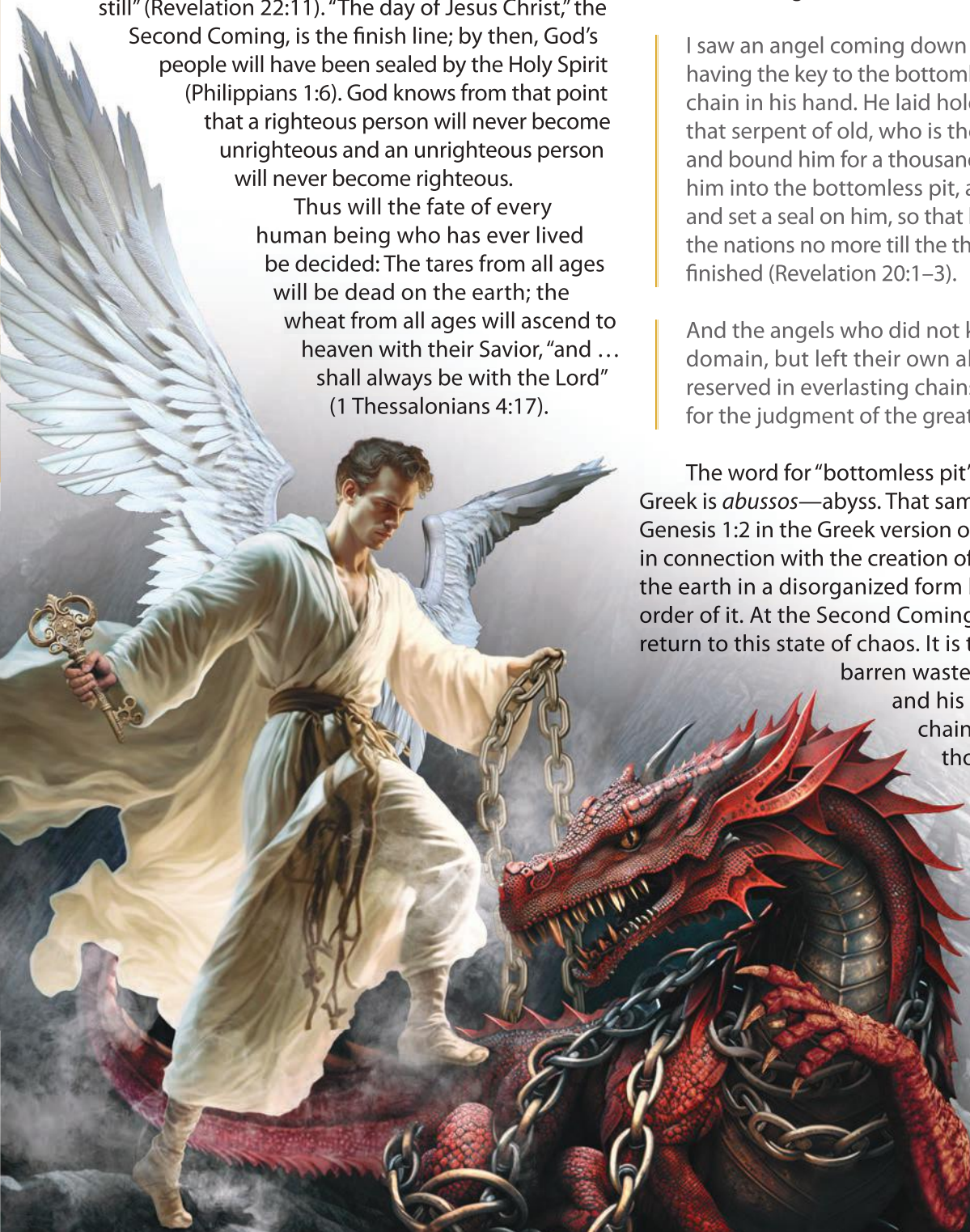
And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6).

The word for "bottomless pit" in the original Greek is *abussos*—abyss. That same word is used in Genesis 1:2 in the Greek version of the Old Testament in connection with the creation of the earth; that is, the earth in a disorganized form before God made order of it. At the Second Coming, the earth will return to this state of chaos. It is to this dark and

barren wasteland that Satan and his angels will be chained during the thousand years, called the millennium.

With no people for the devil to tempt, deceive, or manipulate, it will be a prison of circumstances.

As for the saved: "I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was



committed to them. ... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

During the millennium, the saved from all ages are with Christ in the holy city He has prepared for them. During this time, they will participate in a judgment. This judgment, however, is different from the manner in which God judges. The saved aren't judging who is saved or lost. The Greek word for "judge," *krinó*, can also mean "to decide," to form an opinion. The saved will be able to review the judgments of each of the lost, including the devil and his angels, and form their own free-will opinion on whether God judged justly or not. We have a God who, even in the midst of judgment, cares enough to give us a thousand years to come to our own conclusions.

The Third Coming

But the end is still not yet. Christ returns to the earth for a third time. It is upon the desolate planet that the final scene of this cosmic conflict takes place.

The new home for God's people, called "the holy city, New Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:2), will



descend from heaven, as do all the saved (Zechariah 14:5) and the unfallen angels (Matthew 25:31). Then, Christ gives life once more to all the lost (Revelation 20:5). And Satan, true to form, marshals them under his banner: He "will go out to deceive the nations ... of the earth ... to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea"

(v. 8). After being given a millennium with nothing to do but think over all that his rebellion has caused, Satan still does not repent. He's still driven by pride; a thousand years does not change his heart.

And who is the archdeceiver's target? The Bible foretells that the devil and his army of lost people "went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (v. 9). As he was at the Second Coming, so will Satan be at the end of the millennium: a rebel fixed upon destroying God's people. As they were in their lifetime, so the lost will be when brought from the grave: They will choose Satan and his government of sin over God and His government of love.

This last battle in the war to end all wars reveals all. Christ and His people are inside New Jerusalem. Satan, his angels, and his people are teeming on all sides, ready to take the city by force. And it will be



This battleground mirrors the battle just before the Second Coming, only this time, it's not just those alive at Jesus' return—it's the entire human race and every angel! The two groups, the saved and the lost, stand in stark opposition: God offers free will; Satan exercises coercion. God redeems through truth; Satan manipulates through deception. God aims to save, Satan to kill. This scene is the quintessential illustration of the cosmic conflict.



apparent to all that God has judged the character of everyone—every human from Adam onward to every fallen angel—correctly. None of the saved, even though their situation may appear hopeless, will doubt their Savior. None of the lost, even after being given the gift of life again and seeing the city, will defect from Satan’s side. To the last, all who love sin will always, unprovoked, wage war upon the God of love. Neither time nor circumstance—not even the love of God—will have succeeded in changing their character.

God on Trial

But our God of love goes one step further: “I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (v. 12).

The trial is already over, so why is God opening the books again? These are the same books that the saved looked through during the millennium. God gives each group, both the saved and the lost, the opportunity to understand His judgment. The records of “the dead,” the lost of all ages, are laid out in full transparency—every sinful deed unrepented, every rejection of conviction, every refusal of the Word of life. “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). “There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2; see also Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Then comes a thrilling sight. “All [standing] before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10) fall before the infinite, infallible Judge of the world: “Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (v. 11). “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to

the glory of God the Father”

(Philippians 2:10, 11).

All—even the lost, even the devil—admit that God’s judgment was not arbitrary or corrupt. They will concede that it was decided by a God who, in every possible way, worked to save them: “What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4). They will be speechless in their own defense; in the end, all will affirm that the Lord is “just and true” (Revelation 15:3).

Thus, the Bible has described the greatest acquittal in the history of the universe. We’ve learned that the devil was on trial; we’ve learned that the human race is on trial. But God Himself is also on trial.



From the start of this cosmic conflict, the devil has been accusing God—that He is a deceiver; that God’s law is unfair, untenable, and unloving. But finally, at the end of time, God will have disproven it all beyond any shadow of a doubt. The onlooking universe will see that all God has ever done—in heaven, in Eden, at the cross—is out of an unconditional, beneficent, self-sacrificial love for His

creation. Never again, throughout the endless ages, will there be any doubt that God is love.

The End of Evil, Forever

And that’s when God will put an end to this great controversy, when each individual has decided under which government he or she wants to live, when all have agreed that sin must be destroyed forever, when eternal life has been

Continued on page 54.

STORIES OF THE CONTROVERSY: Battle Over a Dead Body

IN the book of Jude, we witness a peculiar supernatural battle—a dispute over a dead body. The departed was Moses, the well-known leader of God’s people. On one side of the dispute was Christ; on the other was Satan.

Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (v. 9).

Recall that Michael is another name for Jesus. As for the devil, he was once more thwarted by Christ, who, as He did in Zechariah 3:2, said, “The Lord rebuke you!” In the original Greek, the word translated as “contending” means passing judgment; the word translated as “disputed” is defined as discussing, arguing, or reasoning. In other words, we are once more looking at proceedings in the heavenly courtroom.

What is the dispute about? We know from Deuteronomy 34:5, 6, that Moses died and that God Himself buried him. We also know from Matthew 17:1–4 that Moses was eventually resurrected because he appeared to Jesus on Earth. This story in Jude indicates *how* Moses was brought back to life.

The dispute between Christ and Satan was over the life of a human being. From all that we’ve learned about this cosmic conflict, we can know that Satan, “the accuser,” was arguing for Moses to stay dead, while Christ, the Savior, was advocating for Moses to be brought back to life. We can also

conclude that Satan’s claim was like his other accusations—that Moses was a sinner and, thus, deserved death. The Bible recounts some of Moses’ sins in such passages as Exodus 2:11, 12, and Numbers 20:10–12.

But we also know that Christ won the battle over Moses’ body because Moses was indeed resurrected. The Scriptures show that even though Moses stumbled and “[fell] short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) in his lifetime, he also remained in faithful service to God until his death (Deuteronomy 34:5, 10). Indeed, Moses is included in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:24–28. We can therefore presume that Moses was saved from destruction by the grace of Christ through his faith (Ephesians 2:8).

Notice that this verse in Jude distinguishes the character of Christ from that of the devil: Jesus “dared not bring against him [Satan] a reviling accusation.” It is Satan—not Christ—who accuses. The verse describes what Christ does *not* do and what Satan *does* do. In the original Greek, “reviling accusation” means “slandering judgment.” He who slanders speaks falsehoods and misrepresentations. Satan slanders the character of God. Remember, it was Satan’s misrepresentation of God’s motives that prompted Eve to sin (Genesis 3:1–5).

Christ, on the other hand, never lies (Titus 1:2). He is the embodiment of “the truth” (John 14:6). While Satan was busy accusing Moses, Christ was working on behalf of His

faithful servant, advocating for his salvation—even after Moses had died!

If you are one of the faithful who will pass to your rest before Christ's return, you can rest in the assurance that, however much time passes, the Savior will not forget about you. Christ will hold safe the record of your salvation, "and [He] will raise [you] up at the last day" (John 6:40, 44, 54).

It is important to correctly understand the resurrection of Moses. As we've learned, the resurrection of the dead in Christ will occur at the Second Coming. The point in time at which

Christ resurrected Moses was, therefore, an exception. It was given to us as a powerful example, evidence of God's promise of eternal life to those who have already gone to the grave.



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guaranteed not only for the saved but for the entire universe. Then:

Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them [the wicked]. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. ... Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (20:9, 10, 14).

Among the wicked, each individual is punished according to what he or she has earned (Matthew 16:27; Luke 12:47, 48). The intensity and duration of suffering in the lake of fire will be matched to the words and actions of each individual during their probation. As the supreme instigator of all evil,

Satan will experience the longest and most intense suffering, but even he will ultimately be destroyed in the flames (Malachi 4:1).

“The lake of fire” is more commonly known as hellfire, the means by which all evil is incinerated (Revelation 20:14).

The Bible calls the destruction of sin and all who love sin God’s “unusual act” (Isaiah 28:21). But this destructive act demonstrates a principle that He holds in utmost value: Though it pains Him deeply, though it goes against His own desire, He will always honor the choice you have made. Violating your free will is a boundary that God will never cross.

God is also a Savior, and “the second death” is God’s ultimate deliverance of His creation. “The wicked ... shall be ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:3). At long last, Satan, that old serpent and dragon, will be “ashes upon the earth” and shall “never ... be any more” (Ezekiel 28:18, 19 KJV). “The second death” is the final destruction of evil—there will be no resurrection from it. “Affliction will not rise up a second time” (Nahum 1:9). “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). No rebellion; no temptation; no lies, slander, cheating, murder, stealing, war, injustice, hatred, abuse, sickness, or anything that sin ever caused will ever exist again.

Notice also that the hellfire eventually becomes “ashes.” Contrary to popular teachings, hellfire does not last for eternity; it goes out. And after it does, a glorious event takes place:

- “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17).
- “Look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).
- “He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Revelation 21:5).

Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” The death at the end of our lifetime is temporary, like a sleep (John 11:11–13). The second death is the actual “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). Ultimately, sin results in a death from which there is no resurrection.

God will recreate the earth as it was always meant to be: a sinless paradise. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (v. 3). Finally, God's people are fully-realized citizens of the kingdom of love. "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10).

Thus will the great cosmic conflict come to a close.

Your Choice

This cosmic conflict began with a lie, but it will end in truth. "For the word of God is ... sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Through the Bible, God has cut through the lies of the devil to reveal the truth. Satan says that sin looks good, feels good, tastes good, and *is* good for you. God says, "But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:36). The inverse is equally true: All those who *love* God *hate* death—they love life. And that's really what this cosmic conflict comes down to: Do you love God?

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

"As I live," says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

God is clear on what He wants. He does not want you to die; He wants you to live. God loves you. He wants you to choose, of your own free will, to love Him. That's what it means to have the law



of God written upon our hearts. It means that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). It means that "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). It means that "we love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Sin is death; but the love of God, *agape*, is life. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life" (Revelation 22:14).

The God of love is leaving the choice to you. Embracing Jesus as your Lord and His sacrifice for your sins is the only way to escape the power, penalty, and presence of sin. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

So, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), whether to love or to hate, whether to live or to die. You have all the truth to make that choice today. Today, the Truth, Jesus, can set you free! (John 8:32). ■

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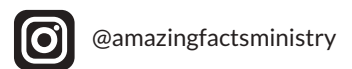
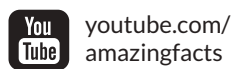
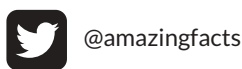
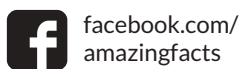
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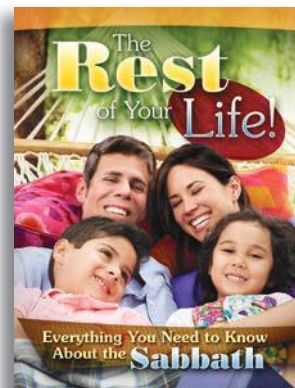
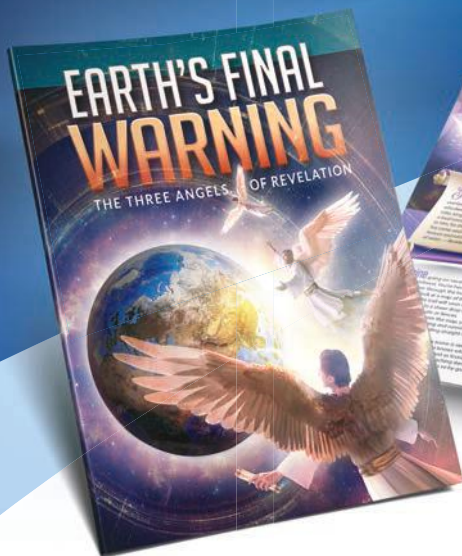
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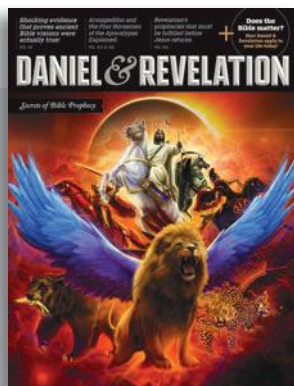
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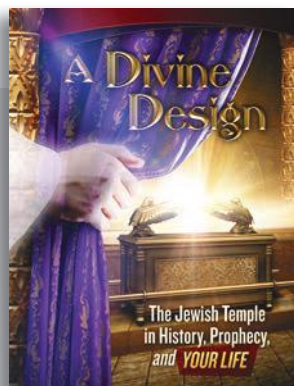
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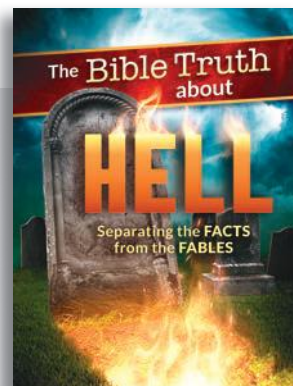
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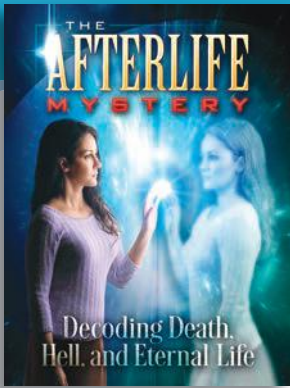


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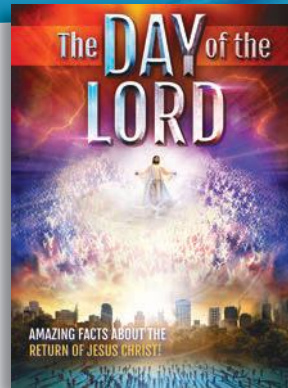
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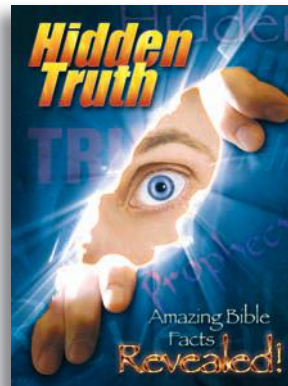
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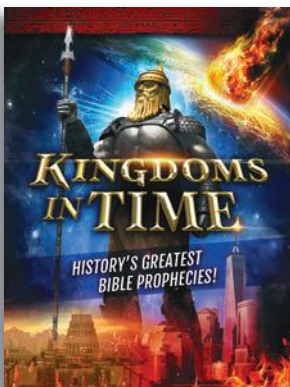
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