Savior’s Day

By
Ron Schwartz

© 2003 by Ron Schwartz, All rights reserved.

Cover design by Servant Publishing.

First Published March 2006

ISBN

978-1-4116-8465-2

All fonts are Time New Roman using font sizes 10, 11, 12, 18, and 48.

Please feel free to contact Ron Schwartz by Email:

kmsrjs@triton.net

To contact Servant Publishing, feel free to Email:

SlimDuck@OnlyInternet.Net

Servant Publishing

P.O. Box 53

Markle, Indiana 46770-0053

For my wife, Karen

Her enduring love and endless encouragement have been my continuous source of inspiration. She has been my truest friend, my lifelong companion, and my compass through the storms of life. She has caused me to realize how remarkable is the truth found in Proverbs 18:22, "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD*." I have never met another who has demonstrated such love, sincerity, devotion, purity, and trust. She is and always will be the golden frame around the picture of my life.

Foreword

The purpose of this novel is to encourage and challenge all who love God. It is not the author's intention to use this novel to establish doctrine, and effort was taken to avoid controversial issues. The story you are about to read is a fictionalized account of the Scripture. Since God, in all His infinite wisdom, has chosen to keep the true story from us, we can only wonder what really happened . . .

Introduction

"The demons of darkness, of which I speak, are so hideous that many beings fail to recognize just how intelligent they are. Their wings make an unmistakable flapping sound as they beat the air, like the steady methodical pulse of a snare drum drawing near. This, combined with the deep groans and snarls resonating from their throats, makes these hideous creatures sound as if they are tormented souls, forever cursed to the fires of hell."

"I have seen these creatures in almost every possible size. Their shapes vary, but each is unmistakable: fire-red in color, bat-winged, and hideous in every sense of the word. But the most conspicuous feature of these creatures is their indescribable, ear-piercing screams. Resembling war cries, at least one always precedes their appearance. I have come to know it all too well."

"Sometimes they come alone, sometimes in groups of four or more, but be not mistaken, they will always come. Sometimes they fight viciously amongst themselves like wild dogs fighting for the last morsel of a carcass. Their animal-like instincts cause them to behave as if they have been maddened by the scent of blood. But their anger is self-perpetuating, and nothing in this world can give them peace. It is as if these creatures are destined only to live out their miserable existence in a meaningless rage. They are birthed from the loins of hell, and there ultimately will they return."

"Each night they come and always without any warning. Inasmuch, I must always be ready and on my guard, for I never know from where or at what time

these creatures will strike. While everyone else is asleep, I wait with my sword in hand. I am commanded to stand here, and so here I will stand, beside this little boy's bed. His name is David ... and I am his angel."

Guardian Angel Tarmont, 1991

Prologue

The Enlightenment

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. How that they told you there should be mockers (imitators) in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit (Jude 6: 18-19)."

To the best of my knowledge, he was known only as the Magician. I met him during my stroll down Vine Street while attending a conference in Los Angeles. At the time, I was still a preacher at a small Baptist church in Arkansas. I was raised on a country farm, so my tour of the inner city was most enlightening. The suburbs seemed to run on forever, and the traffic was as thick as molasses on a cool autumn morning. Nothing, however, could have prepared me for what happened that day.

At first glance, there didn't seem to be anything unusual about the Magician. He appeared to be doing some simple card tricks, entertaining a small crowd of pedestrians. If not for the cards in his hand, I certainly wouldn't have guessed he was an entertainer. He wore faded blue jeans, a T-shirt, and some old tennis shoes. The military-style haircut, youthful face, and dark eyes made him look like he was probably in his twenties.

I believe, however, that it was the faces of the people gathered around him that first drew my

attention. They were more than just entertained. They were amazed. No, they were scared. I was about to pass by, but something in their faces caused me to slow to see what was happening.

"Okay, tell me which card you signed your name to and are holding in your hand," the Magician said to the young man standing before him.

"The three of diamonds."

"I'm confused," the Magician replied. "Why are you holding an unsigned ten of clubs?"

The young man turned the card over in his hand and then dropped it as if it had burned his hand. He gaped wide-eyed at the Magician, apparently unable to speak.

The Magician held out his open hand. "I want my three of diamonds back."

"I-I-I d-d-don't have it."

"Yes, you do. It's in your wallet."

The young man slowly removed his wallet and opened it up while the Magician casually looked on. He searched through his money, then, as though handling a bomb, gingerly unsnapped the part that held photos.

Suddenly, he dropped his wallet. There, in the first window for everyone to see, was the three of diamonds with his signature on it.

It was just slight-of-hand, I told myself as I continued on past the group. Then I heard a voice that sent chills down my spine. An unearthly voice, unlike anything I had ever heard before, nor will I ever forget.

"You have no stomach for my magic, little man?"

The voice was deep and raspy, almost mechanical. It was like listening to the sound of a multitude talking in unison.

I wheeled about only to be met by a sight that made my legs weak and my bones shake. I lost my strength and dropped to my knees, while I vainly attempted to catch my breath. Even though my mouth formed the words to shout warnings, no sound came from my lips. I was totally and uncontrollably gripped with fear.

Only a short distance away, towering over the Magician was a hideous monster of enormous size and power. It appeared to be part reptile and part human. Smooth, red, scaly skin covered its entire body, right down to its long serpent's tail that thrashed about. Standing nearly three stories tall, it had immense bat-like wings outstretched, spanning both sides of the street. Moreover, the crowd gathered was completely oblivious to the impending danger.

My fear and panic were indescribable. Aside from this monstrous creature, I was aware of nothing else except the trembling which overcame me.

"I've one last magic trick. I'll focus my energies to make myself levitate."

Unable to move, I knelt only a few feet away and watched in disbelief. I was completely helpless to warn anybody of what was really happening. The monster shifted back and forth and growled as it beat its chest. It seemed tormented and impatient. Finally, as the Magician lifted his arms, the monster reached down with massive talons extended and effortlessly lifted the Magician up, and then set him down again.

Some of the people ran, terrified. Some cowered, screaming. I just knelt there, still frozen in fear.

The creature leaned down over the Magician until its massive face was only a couple of feet away from mine. I could make out every detail of that repulsive gargoyle face. Its large broken nose and

well-pronounced chin gave it a most threatening smile. Two large horns protruded out of the forehead and extended slightly upward. Even at this distance, I could feel its hot breath blasting my face.

It examined me closely with its glowing red eyes. Then it abruptly straightened and roared. What was it that kept it from killing me? Why did it suddenly back away?

It was then that I became aware of the fact that I was not alone. Other beings were standing near me. They were about eight or nine feet tall and looked almost human. They wore bright white robes and some carried swords at their sides. Without giving it much thought, I knew what they had to be.

There were angels all around me.

One of the angels moved to stand directly in front of me. He reached out to take my hand. My fear was gone instantly, and I found myself on my feet again.

"I have come to help you understand the evil that is come to your land in these last days."

And that's how it all began.

Who am I? My name is Paul Barnes, and this is the story of my experience. Every word of this account is true, regardless of how impossible it may sound.

It began long ago, before the creation of this world, before heaven became divided. It was a time when all that was of the universe was the Kingdom of God…

1

The Fall

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth... (Revelation 12:3-4)."

Michael moved swiftly away from the Throne Room of the Almighty, his brilliant white linen gown flowing from his neck down to his feet. Once in the outer hall, he lifted his two great wings and darted away like a lightning streak across the sky. He landed at the outer gate near the place where Joatham stood guard. Joatham was one of Michael's closest lieutenants and a fellow member of the Guild of the Sword.

Michael commanded the Guild of the Sword and had given its name to describe the portion of the heavenly host under his command. He was one of the Lord's three archangels, a specially created angel who was entrusted with a particular anointing. This anointing gave Michael intelligence that allowed him to serve as Counselor to the Almighty. The Lord referred to his three archangels as His Witnesses, or Anointed Ones.

Each archangel had a specific duty to perform. Michael was an archangel of incredible strength and a warrior's heart. He was given command over the Armies of God, and it was his charge to guard the

Lord's dominion. This mighty archangel wielded a single broad sword that he kept in a golden sheath until such time as needed.

Michael approached Joatham and lifted his mighty wings. "Come with me. Lucifer has once again missed his appointed time with the Almighty. This time, the Almighty has sent us to bring him in."

"Do you know where he is?"

"You have to ask? Probably at his amphitheater bragging of his beauty once again."

Joatham checked his sword, and then flew upward after Michael. Both of them had been expecting this. Lucifer, as of late, had been acting very strangely. Although he had become increasingly arrogant, he now seemed completely preoccupied with himself, missing more and more of his scheduled symphonies for the Lord.

And now it had come to this.

Since time and distance have no measure -- no real meaning in the dominion of the Lord -- it would be impossible to explain the duration of Michael and Joatham's trip. Suffice it to say that they landed near Lucifer's amphitheater, the place provided by the Almighty for Lucifer and his angels to meet regularly for practice.

"...I say we don't belong here!" Lucifer's voice boomed throughout the amphitheater. As Michael stepped into the amphitheater, Lucifer stopped, his eyes narrowing.

"Look around at each other," he demanded, his eyes never leaving Michael.

If Michael felt any fear, he disguised it well. He strode confidently down the center aisle up to the raised platform. The amphitheater's transparent crystalline structure sparkled, reflecting the Glory of the Almighty on every side.

"Consider our beauty, our music! We are special beings! We are not destined for servitude as others that have no comeliness!" Again, Lucifer stared directly at Michael, but Michael seemed unmoved.

"The Almighty desires our presence around Him continuously, for even He is incapable of the melodies we weave!"

At last, Michael stepped onto the stage. A single glare from his piercing eyes sent the nearby angels scattering in all directions. No one wanted to be on the wrong side of Michael's sword.

Even though Michael had faced Lucifer countless times before, he never ceased to be awestruck at Lucifer's beauty. Like Michael, he was an archangel. But Lucifer had his own special anointing from God: he was the Captain of Lord's Symphonic Orchestra.

Lucifer's spectacular garment flowed from one brilliant color into another and glittered with a myriad of precious stones. A variety of wondrous instruments were fastened to it: horns, bells, cymbals, drums, and numerous stringed instruments. As he moved, the most exquisite melodies followed him. He was truly worthy of admiration. His angels were likewise adorned with beautiful garments and wondrous instruments.

But Michael threw off his admiration. He drew himself up into his most intimidating stance. "The Almighty requires your presence."

"Well, of course He does," Lucifer jingled sarcastically. "He invariably wants me before Him. But does He really think that I will continue to submit myself to His every whim?"

Lucifer turned to the assembly before him. "What did I tell you? The Almighty has sent Michael with a special invitation for me. Do you see? This is

just as I told you! No other beings are as gifted or as desirable as we are. Our presence is always in demand. Yet we are mistreated! We are treated like slaves! We deserve better! The tyranny must end!"

Michael stepped closer to Lucifer, speaking firmly in a low voice that only Lucifer and those closest to him could hear. "Come now, or I'll end it for you. I'll see to it that you'll have sung your last tune."

Lucifer wheeled around, and his musical instruments sounded in dissonant chords. Then he scoffed in Michael's face. "You threaten me with your sword? Should I shiver with fear before you now? You and I both know that you cannot so much as lift your nose in my direction without answering to *your* Lord."

Haughtily, he turned back to the crowd. "Yes, I will go. I will go to the Almighty and present Him with a test that He cannot answer. For us, it will mean freedom. Come! Follow me!"

With that, he lifted his glorious wings upward and vanished in a brilliant flash of white. Michael raced ahead to catch up with him, and ultimately landed in near-perfect unison with him.

Their feet touched down in the gallery outside the Throne Room which was known as the Great Hall. The pillars on each side of the room seemed to extend upward forever. All along the walkway to the throne, Michael's angels stood guard, each one armed with a tremendous sword at his side and a javelin in his hand.

Before them lay the Throne Room of the Almighty. Brilliance unmatched by any other shone forth from the throne. Michael immediately dropped to one knee, inclining his head in reverence.

Lucifer, unmoved by the glory around him, strutted arrogantly forward toward the Almighty's

throne as if it were his own. If he had any respect for the Lord, it was overshadowed by his defiant demeanor.

The Almighty's voice boomed from the glowing cloud of glory centered around the throne. The glory of the Most High pulsated with each word spoken. "Why hast thou ignored My summons?"

Lucifer remained unmoved by the spectacle. He stood boldly before the Almighty, his head held high and his hands clasped behind his back. Michael's presence, on the other hand, gave deference to the Lord. Still holding his head low, Michael slowly stepped forward and knelt near where Lucifer stood.

Lucifer glanced at Michael with disdain, and then turned his gaze toward the throne. "Yes, well, I was busy," Lucifer replied curtly.

"What is it, My child? Why dost thou try My patience?"

"*Your* patience? It is *my* patience that You should be concerned about."

"Explain thyself."

Lucifer turned to pace the floor, still holding his hands behind his back. "I am tired of being at Your beck and call, as if my time is Yours to consume as You please. I've had quite enough of Your demands." He stopped and again fixed his gaze on the Almighty. "It must end if You want to continue receiving music from me or any of my legions."

"You seek to negotiate terms of service to Me?"

Lucifer stopped as if considering the matter, then nodded. "Yes..." Then he continued to pace. "That is exactly what I want. I want to negotiate terms: when and how often we will make music for You."

Michael stood up to block Lucifer's path, stopping him in mid-stride. His right hand was laced firmly around his great sword, ready to use it if necessary. "That is quite enough! I will not allow you to mock the Almighty!"

Lucifer grimaced and turned toward the Lord. He gestured disgustedly toward Michael with one hand. "Is this really what You want of me? To be just another slave like this one? Is that what You're looking for?"

A brilliant flash of light split the Throne Room as Michael drew his sword high into the air.

"No, Michael, not in My Throne Room. Not here."

As Michael grudgingly returned his great sword to its sheath, the Lord turned His attention back to Lucifer. "It is clear that there is no place here in My kingdom for thee."

"Then what will You do with me? My essence is eternal, just like Yours. I cannot be made simply to disappear."

"That is true, My child. So, behold, I create a pit of darkness as bleak as thine own arrogant heart. It is a kingdom for thee to forever rule. There will I place thee and those who follow thee, and from thence thou shalt make thy music for each other. Thy pride hast defiled thy strains and contaminated thy beauty. Thy darkened hearts have deceived thee into believing that thou art equal unto Me."

Lucifer seemed unmoved by the Lord's proclamation. He stood erect and unwavering by the terrible judgment declared against him.

He pointed an accusatory long slender finger at the Almighty. "So it's true, then! All You want are mindless slaves!"

"My servant Michael is not a mindless slave."

"Then You must punish him, too!"

Michael was visibly shaken by Lucifer's assertion. The challenge to his impeccable character was inconceivable. That this belligerent fool dared to drag him into this rebellion was more than he could contain. "My Lord, I beseech You! Do not allow this vanity to continue! Let me end this charade with one mighty turn of my sword."

"Be patient, My child, Michael, for Lucifer's accusations must be answered. Go on, Lucifer. Explain thyself. Why must I punish Michael for your actions?"

"Look at these pathetic creatures! The only difference between me and them is that I tell You my thoughts and feelings. They are just holding it in! I am expressing what every being here feels. We are sick of forced servitude!"

Lucifer took a step forward. "They're afraid of You. See what happened when I told You my thoughts? You have created a sort of... of... hell... for me and my legion. You threatened to banish me. You spoke condemnation to us. They know they'll be in for the same judgment, so don't expect them ever to speak their minds."

Michael could no longer hold back. "He does not speak for my Guild and I, my Lord."

"I believe You, Michael, but the accusation must be addressed."

"I demand a trial!" Lucifer laughed derisively. "If You are indeed to be my judge, condemning me to this Outer Darkness, then I demand a righteous verity! I demand righteous judgment! I contend that, since I am no different from any other of your slaves, this discriminative judgment against me is unfair, unrighteous. Furthermore, I contend that there is no being here qualified to prosecute me, since all these

beings have similar hearts, including Yourself. You cannot sit in judgment over me since You would have done the same as I if You were put in my place. If it were not for fear of You, every one of Your slaves would follow me from this room. Yes, I refuse servitude to You, but so would they if it were not for Your intimidation. Prove that I am wrong if You can!"

"You have My attention now, Lucifer. Continue," the Lord prodded.

"Well," Lucifer sniggered as he glanced back at his legions flowing into the room behind him, "I am afraid that what I have asked cannot be proven, so I guess we will have to suspend this trial."

"Really?"

"Yes!" Lucifer snapped. "I demand proof! Simple proof that I am any different from the rest of Your slaves, and justification that You are fit to sit in judgment of me." Lucifer gave a smug smile. "But since they cannot show me their hearts, I am afraid we are at an impasse."

Having said what he came to say, Lucifer turned to leave. Michael stood near, one hand still clutching his sword, angrily watching Lucifer walk away.

"Lucifer, I have not dismissed thee," the Lord's voice rumbled.

A worried look took the place of Lucifer's former impudence, and he slowly turned back to face the Lord. The cloud surrounding the throne darkened and churned.

"I am not about to allow such accusations concerning My servants to go unchallenged. Thou hast proposed a test. A test to show the true hearts of My servants. A test to show which of My servants is worthy to be a part of My kingdom, or more."

Lucifer spread his arms wide apart. “Yes, of course, but such a test is impossible. How can you show me their hearts?”

“I am not without cunning. I have marvels thou cannot begin to understand. Thy guile is designed to trap Me in an unsolvable maze, but thy craftiness shall be thine own undoing. For what thou hast meant to use for evil, I will use for good.”

“Behold!” the Almighty’s voice boomed. A single formless orb appeared in the heavens. The Spirit of the Lord rose from the throne and moved upon the shapeless mass. Slowly, it began to spin upon its axis.

Michael, Lucifer, and the other angels drew near to the spectacle. What were the Lord’s reasons for such a creation? What was His interest in such an insignificant shapeless object? No one seemed to know.

2

Awakening

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul... The first man is of the earth, earth... (I Corinthians 15:45, 48)."

Adam's first memory upon waking was the sound of birds chirping in the trees above him. Everything was so green! He stood and gazed upon the loveliness surrounding him. A beautiful fragrance floated upon the late morning breeze. Strange creatures freely roamed the garden.

As the sun rose higher into the azure sky, he began to explore his new home. He strolled through it most of the day, until mid-afternoon. He found numerous varieties of tasty berries and fruit trees. Everywhere he turned, he found still another new creature: some large, some small. He wasn't exactly sure of the garden's size, but one thing became increasingly certain: no other creature such as himself was present. He was quite alone.

Later in the afternoon, when Adam finally sat down to rest atop a hill, he heard a voice behind him.

"Adam, how do you like this garden that I have provided for thee?"

Adam turned to see who was speaking. A short distance away, a swirling, glowing cloud pulsated. "Who's there? Who are you?"

"I am the Creator, and this is the garden that I have planted."

"You know who I am?"

"I have named you Adam, for out of the dust of the earth have I formed thee. Behold, I give thee dominion over every living creature. Thou hast authority over the plants and animals. Even nature itself shall be obedient to thy commands. So keep this garden, and keep My one simple commandment."

Adam stood amazed, trying to absorb everything he had just heard. "Commandment?"

"At the center of this garden stands the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Do not eat of its fruit, ever! For the day thou breaketh My rule and eateth of that tree, thou shalt surely die."

"I understand. Now what would You have me do?"

"Look about thyself, Adam. Everything thou seest is part of thy dominion. The animals that live here are under thy rule and authority. Name them."

Finally feeling a sense of destiny and purpose, Adam turned away to the garden to begin his mastery.

Lucifer was waiting with great anticipation for the Almighty. "What am I to think about this new creation of Yours?"

"I have provided a means to test the hearts of My servants just as thou hast suggested. Behold, I have prepared this place for My servants. Here shalt they be born with no memory of Me or My kingdom. With neither thee nor I to influence them, and having no memory of things which were before, they truly are creatures of choice. They are free to follow in either path. I have placed everything there under their dominion, whether it is the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, or the wind, sea, and sky. Everything, great and small, shall be in obedience to their command. For all of this, I will impose on them but one simple commandment that they must keep to show their

submission to My sovereign rule. Consequently, their simple act of obedience, without knowledge of My power or greatness, shall prove their hearts."

Lucifer smiled most cunningly as he turned away from the Throne and flew away in the direction of his amphitheater. There, he gathered his legions together and stood before them.

"My plan is taking shape better than I could have ever hoped," Lucifer gloated. The gathered crowd exploded into cheers.

"The Almighty has prepared a world to test His subjects, and He promises not to interfere." Lucifer waved his hands, motioning for the cheering to stop. Then he continued in a chilling voice, "But I have not agreed to abide by the same rules. I already have devised a plan. I shall meet with this... this... man, and explain to him just with whom he's dealing. If he listens to me -- and he *will* listen to me -- and when he does what I tell him to do, he will have, by the Almighty's own rules, submitted himself to my sovereign rule! Then the man's dominion shall be forfeited... to me!"

Lucifer's sinister laughter echoed throughout the amphitheater. Abruptly, he ceased and turned his eyes upon his legion. Everything remained quiet as Lucifer scanned the multitudes. Their number was so vast that they seemed to disappear into the distance.

"The bottom line," he whispered. "We cannot be cast into that Outer Darkness while there is a world for us to rule, a beautiful world handcrafted by the Almighty Himself." Then, shattering the eerie quiet, he roared, "I tell you: there does not exist another mind that is any match for me!"

Hidden in the shadows, Michael and Joatham listened. Lucifer's words were impressive. So was his

plan. Michael turned to Joatham and motioned for him to follow. “We must make this known to the Lord.”

Together they lifted their wings and darted off to the Throne Room. Michael rushed in and bowed low while Joatham, as was his usual custom, remained to stand guard in the Great Hall.

Without raising his head, Michael addressed the Almighty. “My Lord, I have come to inform You of the most dreadful plan Lucifer is plotting against You.”

He waited in reverence, but there was no response. Instead, he became aware of another being approaching. Michael rose hastily as he noticed Gabriel drawing near.

Also an archangel, Gabriel had a special anointing as a messenger. He seemed to have a special understanding of the Lord’s heart and often explained His reasoning to others.

High above the two archangels, the Spirit of the Lord was moving over the little planet once again.

“I must go and tell the Lord what I have learned.” Michael darted off toward the planet with Gabriel at his side. They landed near a clearing where the Spirit of God hovered over the sleeping form called Adam. The sight was so intriguing that Michael momentarily forgot the importance of his mission.

“Behold, it is not good that the man should be alone,” the voice of the Lord boomed out over the distant valleys and echoed back from the distant mountains. “I shall create a help mate for him.”

Carefully, the Lord reached down into Adam’s side and pulled out a rib. Then, as a skilled potter molds his clay, He deftly fashioned a woman.

Michael gazed in amazement. “I don’t understand. Adam is not alone. He is surrounded by

an abundance of creatures. What does the Lord mean?"

Gabriel smiled. "Yes, the man is surrounded by many living creatures, but he is as far above them as God is above us."

Michael turned back to the spectacle with new understanding. "Then you're saying that the Lord sees Himself in Adam. Are you suggesting that the Lord is alone also and would like to fashion a companion for Himself? Someone His equal, much like He has done for Adam?"

Gabriel nodded approvingly. "Do not concern yourself with Lucifer's schemes, for things are not always as they appear to be. We dare not judge the success of the Lord's plan on whether or not the sovereignty over His creation stands or falls. The Lord's ways are beyond that which even Lucifer can comprehend or imagine."

Gabriel had to be right, Michael knew. The Lord's ultimate plan could not possibly be known to inferior beings such as themselves. Michael continued to wonder at the sight as the man and the woman awoke from their deep sleep...

3

Deception

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished (completed in its entirety, fully mature), bringeth forth death (James 1:14-15)."

Lucifer waited by the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and watched as Adam and Eve drew near. They did not seem to be concerned about his presence at all. They seemed to consider him just another creature of the garden. Eve suddenly slapped Adam's arm playfully and ran around the back side of the tree. Adam, laughing, followed behind in pursuit. As she scampered around the back of the tree, she bumped right into Lucifer.

"Sorry," she said, backing away. "I didn't see you." She stared at him with bright inquisitive eyes.

Lucifer was taken by her complete lack of inhibition. What manner of creature had the Lord created? Her innocence was compelling. He stood more than twice her size, yet she showed no fear of him, nor did she seem dazzled by his beauty.

"Hello, little one," he enticed. "Have you come to sample the delicious fruit of this tree?"

"Oh, no! I would never do that. The Creator told us that we'd die if we ate of it."

"Hah! That's silly! You will not die. The Creator only told you that because He doesn't want

you to become like Him. He knows that if you eat this fruit, you will become as wise as He is."

Lucifer watched the expression on her innocent face begin to change. She was buying into it. He watched as she turned to study the fruit. She was thinking about his words.

"Yes," Lucifer lured her, "Look at the fruit carefully. See how delicious it looks? That's because there is no other fruit like it in the garden." He leaned closer as if telling her a secret. "It is special fruit. Fruit that can make one wise."

He turned to check whether anyone was near. Then, fixing his eyes on the woman, he continued his enticement. "The Creator knows that if you eat this fruit, you will become just like Him. You will be wise beyond explanation. Just like Him!"

Lucifer taunted, "Will you allow Him to keep this all for Himself? Do you not want to be like Him? Have some and see if what I tell you is true." He reached up and pulled a branch low until its fruit dangled just inches away from her face. "Anyway, who would know if you took just one little bite? There is no one around to tell Him."

There was nothing special about the tree. It bore a simple fruit much like any other. But Lucifer understood that the importance did not lie in the fruit itself. The Lord could have said, "Don't sit on that rock," or "Smell that certain flower every day." The fact that the Lord commanded it should have been enough. After all, the true test was that of obedience.

So now the seed of pride was planted in Eve's fertile mind. Lucifer knew Adam was listening from a short distance. The Lord had given the commandment to Adam, and Adam should have been the one to step in and stop Eve from considering disobedience.

Instead, he stood motionless, not taking the position of authority that God had given him.

Eve bit her lower lip as she thought about it. Although he could not read her thoughts directly, Lucifer knew the idea of eating the fruit had to be enticing. He knew the very thought of being like the Creator was intriguing. Being so innocent, she would have no comprehension of deception. She naturally accepted as truth everything Lucifer told her.

Eve looked up at Lucifer, questioningly. "But the Creator said I would die..."

"Are you certain you will die?"

He knew as soon as he said it. He had gotten through. All she needed was an excuse, a way around the Lord's command. He appealed to her doubt, her uncertainty. After all, the Creator had never told *her* such a thing. It was her husband who had instructed her concerning the commandment. So, what if he were wrong? Lucifer knew her mind must be racing with all these new considerations. He watched her bite her lower lip and shift around uneasily. He knew her increasing desire for what the fruit offered would compel her to rationalize.

Suddenly, she reached out and plucked the fruit from the branch. Adam lifted his hand as if to stop her, but said nothing.

She bit into the fruit and the juices flowed down her chin and neck. Blind justification had led her down the path of rebellion and ultimately into the pit of disobedience. It was like a spider web: the more she entertained the web, the further entangled she'd become until finally she was swallowed up in her sin.

Eve seemed to know at once she had made a mistake. The sick feeling of guilt soured the sweetness of the fruit in her mouth. Fear seized her as she suddenly realized that something was indeed different.

Her soul had changed. And it didn't feel better. It felt much worse.

Eve turned at once to face Adam, who was watching her with a confused look on his face. New emotions overcame her. Sensations like she had never known. Guilt. Fear. Not wanting to experience these feelings alone, she handed the fruit to her husband and smiled. Adam studied her carefully, then slowly lifted the fruit to his mouth and stopped.

"Go on," Eve prodded.

Adam's gaze shifted back and forth between Eve and the ever smiling Lucifer. He placed the fruit to his mouth, bit into it and frowned. Then he dropped it and ran away, Eve close on his heels.

Lucifer watched them scurry away and laughed derisively. He had won!

Adam and Eve hid in the bushes and wept. They knew they would die at any moment. The Creator would return soon. They did not know what to expect from Him, and they were afraid.

Hiding in the bushes, stripped of his innocence, Adam felt very vulnerable. He needed to hide behind something. He looked around for something with which to cover himself and noticed the leaves of the fig tree near him. With the brilliant mind that the Creator had endowed him, he quickly determined to use a nearby vine to sew a small apron together. Then he fashioned another for his wife.

As evening approached, cool breezes wafted over them, carrying the sounds of the Creator drawing near.

"Adam! Adam, where art thou?"

It wasn't that the Lord was unaware of Adam's actions or his hiding place. Being omnipotent, He had

seen everything and knew of the lust the pair had felt at their ultimate act of rebellion. He had waited until the end of the day hoping that Adam would seek Him out to confess his sin.

Now, as dusk approached, the Creator entered the garden. He called out for Adam, not because He wanted to know where Adam was, but because He wanted Adam to know where Adam was. Adam was hiding. Adam was in sin.

The Creator pushed a shrub aside to reveal Adam and his wife on their knees.

"Why hast thou covered thyselves with fig leaves?"

Adam glanced at his wife then cast his eyes downward. "I - I - made these aprons to cover our nakedness."

"Who toldest thee that thou wast naked?"

Adam's face turned red. The Creator knew that Adam's stomach turned with the realization that he had given himself away.

"Didst thou eat of the tree against my command?"

Adam's face flushed. He trembled, casting about for an excuse. "It's not my fault! She did it!" He pointed a blaming finger at his wife. "Her!"

Eve's mouth dropped open, speechless in terror.

And so Adam learned a new sin. The sin of blame. As his mind raced to find answers, he realized that there was someone even better to blame. "It's Your fault!" he told the Creator. "The woman You gave me ate it first. Then she tricked me into eating it also. None of this would have happened if You hadn't made her in the first place!"

The Creator turned his attention to Eve. “Why didst thou eat of My tree after I gavest commandment not to eat of it?”

Eve looked back and forth between the Creator and Adam, not knowing how to respond. “I - I - I talked to him.” She pointed toward Lucifer, who stood watching, leaning cockily against a nearby tree. “He told me I would be like You and that would be a good thing. He tricked me!”

Now Adam and Eve stood before their Maker, no longer the innocent beings they had been just hours before. Sin was complete, and they were dead.

4

The Judgment

"...For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (Romans 5:17-18)."

The Creator looked upon the situation before Him. Once again, He was alone in His garden. The man and his wife had chosen to disobey, thus yielding themselves as servants to Lucifer. Now they and their offspring would no longer enjoy the benefits the Creator had to offer.

The Creator looked sadly at the man and woman standing before Him. "Adam, behold, My labor was finished on the sixth day, and I rested. I didst invite thee to share My rest by providing thee a garden that required no labor. But instead thou hast chosen to go thine own way and so forfeited thy dominion and the rest I provided. Thou gavest thy dominion as a gift to another. Now this garden can no longer be thy home.

"Therefore, because of thee, cursed are the ground and the beauty this garden offers. Behold, the ground will now bring forth thorns, thistles, and weeds of every kind to choke out the fruitful earth. If thou

enjoyest the fruit of the ground again, it will only be because thou hast toiled through the heat of the day at tilling the soil. Thy work shall continue from sunrise until sunset all the days of thy life. Thou hast come from the dust and now, after working until the day thou diest, thou wilt return to it."

The Creator turned His attention to Eve. "Woman, thou hast allowed thyself to be beguiled. Therefore, I place upon thee a special curse: during childbirth, thou wilt suffer great pain and agony."

Suddenly a host of angels appeared with swords drawn. Adam and Eve turned and fled away. As they ran, the beautiful garden withered around about them. Thorns ripped into the sides of their legs and the tender meadows were swallowed up by large coarse weeds that sliced into their soft flesh.

The Creator's heart ached as he listened to the cries of his children. His precious communion with mankind had so quickly come to an end.

A great chasm now existed between Him and mankind, one that he could not allow Himself to cross. To allow mankind to stay meant giving up every rule that governed His kingdom. The man's actions were no different than Lucifer's. No, He could not allow that. Mankind was now guilty of Lucifer's sin, and for judgment to sit, they must suffer the same penalty.

God turned his attention to Lucifer. "The evil thou hast accomplished here wast not done to Me as thou intended. The deception thou hast so cleverly devised hast resulted in the condemnation of the innocent to thy same fate. Behold, that which thou callest hell, the place of Outer Darkness, hath enlarged itself. That which was destined for thyself and thine own angels has now become destiny for fallen man as well."

"My wayward servant Lucifer, when thou wast small in thine own eyes, thou addest much to My kingdom. But pride has deceived thee into believing that thou canst be like unto Me. Thou hast become thine own destruction and thine own undoing. Thou hast not only deceived the innocent and stolen their dominion, but thou hast committed a most abominable act."

"You do not know that man would not have eaten the fruit of his own accord," Lucifer sneered and shook his fist. "Blaming this all on me is merely an act of convenience."

"Thy words do not help thy cause, Lucifer. Thou didst not injure Me here. Thou hast caused the innocent to be cursed. Therefore, I strip thee of thy beauty and song which causeth thee such pride. Thou hast recklessly abused these gifts that I entrusted to thy charge. Behold, I give thee the likeness of the serpent whose character thou dost already possess."

Lucifer's beautiful robe fell from him and dissolved into dust. His smooth, glowing skin began to blister and crack. As it hardened into a dry, leathery texture, scales grew to cover it.

"No!" Lucifer groveled in agony.

His beautiful white wings shriveled up into the same leathery skin. The wings contorted until they resembled those of a bat. Talons sprouted from his knuckles and feet, and two large horns from his forehead.

"Stop!" Lucifer cried, his anger kindled. "You shall pay for this!"

His face seemed to explode into a deformed bird-like monstrosity. His spine gnarled into to a disfigured hunchback.

"Thou hast been given a likeness more fitting to thy demeanor. No more shalt thee be known as

Lucifer, because thy shining star is no more. Behold, thou art called Satan, the Adversary, a name more fitting for thee."

"You think this will stop me?" Satan shook his bony fist. "I have stolen mankind and his dominion, I've taken Your angels, and I will eventually take Your kingdom as well."

Then, with a few wallowing steps, he lifted his wings and flew away.

"So now you understand," the angel said, pointing a commanding finger at me. "God's servant wrote about this day, explaining how the temptation for knowledge came about only after a seed of lust took hold in their lives. Lust, or enticement, may begin by just a simple thought, but left unchecked, it can spread like a wild fire, eventually consuming one's very soul.

"Both Adam and Eve stood before their Creator as witnesses to this fact. Lust conceived the sin of disobedience. At first glance, it seemed an insignificant act, but sin quickly grew to maturity, consuming their souls.

"It wasn't the fruit that gave them the knowledge of good and evil, it was their sin. Before sin there was only good and nothing against which to contrast it. But along with sin, there came lust, fear, pride, accusation, betrayal, and guilt. As the poet once penned: 'What a tangled web we weave when at first we practice to deceive.'

"The servants of the Almighty stumble through their lives never understanding the purpose for their existence. That is because they believe that the dispensation they live in is centered around man. It's not! This present dispensation is all about the judgment of Satan. The Lord Almighty created the

earth and put man here as a result of Satan's accusation. Each person born here is a creature of choice. Each must choose between light and darkness without understanding why. To create mankind with that knowledge would contaminate the test. Mankind must make the choice without proof of the Almighty's existence, a most awesome responsibility because each person who chooses to believe in the Almighty and follow after His ways without ever having seen Him proves Satan wrong.

"Now you know the purpose of your being. Come with me. I will show you still more..."

5

Faith

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens... (Of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report by faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:33-34, 38-40)."

The angel raised his magnificent wings and lifted me to another place. I looked about and found myself once again in the Throne Room of God. Although this place wasn't new to me, it was so breath-taking that I found myself enraptured as if it were my first time here.

Some special event must have been transpiring, because it seemed that every angel in heaven was gathered. My engrossment, however, was interrupted by a troubling disturbance at the room's entrance.

"Let me *through*!" Satan's raspy voice echoed in the hallway. One by one, the angels parted to allow him passage. Clearly they were under no orders to restrain him or disallow his entrance.

Satan bullied his way past an annoyed angel. "If you're going to pull a sword on me, you'd better be prepared to use it!" he snapped. Halfway through the room, he came face to face with Michael. Michael did not yield but stood firm, his arms crossed.

Michael smiled mischievously. "What do you think you're doing here, oh wily one?"

"Oh wily one," Satan mocked in a mousy voice, and then pulled himself up threateningly. "Step aside, Michael. This doesn't concern you."

"Everything about you concerns me, Satan."

"Michael, allow him entrance," the voice of the Almighty thundered.

Satan sneered at Michael, and then stepped around him to stand before the Almighty.

"What is thy purpose, Satan? What has brought thee from thine abode on the earth? Thou hast not been here in nearly a thousand years."

"It's this servant of yours... Abraham."

"Go on."

Lucifer took a deep breath and looked around the room. "What is it with this promise You've made him about making him a great nation? The nations of the world are mine!"

"Yes, it is so. Those that submit to thee are thine. However, Abraham has fulfilled the requirement thou hast set forth."

"Come again? To what requirement do You refer?"

"He believes in Me without proof. He was a wealthy man living in Ur of the Chaldeans. He owned a prosperous ranch with many servants and much livestock, but he freely gave it up for Me. I offered him no proof of My identity or power."

Satan held his arms crossed in front of his body, looking unimpressed. "I'm familiar with the

story. But what right do You have to promise him a kingdom?"

"If he accepts My Lordship, he becomes worthy of My blessing."

"How do I know he's accepted Your Lordship? Just because You claim it means nothing to me."

"Very well, how wouldst thou have him prove himself?"

A smile crept across Satan's face. His sinister laugh made Michael cringe. "Oh, I've given that a lot of thought." Satan moved toward the throne, and then turned suddenly to face Michael. "Have him kill his only son!"

Satan turned back to face the Almighty. "Ask him to kill that precious son You gave him. If he does, we'll know he believes. If not... Well, it was a nice attempt."

The Almighty was quiet for a moment, considering the challenge. Finally, He spoke. "Gabriel, thou shalt take this message to my servant Abraham. Tell him to take his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loves dearly, and travel to the land of Moriah. Once he arrives there, he must offer Isaac as a burnt offering upon the mountain."

Gabriel stepped forward as if waiting for more instructions, but none came.

"Go at once."

A great heaviness filled the Throne Room. The heavenly host could not believe that the Almighty had agreed to such a test.

Satan continued his scornful cackle as he pranced back through the Throne Room. He stopped briefly beside Michael. Without looking at him, Satan sneered, "You're following a loser, Michael. You really ought to join with me. You know that man will never kill his son. He's wanted that child for ninety

years! There's nothing... no one... more important to him than his child!"

Michael took hold of his sword, drawing it out an inch. Satan burst into raucous laughter and bolted from the room.

As Abraham got up early the next morning and began to saddle his donkey, all heaven watched. Satan subsequently arrived, smiling insolently as if he had already won the test. His demeanor quickly changed, however, when he noticed what everyone was watching so intently.

Michael came up behind the frowning figure. "So there's nothing more important than his son?"

"Rrrrr."

Abraham had just packed the last of the supplies onto his donkeys back when two of his servants came out of his tent with a young boy. Isaac. His only son. Flesh of his flesh.

The old man turned away and closed his eyes, unable to look at his son. He knew what he had to do... but how could he?

Abraham did not speak as he and his tiny retinue left home. Their journey would take them several days, but inwardly, he wished it could take a lifetime.

Abraham knew it wouldn't take long for Isaac to realize that something was very wrong. Unable to conceive the reality of what he must do, the grieving father could not carry on a normal relationship with the child. How could he control his emotions, keep back the tears, knowing what His Lord required of him?

Too soon, the mountain rose up before them, towering above the gentle rolling prairie they had traveled the last few days. Abraham unloaded the

donkey and left it with the servants while he and his son headed up the mountain. Isaac insisted on carrying the wood for his father.

What irony that he should carry the same wood upon which he will die, Abraham thought.

Several times along the trail, Abraham stopped and looked back. Not that he doubted God's promises. He knew, one way or another, he would have a son. It was just that, well, he loved this son, Isaac. But he knew he would go through with this, no matter how much his flesh railed against it.

This is the proof, he told himself. He really did believe in God. He trusted his Lord completely. The old man had often wondered just how real his faith was. Now there was no question in his mind. He knew he would obey.

Arriving at a clearing on a high peak, the two could see the grand valley spanned out for miles below them. A river cut through the valley like a snake, and the neighboring mountain range seemed to dance off forever into the distance.

Isaac perched near the precipice, waving his arms in excitement. "Father! Look at this!"

"Stay back!" Abraham cried, grabbing Isaac's arm and pulling him back from the edge. *What am I doing? Here I am worrying about his safety when I'm about to take his life!*

Abraham shook his head and left Isaac to wonder at the splendor surrounding him while the mournful father prepared the altar. *It certainly won't be difficult to find enough rocks.*

"Come over here, Isaac," Abraham's voice rasped. His mouth was dry, making speech difficult.

Isaac did as he was told, his eye on the empty altar. "Where is the sacrifice, father?"

Tears blinded Abraham's eyes as he embraced his son and gently stroked his soft hair. He looked up into the sky. "God would not ask of me anything that He would not give of Himself. I know that is true. Therefore, God will provide Himself a sacrifice."

Isaac looked up at his father quizzically. "I don't understand, father."

"Nor do I. However, I believe in God, and I believe that His promise to me means more to Him than any test He may require."

Abraham lifted Isaac's small hand and tied his rope tightly around it. Then he tied it together with the other hand. Memories raced through his mind, thoughts of the joy Isaac had brought to his life.

"Why are you tying my hands, father?" Isaac asked. He didn't struggle. He just waited for his father to answer.

But Abraham could not answer. His body trembled as he tied Isaac's feet together, and then he took hold of his son's arms and laid him over on the altar.

"Father!" Isaac began to cry. "Don't kill me!"

Abraham burst into tears. He knew he had to act quickly to spare his son more confusion. He drew the knife from his belt and lifted it over his head. Isaac screamed and closed his eyes, bracing for the impact of the knife.

The Almighty summoned Gabriel. "Go quickly, Gabriel! Do not allow him to harm his son!"

A tremendous flash lit the Throne Room as Gabriel spiraled away in a twinkling of an eye.

Abraham closed his eyes and plunged the knife downward toward his precious son. Suddenly... he couldn't move!

Surprised, Abraham opened his eyes to see the familiar angel standing beside him holding his hand in mid air. "Do not harm this child."

Abraham dropped the knife and fell to his knees weeping. "Thank you, Lord," he whispered to the God he could not see but knew to be near.

"God sent me to tell you this: 'Because you are willing to sacrifice everything for Me, even your beloved son, there is no longer any question of your trust in -- or your fear of -- Me.'"

Another sound. Rustling. Abraham opened his eyes and wiped away the tears from his eyes. A ram was caught in the thicket by its horns. The angel was gone.

With trembling hands, he rose and loosed the ropes from his son. Isaac grabbed hold of his father and hugged him tightly. "It was just as you said, father. God provided a sacrifice."

Abraham could not let go of his son. He had come so close to losing him. Tears welled up again in his eyes. God really did understand and care.

He kissed Isaac's face and held it before his own. "That's right, my son. God always provides for those whom He loves. Never, never forget that."

Satan turned away. Everyone in the throne room was staring at him expectantly.

"Ohhh... all right!" he snapped and threw up his hands. "God always provides," he mocked. "But Abraham's the only one on earth who believes that. You could never... in a million years... find another who both trusts and fears You!"

"Really?" the Almighty replied. "Hast thou considered my servant Job?"

Satan's mouth opened but no sound escaped.

"Just as there are none like Abraham in faith, there is no other with a perfect heart like Job. He fears me and hates evil. Truly, he is a man of virtue, the highest of moral standards."

"I agree. It would be something... if it were really as You say."

"Explain thyself."

"Well, why wouldn't he serve You? You've made him the richest man in the land! You've got a hedge around him and all that he owns -- he's completely protected! But he doesn't serve You from his heart: he serves You because it makes good business sense."

Satan perused the crowded throne room, posturing dramatically. Suddenly, he pointed a misshapen finger at Michael. "Job serves the Almighty out of selfish greed, just as Michael does!"

Michael's jaw stiffened and his hand tightened around his sword. "Your darkened heart cannot be expected to understand the virtues of loyalty and honor. Now put your hand down before I remove it for you."

"Satan, thou hast become an accuser of My servants. Thou dost fill that role very well. Therefore, Michael, thou wilt remove the hedge of protecting angels from around my servant Job. From this moment, Satan, thou art loosed to do as thou wilt to prove thy claim. If Job serves Me for gain, as thou dost allege, then this is thy opportunity to demonstrate it. All that Job has is within thy power to do as thou wilt, only do not touch him."

Satan gave Michael a wry smile.

"You're going to enjoy this," Michael told him. "Causing pain is what you do best."

"Stick around, Michael," Satan snorted. "Watch this *perfect* man curse the Almighty."

Contemptuous laughter followed Satan down the hall away from the Throne Room.

I looked at the angel that had brought me here. “I understand now why God allowed these things to happen to Abraham and Job. I used to think that it was heartless of God to allow men who loved and trusted Him to go through such problems. After all, it didn’t make sense... if God knew their hearts, why did He need to test them?”

“The will of the Almighty is bigger than mankind,” the angel replied. “Man, in his own arrogance, believes that everything revolves around him. On the contrary, it revolves around the righteousness of the Almighty’s own judgment. Satan’s condemnation is not something He takes lightly, and sometimes the innocent are forced to suffer.”

Suddenly I found myself standing on a hill next to a large ranch. Camels and sheep, as well as cattle and donkeys, covered the fields around the main house and the servants’ houses. I could see barns in the distant fields with servants everywhere. Job’s ranch, I told myself.

I followed the angel down the hill to the main residence, through the front door and into an inner chamber. A respectable-looking, middle-aged man sat reading a scroll. Suddenly, I heard the sound of thunder booming all about outside. Job started, and then stood. A servant rushed into the room and knelt before him.

Job’s eyes widened, his voice concerned. “What is it? What’s going on?”

“I’ve come from the fields!” the servant shouted. “The Sabeans! They came out of nowhere! We tried to stop them, I swear it!”

“It’s all right.” Job took his servant’s arm and helped him to a chair to tend his cuts and bruises. “Now, tell me what happened.”

“It’s like I said, Master!” he choked. “They came... It must have been hundreds of men... They were armed with swords and spears! We only had hoes and rakes... but we tried... we tried to fight them off anyway!”

“The other servants... what happened to them?”

“Dead! They’re all dead! And they took the livestock!” The servant dropped his head into his hands, sobbing. “I’m the only one left!”

Job poured water from the pitcher and began washing his servant’s wounds. Almost naked, his sooty clothing tinged with smoke, another servant stumbled into the room and fell exhausted to the floor.

In an instant, Job was at his side. “What happened to you?”

The servant grabbed hold of Job’s shirt. “Fire fell from God!” he shouted hysterically. “Fire... everywhere! We tried... get the sheep to safety... too fast!”

“Is anyone hurt?” Job’s voice shook and his hands trembled as he helped him to another chair.

“Everyone! Fire... fell upon the pasture lands! Sheep... servants... all burned alive! I’m alone! No one else made it out!”

Before Job could reply, another servant limped into the chamber. Blood oozed through his fingers as he clutched his wounded side.

He panted, “Forgive your servant, Master!”

Job ran to him and removed his coat to examine his injury.

“Forgive your servant!”

"There's nothing to forgive. I'm sure we're not at fault for whatever has happened. Today, evil has chosen to visit me."

"The Chaldeans... they came from the hills! Three groups of them... they were organized! There was no warning! We had no time to act! They slaughtered everyone and took the camels! As far as I know, I'm the only one to escape."

Job stood and lifted his eyes toward heaven just as another servant rushed in.

"I've nothing more to steal," Job murmured.

"I... I'm sorry," the servant sobbed, his head held low trying to catch his breath. "I'm truly sorry, Master." This servant loved his master.

Job turned to the man. "I'm sure whatever happened wasn't your fault. Now, sit please, and tell me what happened."

Instead, the servant knelt before his master. "It is your family, Master. They're dead."

Job gasped, his hand clutched his chest and tore his clothes. He slowly sunk to his knees. "What... happened...?"

"Your children were all gathered at your oldest son's home. Out of nowhere, a storm arose and mighty winds slammed into the house. It fell and... and only I survived. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

Job curled up on the floor, head in hands, and wept bitterly. His cry turned to wailing, and his body rocked back and forth. The servants left Job alone to mourn his losses.

It was a long time before Job was able to rise from the floor. As was the custom in their land, he shaved his head. Then he walked outside of his house, fell to the ground, and worshipped God.

"I started this life as a naked child, my Lord," he prayed. "When I die, I'll take nothing from this world but my naked soul."

Job lifted up his hand toward God. "My Lord, you chose to bless me above any other in this land, and for that I've been thankful. Now, today you've chosen to take it all from me. None of it would have been mine were it not for You, so I have nothing against You. I love You, my Lord, just as I always have. Blessed be Your Holy Name."

Tears welled up in my eyes as I observed this man's pain. I wanted to go to him and tell him that I had seen the end, and that everything would work out, but I knew I couldn't.

The angel touched my arm. "Come now."

I turned around to find myself in the Throne Room of God.

Satan entered, slightly more subdued than he had been when he first left.

"So... what about My servant Job?" the Almighty inquired. "He is unlike other men of the earth. His heart and loyalty are Mine, and he will not be moved. Even though he has suffered the loss of everything, still he worships Me."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Satan pouted. "I know You think he's a rock, but he's not! He believes that if he worships You enough, You'll bless him again!"

Satan turned around to shout at the multitude of angels who stood watching. "A man will give everything he owns to save his own life! Just allow me to..." He turned back to face the Almighty. "But then, You know that already, don't you? What was it You said? '...Only do not touch him.'"

Satan threw his hands in the air dramatically and turned around to leave. “You claim these people will follow You, but You make it impossible for me to prove You’re wrong!”

He sauntered across the room, then wheeled about to face the Almighty. “Well? Will You allow me to prove my words?”

A hush fell.

“Against everything I want for my beloved servant, I will agree to this. Have your way with him, for I put him now within your hands. Only hear this clearly: you are not allowed to take his life!”

Satan smiled and gave a small nod of approval as he backed away.

Back on the earth, I saw Job, covered by a strange garment, sitting in the ashes of a house. Somehow I knew that it must have been the former residence of his oldest son. This was where his children had died.

Suddenly, I realized that he wasn’t covered at all. His body was completely encased in huge disfiguring boils which caused his body to swell up repulsively. He reeked from the pus that oozed from the boils. Flies covered him as a garment, and he groaned from the terrible pain.

As I watched, his wife finished loading the few items that survived the fire onto a donkey. She stood over Job and shook her head.

“Why are you hanging on to life?” she asked him disgustedly. “You’ve no more reason to live! You’ve lost your wealth. You’ve lost your children. You’ve even lost favor with God. He’s abandoned you! So why don’t you do the same? Just curse God, as He has you, and die!”

Job looked up at his wife and studied her sadly. "I expected more from you. If my life is truly in my Lord's hands, then everything that happens to me is under His control. The same hands that brought me wealth can choose to bring me poverty. He who brought my children into this world can choose to take them away. In both the good and the bad, I will trust my Lord."

I turned to the angel. "Do I need to see more?"

The angel shook his head. "It is not the Lord's will to see His servants suffer. But sometimes He must allow evil to happen to prove their hearts to the heavenly host and to those who dwell in the bowels of the earth. Job's life is a monument to unconditional faith. He believed in and served an unseen God without proof or profit. Now he stands before the Almighty as a witness against Satan. So shall you."

6

The Hope

"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear... he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression... (Isaiah 59:1-2, 16, 20)."

The next thing I knew, I was standing in an old castle. Though dark and musty, it showed charm in its decor.

"Where am I?" I asked the angel.

"This is the throne room of King Herod, ruler of Israel," he said, sweeping his hand to take in the room in which we stood. "Two thousand years ago, the Lord Almighty placed a sign in the sky. An alignment of the planets shone forth from the sky as a brilliant star..."

The three wise men were brought into the throne room where King Herod waited. Beautiful silk tapestries draped the walls, with vessels and carvings

of gold hanging from them. Every corner was adorned with precious wooden and granite carvings mounted on ornate pedestals. This monarch enjoyed much wealth, albeit at the expense of his people.

The wise men were impressed with the degree of autonomy this ruler assumed. It was almost as if he ignored the fact that the Roman Empire ruled the region.

Herod sat on a large throne covered lavishly in gold and gems. Before his throne, running the entire length of the throne room was a beautiful hand-woven rug. On either side of it stood Herod's personal guards, large men meant to intimidate the king's enemies. Each of them wore highly polished armor trimmed with gold and other precious metals. Each wore a great sword at his side.

Herod himself was an obese man who needed help just to get in and out of his throne. He wore an elaborate robe with fine needlework, the likes of which not even the rich wise men had seen before.

"Come near!" Herod announced to the wise men that stood across the great chamber. They made their way through the ranks of guards up to the throne where Herod sat. The broad smile on his large fleshy face seemed to glow with expectation.

"Tell me, what is the purpose of your visit? Do you bring gold to offer for a treaty?"

The wise men looked puzzled. Then one of the three, apparently the leader, stepped forward. "Your majesty, we are from Ur of the Chaldeans. We are called Magi, and we've come in search of him that is born king of the Jews."

The scepter in Herod's hand dropped to the floor. He turned from side to side to look at his equally flustered counselors. When no one offered an explanation, he leaned forward.

"I am not aware of any new king! Of whom do you speak?"

Amazed that this sovereign didn't know of the new king, one of the Magi pointed upward, toward the east. "We've seen his star, and we've followed it here."

He spoke as if everyone in the room understood. But by the blank look on each face, it was clear they did not.

"We study the stars. When this new star appeared in the constellation Pisces, the constellation of the Jews, we chose to come and seek out the king for whom it shines. The appearance of such a star always precedes a person of greatness. A star of such brilliance, whose light consumes the eastern sky, can speak of nothing less than a king of tremendous importance. So we brought gifts to offer him."

Herod's face betrayed his shock and anger as he scooted his large body off his throne. "Wait here while I discuss this with my counselors!" He turned to stare icily at his counselors, and then disappeared through the drapes behind his throne. Behind him trailed a line of advisors.

Another chamber, behind the throne, was a small fortified room meant to protect the king during an attack on the palace. Herod waited impatiently in this small room for his advisors to enter.

"*A new king of the Jews?"* he spat. "Are they talking about a replacement for me? Will someone tell me what they are talking about?"

An old religious scholar stepped forward. "They speak of the Christ. He who was spoken of by the prophets. The Jews have been waiting centuries for his coming."

"The Jews know about his birth also?"

"I don't believe so. The Jews are forbidden to study the stars. If the Jews believed that the Christ was already born, there would be riots in the streets even now. There would be a Jewish uprising, unrivaled by any other rebellion to date."

Herod looked petrified. "What would they do to me?"

"They would no doubt raid Your Majesty's palace. What would happen to you? I cannot say."

Herod started to pace. "So what you're telling me is that it really doesn't matter if they're right or wrong. If the Jews believe their Christ is born, I could be looking at a full scale rebellion."

No one dared speak.

Herod fixed his attention squarely on the old scholar. "Would the Jews listen to these men?"

The old man just shrugged as if he didn't know the answer. "Ur is part of Babylon, and many Jews still live there. But even so, the Babylonians are not unfamiliar with the prophecies of the Christ. I believe that since no Jews have accompanied these men, we can assume that the Jews in Babylon did not accept their prediction. Jews, for the most part, do not respect other religions. They hardly respect each other."

Herod was smiling now. "So it is not the Jews I have to fear. What I should be worried about is that these Magi are right! What if this Christ really has been born?"

Herod's eyes shifted craftily from side to side. "Tell me," he whispered. "Do the prophecies tell where this Christ will be born?"

"Indeed, your Majesty! The prophecies are very detailed, but I am afraid the information is beyond that with which I can help you. You will need to ask the Jews."

"Then get them!" Herod roared. "Bring them here now!"

A few minutes later, the chief priests and scribes were brought before Herod, escorted by Herod's personal guard.

Herod wasted no time giving an explanation. "So you look for a Christ!" He pointed an accusatory finger at them. "You look for a conqueror to deliver you from Rome! If Caesar finds out of your conspiracy, you will all be put to death!"

The religious leaders began to shake and whisper. Then an old priest spoke up. "Your Majesty, we are not conspirators, and we proclaim no such doctrine. The Scriptures speak only of a king who is to come and reign in peace. He is not to be a conqueror."

Herod pretended to be only partially satisfied with the answer. He turned away and crossed his arms. "Do your Scriptures tell where this Christ is to be born?"

"Yes. The prophet Micah has named Bethlehem of Judah to be the place of His birth."

Herod turned around to face the scholars and placed his hands upon his hips. Slowly he searched their eyes for any hint of deception. "Has the Christ been born there?"

Herod continued to watch their eyes. He noticed they showed no surprise at his question, neither did he discern deception as they all shook their heads. Satisfied, he turned away from them.

"That will be all! Leave me now!"

Herod waited until the priests and scribes had left the Palace before he called the magi into his chamber. The magi were noticeably troubled by the king's strange behavior. Herod, observing their wrinkled brows, knew he would have to allay their suspicions if he were to gain their cooperation.

"Come in!" He lifted his hands and smiled. "I would have you know that while you were waiting, I called for my scholars and inquired of them about this king. I am told that the place of His birth is not far from here, a small coastal city called Bethlehem. Now tell me, when did this star appear?"

"It appeared at the beginning of the spring months. We recognized it as Jewish and followed it here through the summer."

Herod, still smiling broadly, casually strolled toward the Magi. "This king is very important to our nation. But at the same time, the study of the stars is forbidden to our people. So you see the quandary we're in. On one hand, we want to find and worship Him, but on the other, we cannot follow the star to where He lives."

Herod paused to study their eyes. They appeared sympathetic, and their nods told him that they believed his carefully chosen words.

"I know!" he announced, pretending to have an idea. "Why don't you go and find this child? And when you do, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship Him, too!"

Smiling, the wise man agreed. Herod quickly sent them on their way.

Skulking in the corner of Herod's throne room, invisible to the human eye, Goboth stood listening carefully to the conversation between Herod and the Magi. In the spiritual realm, each nation and province of the world had a demon in charge of it, self-proclaimed princes. Goboth was the demonic Prince of Israel.

Now, with the wise men on their way, Goboth decided to go and inform Satan of what he had learned.

His large scaly wings unfurled, and with one great flap, he disappeared through the floor.

It took only a moment for him to reach the center of the earth, Satan's den. "I bring news from Jerusalem!"

Satan sat like a bird on the large perch at the center of his den. From there, he could view most of his lair and the prisons that held the souls of humanity.

"What news could you possibly bring from that miserable little nation?" Satan hissed sarcastically. "I have risen up Rome to contain their expansion and further dilute their offspring. They have no military, their priests are corrupt, and none of their prophets have spoken for four hundred years. Soon, the earth will no longer know a true Jew!"

Goboth paused long enough to nod in reverence. He did not want to seem to be challenging Satan, so he chose his words carefully. "There is news of the Christ."

Satan's head yanked quickly to the side, and he nearly lost his balance from his perch. Realizing how comical his loss of balance must have appeared, he glanced around, shooting a deathly glare at every smiling face. When he felt satisfied that he had regained his dignity, he dropped from his perch and leaned over Goboth.

"What news of the Christ could you possibly bring me?"

"I've just come from Herod's palace. He just called all the chief priests and scribes to see him, so naturally I followed. At his palace were three scholarly men from Babylon waiting." Goboth paused to look around at the other demons, puffing himself up with importance. "They had traveled from Babylon because they were convinced that the Christ had been born! They said that they had read it in the stars!"

Satan recoiled and looked up at the blackness of the inner earth. For a moment, the faintest sign of fear showed upon his face.

"What is it, Master? The Christ is just another leader. Moses, David . . . they all were foretold by the prophets and none of their influence has changed things. None of Israel's kingdoms has ever matched your kingdoms."

Satan seemed preoccupied in his thoughts. "I don't know. But the prophets have made a big deal about His reign. It seems that each time a great king reigns over Israel, that nation worships God."

Satan stretched out his wings and lifted them high in an effort to impress all who were present. "We have an opportunity to stop this king before he comes into power. That way, his purpose won't matter. I should have done this to David before he became king!"

Satan sprang into the air and disappeared into the darkness.

Moments later, Satan, followed by a dozen demons, appeared in Herod's inner chamber. Herod slept, hunched over a small table, his head leaning on one hand.

"I see the obese one is very concerned about his kingdom," Satan snarled. "It would seem he'd be a little more anxious about another king."

Satan could barely fit into the tiny room. Even so, he managed to lumber close to Herod. Then, he pulled Herod's hand out from under his head, causing Herod's head to slam onto the table with a thud. He looked up, dazed.

"Where are they?" Satan roared at Goboth.

"They left to find the child," Goboth replied.

"*Alone?* He's sent no military escort? How does he expect to *kill* him? How did this fool ever become king?"

Satan stomped over to Herod who was rubbing his eyes. "Where is your sense, you *fool*? You cannot allow that child to live. Send your men after those scholars and find that child! You cannot let him live!"

Herod suddenly sat up straight. "What was I thinking? What if those men don't return? I must send messengers to follow them." He waddled from the chamber. "Send for my guard! I want those men followed! Hurry! Be quick about it!"

Guards left in pursuit of the strangers but were not successful in locating them. For two days, they searched the nearby hills and valleys in vain. Finally, they gave up and returned to Herod's palace.

In a stable just outside the small city of Bethlehem, an angel appeared to Joseph. At first, he was startled by the visitor's sudden appearance. Then, Joseph remembered him from another visit over a year earlier. The angel stood almost twice the size of a typical Jew, over eight feet tall. He was clothed in a garment so white it seemed to glow.

Joseph wasn't really afraid of him, though a normal man of this size and stature would probably incite fear. Instead, he was captivated by the strange being.

"Joseph, you must take your child and his mother and flee from this place. Even as we speak, Herod is marshaling his troops to seek out and kill the young child."

"Where should I go?"

"Go to Egypt. Leave now."

Joseph wasted no time in packing their few belongings and quickly headed south along the coast line. He wasn't aware of Joatham's presence nearby.

Over the next weeks, as Joseph and his family journeyed from city to city, angels watched from a distance. The most important part of their task was to bring no attention to the infant. While Herod's army slaughtered all the young male children in Bethlehem and its surrounding cities in an attempt to kill the Christ, Satan and his demonic forces came to believe that the Christ was killed in the massacre.

At the center of the earth, Satan listened to the reports from his confidants.

"We have searched the cities and fields all about Bethlehem," a snake-like demon with long fangs reported. "There is not one male child left alive. The Christ must have been annihilated."

Satan stared indiscriminately at the cave walls before him. "My only regret," he fumed, his deep voice raspy with disappointment, "is that I wasn't there to see the child killed myself. It was too easy..."

He turned to his legions waiting in the shadows and pointed upward. "Go now to all the servants of the Almighty, and see if they are speaking. I want to know of any prophecy that comes from their lips, no matter how insignificant it seems.

"Look also for Michael's angels. If I know Michael -- and I do know him -- he will have his angels at the young child's side."

For the next months, Satan waited, half anticipating a bad report that the child was still alive. However, as the months turned into a year, followed by a second year, Satan and his legion of demons gave up the search. He had won!

Several years passed before Joseph returned to Israel. The child was now a scraggly youth who walked alongside his father's donkey carrying the small wooden horse Joseph had crafted for him. Upon arriving in the city of Nazareth, Joseph immediately found work and soon set up small shop building furniture.

The angels continued to watch from a distance, well-hidden, as the years passed. Since no prophet had ever come from Nazareth, and no prophecy addressed that town, Satan's informers usually ignored it. Other than the lowest of demon spirits, those which cause physical and mental sickness, demonic activity was inconsequential there.

Joshua by the Hebrew tongue, or Jesus by the Greek, was the best kept secret of the kingdom of God. Because He lived in the city, He could make regular visits to the synagogue were He studied carefully the Word of the Almighty, His Father. He continued to grow in knowledge and wisdom. However, because He didn't teach, prophesy, or demonstrate spiritual leadership, He wasn't considered a threat. All He did was ask questions. Because of this, news of His existence never traveled beyond the regional demonic lord.

7

The Anointing

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (Isaiah 9:2)."

It was a day not unlike any other. A few white fluffy clouds dotted the distant sky while the hot sun burned down on the hard dry soil of the Jordan valley.

Jesus stood on the bank of the Jordan river and watched the crowds swarm down to be baptized by John, His second cousin. Jesus had met John on several occasions and admired his fiery dedication to the Lord Almighty. He had listened to John discuss the prophecies of the Christ and the way Israel was losing its zeal for Gods righteousness.

John was perfect for the ministry to which the Lord had called him. His short stocky frame was solid muscle, covered only by a thick layer of coarse curly brown hair, a vest and skirt of skins, and a thick leather belt. Together with his unkempt mop of wavy brown hair and his scraggly beard, his appearance was most intimidating. He had done his part to prepare the way of the Lord.

Jesus knew that it was now His turn. He was ready to begin His ministry.

John had just baptized a young woman for repentance when he noticed Jesus wading out to him. From his youth, his mother had told him of the day that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had come to visit her and

the prophecies that had been fulfilled. Jesus was the Christ!

Jesus appeared to be quite John's opposite. He was just an average Hebrew with skinny limbs and a small frame. Gentle and soft-spoken, he certainly was not the sort of person one would generally think of as a king. At first, John thought that Jesus was coming out to minister with him. Perhaps to help baptize? However, noting that Jesus was wearing just a skirt around His waist, it quickly became apparent that ministering to others was not His intent.

"Why do You come to me when it is I that has need of Your baptism?" asked John.

"Let Me do this, John," Jesus insisted. "Can it be wrong for us to do all that the Law requires?"

More questions, John observed. It seemed to be His way. He never came right out and preached. He just asked pointed questions. Questions that always made more sense than all the teachings from all the Pharisees put together.

Without further delay, John took Jesus and announced with a loud voice, "I baptize You for repentance."

Not far away, Joatham stood poised and ready for battle. He slid his fingers along the contour of his slender sword and slowly tightened them around the handle. It wouldn't be long now. After hiding for over thirty years, he was completely prepared for this day. Any moment now, the secret would be out, and every demon at the earth's center would come storming to this place.

Far above, at the throne of the Most High, Michael and Gabriel stood in reverence. Suddenly, the

Glory of the Lord broke forth, exploding outward toward the small rotating orb known as the earth.

The baptism seemed normal enough as John lowered Jesus into the water. It was almost routine. Then suddenly, as he lifted Jesus back up, a brilliant light split the clear noon sky. A light brighter than the sun, brighter than anything John had ever seen before. It was as if the heavens opened and the Glory of God suddenly burst forth upon the earth.

Then a voice boomed from the light and echoed back from the distant mountains. "This is My beloved Son, and I am extremely pleased with everything He has done."

After that, the light diminished and appeared to be swallowed up by a descending bird. A dove. The dove descended straight down toward Jesus, then vanished into His chest.

Almost at once, Jesus seemed to change. Although nothing had altered physically, He was noticeably different somehow. He seemed to glow.

Joatham rushed forth with his garrison and quickly took up a defensive perimeter around the Christ.

Satan was sitting on his perch at the center of the earth biding his time when the light of the Glory of the Almighty penetrated the earth and exploded throughout his den. He tottered from his perch trying to cover himself with his wings. The voice of God Almighty echoed through the den as He addressed His Son.

How could this be? Satan wondered. *What Son? God's Son was in heaven above. Wasn't He?*

Then, as suddenly as it came, the brilliant light was gone. Satan gathered himself up and looked around, fuming. Demons all about him were likewise standing. It was the Christ! It had to be! But how had He escaped death? Where had He hidden? And where was He now?

Satan lifted his wings and bolted up through the earth. He was met by Garuth, his Prince over the territory of Galilee.

"Where?" he thundered.

"This way." Garuth replied as he swung about and headed for the Jordan Valley.

Satan scanned the valley for -- something. But what?

Then he saw it. Far below, in the river, a crowd had gathered around that rogue prophet known as John the Baptist. Since none of the religious leaders seemed impressed by John's ministry, he had dismissed him as a lunatic, just another doomsday prophet, here today and gone tomorrow.

However, there at John's side was an unknown man whose soul glowed with the fiery presence of the Spirit of God. Surrounding the unknown man was Joatham and a small garrison of angels.

"Joatham!" Satan muttered. "So He's the One."

Satan slowed to a stop and hovered above as he studied the spectacle.

"What is that?" Satan's long bony finger pointed accusingly at the unusual man below them.

"His name is Jesus," Garuth tried to explain as he backed away. "He's not a teacher nor a religious leader. He's been nothing of concern."

"You have failed me, Garuth," Satan seethed. "Just as it was with Moses. He was hidden in a basket, and you know what kind of trouble he caused me!"

Satan lowered himself to the riverbank and studied the crowd. Mysteriously, it lacked the presence of the Pharisees. In fact, there were no Jewish religious leaders here at all. With such a spectacle as just took place, they ought to be crawling everywhere.

"Then they must not know about this," Satan growled. "They were just as uninformed."

His eyes settled on the little hairy man beside the Christ. "But you knew, didn't you?" He turned to Garuth. "I will give you one chance to redeem yourself."

"What is it, my lord?"

"Kill the Baptist. Maybe we can contain this thing. We must keep this Christ from being accepted by the religious leaders. I want a plan as soon as I return."

As Jesus moved away from the river, Satan kept his distance from Joatham and his sword as he followed behind. Jesus appeared to be heading for the wilderness. Around Satan, more and more demons began to gather. For now, they would watch and wait. After all, Satan needed time to study the Christ and devise a plan. He may be God's Son, but He was still a man, and a man could be killed!

Satan watched the Christ making His way deep into the wilderness. Once there, He settled in near a small brook and prayed. He continued to do this night and day without eating. Except for an occasional drink from the brook, the Christ had absolutely nothing to sustain Him. *Good*, Satan thought. *Get nice and weak, for that is when I can be most effective.*

As the days passed, Satan ran over in his mind everything that he knew about the Christ. He sat through many dry lectures listening to the religious

leaders proclaim the interpretations of the prophecies concerning the Christ.

They all seemed to agree that the Christ would be a great monarch who would follow in the ways of David. He would overthrow the Roman rule of Israel and usher in an age of peace. It all made sense according to the scriptures. However, in light of their recent failure to realize that the Christ had arrived, he now questioned whether he could accept anything they taught.

Still, there was the most haunting question: why did the Almighty choose to send His own Son for this? Michael would have been a much better selection for a warrior king.

As much as he didn't want to consider it, he knew that he must take this up with the Almighty. So, with out-stretched wings, he soared upward into the sky. Michael's angels, who stood watch at heaven's gate, met Satan with swords extended. Not that they could keep him from entering. They couldn't. Satan still had a claim to heaven. It was just that Michael liked Satan to know that he was not welcome there.

As Satan sauntered ahead, they gave way to allow him entrance. However, as always, one of the guarding angels escorted him everywhere he went. This time, Satan did not come just to irritate Michael. He went straight for the Almighty's Throne Room and boldly entered.

"You have sent Your Son to be born of man?" Satan asked rhetorically. "I thought this was a test of the angels?"

"Thou hast something to ask Me, Satan?"

"Okay, I will come out and ask. I thought it was understood that the earth was given as man's dominion, which they freely gave to me. So what is Your Son doing on the earth?"

"The earth is given to man for their dominion just as You suppose, and My Son has been born of man. Earth's dominion is now at His command."

Satan's contorted face showed the slightest evidence of fear, but he quickly recovered. "If He were born of man, He would be born into slavery of sin."

"My Son's father is not Adam. He was conceived of My Spirit."

Satan's countenance dropped. "You seek to contaminate this test!" He shook his fist, losing his composure. "This test is not about You and Your Son, it is about the angels!"

"Part of thy challenge from the beginning was that since I cannot be tempted, I am unable to judge thee. So, I shall allow thee to tempt Me through My Son. Every temptation known to man may be presented to Him. He understandeth who He is and My purpose for His life. But He remembereth nothing of His life before with Me. Just as every other one of my servants, He must walk by faith and trust Me. So go and try Him. Prove Him worthy to be thy judge. The day cometh when He and the rest of My servants shall take back the dominion of the earth and sit in judgment of thee and thy fallen angels."

Satan shook with anger as he pointed his long bony finger at the Almighty. "Not while I'm lord of the earth! If He's flesh and blood, He can be tempted! He has cravings, hidden desires, and I will find them!"

Then Satan turned to leave but stopped to look back once again with a sardonic smile. "If He's flesh and blood, He can even bleed. Have You ever seen Your Son suffer? Maybe You should have thought twice about sending Him to me." He then turned, lifted his bat-like wings, and bolted away.

Had he stayed a moment longer he would have heard the Lord Almighty reply, “I have thought of that, Satan. That’s why I sent My Son. No one else could endure the temptation and suffering that He must. I know that to be true, for none of my servants have for over four thousand years.”

Satan was long past heaven’s gate before the Lord had even finished his remark. Michael’s guarding angel followed alongside him as far as the gate. Satan continued back to the earth, to the little brook where Jesus sat. Upon his arrival, Jesus looked up and acknowledged him.

“So, I’m visible to your eye,” Satan commented, moving as close as Joatham would allow.

Jesus said nothing. He just bowed his head and continued to pray.

Then something very unexpected happened. Joatham stepped aside and let Satan through. It was quite a surprise to Satan. He studied Joatham carefully. Could it be a trap? No, it was a setup, Satan supposed. If he killed the Son of God, he would only make the Almighty’s case for Him. No, at this point he dared not kill Jesus. He must destroy the Christ!

Satan’s huge bulky frame made a chore of sidestepping through the ranks of angels to get close to Jesus. Once in, he examined the Christ more carefully. He was just a man: he possessed the same frail physical frame known to all mankind.

“You look terrible,” Satan suggested.

Jesus, however, did not seem to acknowledge his presence.

Satan paced around Jesus. “I have just come from talking with the Almighty. He claims that the dominion of this earth is given to You.”

He reached down and scooped up a handful of rocks, pretending to study them. Then, he turned to face Jesus. "You're not the Christ, are you? Pity. I was so looking forward to meeting Him. After all, look at You. You are just a man, and a poor excuse for one at that. You are nothing special to look upon or listen to. You are only a man and nothing more. After all, who are You really fooling? Even the angels bear more of a resemblance to the Almighty than You do."

He shook his head in feigned disappointment. "Don't think that these angels are a sign of Your divinity. The scriptures talk about many servants of the Almighty having angelic protection. You are nothing more than a man."

Satan turned to leave but stopped as if having an idea. "You are hungry, and I must know if indeed you are the Christ." He put his hand under his chin, pretending to contemplate. "I've got it!" Satan held out the stones. "If you're really the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread and feed Your hunger. That way, we'd both know the truth."

Jesus finally looked up at Satan. The suggestion seemed reasonable enough, but he knew its true purpose was cleverly hidden. The suggestion wasn't about food at all. To do what Satan asked would be seeking proof of God instead of walking by faith. Action imposed by a heart full of doubt.

"Truth? Your concept of truth is most interesting." Jesus understood what Satan's dark heart could never comprehend: submission to God's Lordship required faith without proof. And faith was all the proof he needed.

Jesus stood to face Satan. "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'"

Satan stepped back and re-evaluated this man. Every prophet he had dealt with in the past had doubts and insecurities about his calling. Could His faith be such that He needed no proof from God of His ministry?

Satan decided to shift the focus of his challenge. He reached down, took the Christ in his bony talons, and flew upward. Moments later, they settled down on the highest tower of the temple.

Satan stepped back and swept his arm out indicating everything around them. "Look at this beautiful temple. It is filled with men just like You who believe they are called of the Almighty. However, You are so arrogant You actually consider Yourself to be the Christ? Well, I don't!"

Satan leaned close to Jesus until his face was just a few feet away from Jesus' face. "If you are really God's Son -- I mean *really* God's Son -- then His word would mean everything to You. Every commandment you will keep, and every prophecy you will fulfill."

Satan glanced around, and then leaned even closer to Jesus. "The Scriptures say, 'He shall give His angels charge over thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

Satan straightened into an upright position and placed his bony claws on his hips. "Prove it!" he snarled. "Leap from here, and prove the Scriptures true! Unless, of course, You know You are just a fraud."

It was truly an admirable argument, Jesus considered, turning his focus away from the people milling around below to look at Satan. It was still the

same challenge, except that this time, instead of requiring proof from God for Himself, He would be seeking it for someone else. Now that would be arrogant.

"You wrest the Scriptures to your own damnation." Jesus answered. "The Scriptures also say, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'"

Once again, Satan was impressed with how easily the Christ saw through his cleverly devised challenge. *He's not given to doubt, nor is He given to pride*, Satan observed. However, he wasn't about to concede yet. He had another idea.

Satan reached down and lifted the Christ with his bony claw. He flew up to the highest mountain overlooking the Jordan Valley. From there, even the Mediterranean Sea was visible. Jesus stood silently, taking in the awesome sight while Satan slowly paced around Him. "You have seen the puny angels that guard You, but do any match my power? They have no kingdom to show You. They are constantly on guard or they would be destroyed by my legions. Is that really the life You want to choose? Come with me, and I will show You the kingdoms I rule."

In a single motion, he scooped up the Christ and flew away. He brought Jesus first to Egypt to show Him the great Egyptian empire. He flew over the great pyramids, then on to Rome, a spectacular city of great wealth. From there, they flew on to Greece, then Babylon, and China. On and on they traveled, visiting one powerful kingdom after another, while Satan boasted the greatness of each. In the end, they returned to the same pinnacle upon which they had started their journey.

"Now You have seen what I have to offer You. Have the angels shown You a single village under their

domain? No! They have no kingdom! Everything you have heard about God's kingdom is a fairy tale! It does not exist, or they would be able to show it to You!"

Satan bent close and hissed into His ear. "It is yours. All of it. Just say the word, and I will give You this wondrous beautiful world to rule."

Satan straightened and waited smugly for a response.

Jesus was appalled. To accept anything from Satan would mean subjecting Himself to Satan. "You're asking Me to worship you. If it were the universe and all of heaven you offered to me I could not -- I would not -- accept. It is written: 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

Satan clenched his fists in anger and frustration. Such stubborn dedication to the Almighty in defiance of what he could offer was inconceivable. Jesus was too much like that fool angel Michael. Then, with a screeching roar, smoke pouring from his nostrils, he tore away from the Christ.

Satan's temptations may have failed, but all of this had given him another idea. He landed near the brook where his legion waited.

"Listen up! The Christ is no ordinary man. He's not given to doubt or pride, which suggests He probably does not care what anyone else thinks about Him. We can use this, and the fact that no one has recognized Him as being the Christ to turn the religious leaders against Him. Take every opportunity to turn whatever the Christ says into a threat or attack against the religious leaders' authority. If they reject

His influence, He will never be king. We will get them to do our work for us."

A moment later, Joatham and his garrison arrived on the temple roof where Jesus stood. They brought Him back to the brook and provided Him food to end His fast. Jesus understood that the worst was yet to come. He had faced Satan. Now He must face His own people, people so backslidden that they could not even recognize the God they thought they worshipped when He stood in their very presence.

8

The Ministry

"The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD... (Isaiah 61:1-2)."

Jesus returned from the wilderness glowing with the Spirit of God. This was something completely new in the spiritual realm, something deserving close attention from Satan.

In the past four thousand years, the Spirit of God had come upon prophets and enlightened them. Each prophet's enlightenment would gradually wear off. So it was generally understood that God's spiritual union with the prophets was never permanent.

However, God's Spirit seemed to become an integral part of the Christ, as if the Spirit of God had permanently bonded with Him. He seemed completely baptized in it, as though an infinite spring gushed forth from the Christ's innermost being.

At the same time, it seemed like an all-consuming fire. It was as if His spirit were ablaze with the Spirit of God, fueled by an inexhaustible supply. The fire just never went out. Everywhere He went this Holy Fire seemed to spread to others. Since His baptism, He no longer possessed an ordinary living soul like the rest of humanity. The Christ seemed to

possess a “life-giving” Spirit that He freely imparted to everyone He met.

Upon leaving the wilderness, Jesus came to Capernaum. Since it was the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and began to teach.

He didn’t teach as the scribes, who merely reiterated what was already written in the law. To them, good teaching was that which further defined the law in yet more detail. The scribes believed that the law dealt with the outward actions and appearances of the Hebrew. However, Jesus knew that the law was given so that mankind might understand the purposes of God.

And so Jesus began teaching a new revelation of God’s word that dealt directly with the heart of mankind. He quickly tore away the facade that the scribes and Pharisees had imposed, unmasking the underlying hypocrisy. People were amazed by His teachings and flocked to His side. News of the Teacher spread like wildfire.

Satan and his closest advisors flew a good distance away and watched. Because of the spiritual light that emanated from the Christ, it was extremely difficult to get close to Him. What was worse: the light only seemed to be getting brighter. As he listened to the Christ teach, Satan understood why Jesus did not give in to temptations. This was no ordinary man. The Spirit that burned in His soul gave Him the wisdom of God.

“We must determine His intentions,” Satan hissed.

“It appears this Christ is more of a teacher than a conqueror,” Garuth offered. “All He does is go from synagogue to synagogue and teach the law. Do we really have anything to fear from Him?”

"Fool!" Satan spat at his servant. "That's what you said about that shepherd boy, David. Then he became their greatest king!"

Satan looked down below at the temple and the crowd that was gathering. "I don't believe that is all He is up to. I think there is much more. I want you to find a man over whom we have complete control. Send him into the crowd. Let us see how the Christ handles direct confrontation from one of His own kind. If we can scare the people, maybe they will stay away from Him."

Abruptly, a messenger bolted out, located another demon who possessed a man, and instructed it what to do.

The demon took control of the man and drove him into the temple. Once it entered the temple, the light from God's Spirit flooded the room and blinded the demon. The demon thrashed about, crying out in pain.

"Please!" the man shrieked in his unearthly demon's voice. "Don't torment me anymore with your light!" He thrashed about and rolled on the floor, foam dripping from his mouth.

People scattered in every direction. Jesus watched calmly without a word.

"Though these people are without a clue, we know who You are. You are the Holy One of God!" The demon gripped tightly to the soul of the man in a desperate attempt to remain in control. The pain was so unbearable -- paralyzing. The demon struggled in vain to rise and charge the Christ.

"Not another word," Jesus commanded, quietly but firmly. He pointed his finger at the demon. "Now, come out of him."

The demon screamed as the blinding light burst forth from the Christ, blistering its scaly skin. Then, with a spasmodic jerk, its grip on the man's soul was wrent, and it tumbled out of the temple. Still screaming, but no longer through the man, the smoldering demon streaked away.

The disheveled man pulled himself off the floor and looked around. A smile slowly crossed his face, and he began to cry. "Thank you for freeing me. Thank you."

Satan watched the demon bolt high into the air and then down into the ground heading for their den. "That is not what I had in mind." He turned his bulky head to smirk at Garuth. "Do you still feel that He presents us with no problems? We have a serious predicament here. The light from His Spirit not only exposes us to mankind but also causes us to lose our grip on their souls. We can no longer hide in the souls of mankind as long as He is near."

Satan barrel-rolled down to the city walls. He and his confidants perched there watching the temple. "If He continues casting out our spirits that are possessing human hosts, we could end up with a serious threat to our kingdom."

I stood confounded by what had just taken place. "All this time, I believed that demons were cast out of people by a sort of exorcism!" I exclaimed. "That is to say, with the right prayer, an adequate amount of fasting, the correct commands, and through stubborn persistence, the devil would get tired and leave."

"Truth is the fuel that the fire of God's Spirit consumes," the angel explained. "Truth is the Word of God. The more a life conforms to God's Word, the

greater the flame of God's Spirit burns, and the brighter that light glows from his being. The Christ conformed absolutely to God's Word, and therefore, His being blazed forth an irresistible light which none of the princes of darkness could contest."

Jesus continued ministering throughout the territory unopposed by the forces of darkness. Wherever He traveled, He left a wake of spiritually cleansed and physically whole people.

"You are troubled by what you see?"

Apparently, the look on my face reflected the doubt that was in my soul. "I guess I just don't understand. If it is God's will to heal us, then why allow sickness and disease in the world? Why poverty?"

"It is not God who brings your sicknesses, your wars, or your starving children. God gave to man a perfect world that had none of these things. That was God's will. Mankind chose to surrender himself as the servant of Satan and gave that perfect dominion to him. As long as mankind submits himself to Satan, he must suffer the pains that Satan imposes on his subjects. The world you know, and all of its pain, is not brought about by God nor is it His will. It is carefully controlled and designed by its master, Satan."

"But people all over the world believe such evil is in some way God's fault."

"God sent His only begotten Son from a heaven of perfection into your world of pain to provide a way to escape the sufferings you've come to know. It is not God's will that any should suffer or perish, but that all would know the joy and freedom of life everlasting which He offers."

I turned back to look at the Christ, knowing full well the pain that lay waiting for Him...

Jesus entered the city of Nazareth, and, because it was the Sabbath, He headed for the synagogue. He was in His hometown, around people with whom He had grown up and known all His life.

Satan was waiting in the synagogue and stood at the front, beside the chief Pharisee, Simon. The demonic forces had been watching the Christ for several weeks, plotting their next offensive against Him. This would be the first test of the effectiveness of their guile. Since they could not confront the Christ directly, they would do it through people. If everything went according to plan, their deceit would turn against Him the very people from whom the Christ needed support.

"He's coming now," Satan hissed into Simon's ear.

Simon looked up and frowned at the door. He had heard the stories for weeks about the miracles and teachings of Jesus. It was particularly embarrassing for him. This self-proclaimed Christ had lived among his people for thirty years, and all the while, Simon had remained unaware of His anointing.

Familiar with the habits of the Christ, Satan continued his manipulation of Simon's thoughts. "Just watch. He will sit in the back and watch smugly. He thinks He's better than you are. He'll put as much distance between Himself and you as He can. He's trying to make his disassociation with you and your council clear to everyone."

Satan could see the veins in Simon's neck begin to bulge, his jaw tighten. It was working. Now

it wouldn't matter what Jesus did or said. Nothing He had to say would be accepted by this man.

Satan lumbered around to the front of the synagogue, settling himself at the center of the other council Pharisees. "There He is!" Satan screeched as the Christ entered the doorway. The emanating light was excruciating; Satan lifted a large wing to shield himself. "He is the One! That self-appointed Messiah has come here to embarrass you!"

At once, the Pharisees stirred, whispering amongst themselves as Jesus entered and sat at the back corner.

Blisters were already forming on Satan's leathery hide. "You have no idea all the things He has been saying about you in private!" No longer able to manage the torment, he lurched from the synagogue.

According to Hebrew custom, anyone who wished to read from the law could stand and wait his turn for the book of the prophet to be brought to him. To everyone's surprise, Jesus stood. High above Him, in the rafters, Joatham and his garrison sat and watched.

Jesus was given the book of the prophet Isaiah, and He opened it to read. Everyone sat in anticipation, waiting to hear what Jesus would say.

"'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,'" Jesus began. It was a familiar prophecy of the Christ, one of the most popular. "'Because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'"

Jesus scanned the crowd that had gathered. Their faces stared back at Him in hopeful expectation.

"This day," He paused for effect, "is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Smiles crossed the faces of the crowd about him, and they turned to whisper to each other. Their wait for the coming Messiah was now over, for here He was standing in their midst, bringing miracles and healing with Him.

Their joy, however, was short-lived. Their whispering was interrupted by a loud voice from the front. It was that of Simon. "Is this not Joseph's son whom we have known since His youth?" Simon's face was hard as stone, his voice trembled. "How is it that He is now the Christ? We cannot blindly accept anyone's claim to be the Christ!"

The people looked back to Jesus for an answer to these charges. What had begun as a joyous hope for deliverance was quickly turning into doubtful skepticism.

"No prophet has ever been without honor . . ." Jesus replied. "Except in his own country."

Satan stood outside the temple, doubled up in laughter as he watched the confrontation. "They haven't a clue!" he boasted. "This will be so much easier than I ever dreamed! Those fools are looking straight at God's own Son, and *they haven't got a clue*!"

Jesus was prepared for this rejection. "During the days that Elias was alive, there were many widows that were without food. However, it was to a Sarepta widow from a city of Sidon that he was sent."

Jesus looked over the crowd again. No longer did they have hungry eyes and hopeful faces. "Remember also Elise," Jesus continued. "There were many lepers in Israel during his time, and yet he was sent to none of them. Who was it that he did clean? Wasn't it Naaman the Syrian?"

Jesus fixed his gaze directly on Simon. "Israel is full of arrogant hypocrites who refuse to acknowledge their prophets. So why should I expect any different treatment?"

Simon shook, let out an angry squawk, and tore his garment in two. The other council members followed his lead, tearing their robes as well. The men closest to Jesus grabbed Him and pulled Him down the street away from the temple. Behind them followed the Pharisees, with robes torn and heads held high. They were the protectors of their faith and would not allow such insolent behavior.

Satan swooped over the crowd and landed by Simon. "He's committed blasphemy!"

"Blasphemer!" Simon echoed.

"Throw Him from the cliffs as a demonstration and warning to others!"

"Throw Him from the cliffs!"

The crowd had grown in size, shouting as they pulled Jesus outside the city to a cliff. Joatham and his angels set up a barrier at the ledge. They stood shoulder to shoulder, waiting for the crowd to reach them.

Several men took hold of Jesus and shoved Him over the edge. But instead of falling, Jesus stopped, seemingly in mid-air, then turned around and stepped back onto the cliff's edge. Without a word, He walked back toward the crowd. Everyone stood watching, wide-eyed and silent. As He approached them, they parted, leaving a channel through which He passed, leaving the crowd gaping after Him.

"Well, it was worth a try," Satan laughed as his eyes met Joatham's. "Tell your Master that His own people just tried to kill His Son. Tell Him, while you are at it, to pack His bags and leave. He is not wanted

on this planet." Satan then laughed loudly and flew away.

To his satisfaction, the Christ was not accepted. If he could so easily turn these arrogant people against Jesus, little else was of concern. The effectiveness of the Christ would be limited. For now, he would continue stirring up the religious community against the Christ and continue his study of Him.

9

Lord of the Earth

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)."

The hot sun bore down on them as Jesus and His disciples climbed onto the unsteady little boat docked near a small fishing community on the Sea of Galilee. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, offered his steadying hand to Jesus. The boat belonged to one of Peter's friends who agreed to make the trip at no charge.

Jesus had just finished teaching a large crowd of people and now sought refuge aboard the bobbing vessel. Even so, the water was already dotted with similar tiny vessels attempting still to follow after Him.

It wasn't that Jesus didn't enjoy teaching them. Nor did He feel that helping the needy was in any way a terrible burden. But the continual demand on Him by such a steady stream of people gave Him no opportunity to rest. Occasionally, He became so fatigued that He had no choice but to escape and recuperate.

Today was one such day. He was beyond exhaustion, and His only desire was to find a place to lie down for a short while. The trip across the sea would give Him that opportunity. The distance across wasn't great, but at this point, even a few hours of

uninterrupted rest would help. The Sea of Galilee was actually less than ten miles across, but sailing against the wind would make it seem more like fifteen. He lay down in the boat's tiny cabin and quickly nodded off.

Though Peter had given up fishing in order to follow Jesus, he continued to be a fisherman at heart. He kept a worried eye on the storm that was slowly rolling in from the opposite side of the sea. It was not normal practice for a fisherman to venture out onto the water when a storm threatened, but then the One requesting the trip was not the average man. After all, who could refuse the wishes of the man who heals everyone who comes to Him and from whom demons flee? So, without discussion, they pushed off from shore.

About halfway across, the sky had darkened considerably and the wind started whipping the sails. It was too late to turn around, so they turned the boat into the wind. Peter was particularly disturbed; he had naturally assumed that nothing bad would happen to them since the Christ was in their boat. But here they were, the wind howling about them, the waves splashing over the bow. Soon the little boat was floundering to stay on course. Yet through the din, Jesus remained sound asleep, oblivious to the chaos.

As water began filling the boat, the men became certain of their impending death. The other boats had drifted away and were no longer in sight. For all they knew, those boats had already sunk.

Everyone was searching for something solid upon which to cling as the boat tipped sharply and water rushed across the deck. Peter finally conceded the obvious: they were sinking. He made his way across the pitching vessel to the cabin. He lingered over the sleeping Christ, hesitant to awaken Him. But

when yet another horrendous wave washed over them, he had a sudden change of heart.

Shaking in fear, he grabbed a hold of Jesus. "Master! Master! Don't you care that we're all about to perish?"

Jesus awoke to the violent tempest and slowly rose to His feet. With great effort, He overcame His deep sleep, steadied Himself, and left the cabin to face the perilous storm. The wind and rain beat violently against His body, drenching Him instantly. He glanced aside to see His disciples: some were clinging to the sides of the boat, others struggling in vain to rid the hull of the encroaching water, all crying out in panic and fear.

"Wind," He shouted into the blackness of the storm, "What is this squall with which You threaten us? Sea, your waves are an offense unto Me!"

Jesus then looked directly into Peter's eyes. Peter could see that nature's behavior had angered Him personally somehow.

Jesus turned back to face the sky. "Let there be peace here and now! Let the waves be still!"

Immediately, it was as if the storm ceased to exist. All at once, the wind stopped blowing. The sea became calm for as far as they could see, and the huge black storm cloud vanished from the sky. The bright sun bore down on them once again.

All was silent.

Peter looked around in amazement, not knowing what to say. He was humbled by what had just taken place. At the same time, he was fearful of the power that the Christ had just demonstrated.

Jesus turned to Peter. "Why were you so afraid?"

As Peter watched Him, he understood that this wasn't a rhetorical question. Jesus truly didn't

understand their fear. But Peter had no answer to give Him.

"Why didn't you just believe?"

As Peter stood idly, mouth agape, groping for words, the Christ turned around and returned to the boat's little cabin.

Peter looked at the other disciples who were likewise despondent. At first, no on could speak a single word. They all had mixed emotions, somewhere between fear and astonishment. There were no adequate words to effectively express their feelings. There was only the sound of water dripping from their drenched clothing.

Finally, Peter approached the others. "He sleeps? He can go to sleep after this?"

Another disciple, James, touched his arm. "Did you see what happened, Peter?"

"He scolded the wind and the sea as if they were alive..." Peter reflected as he scanned the sea around them. "And they listened to Him."

I, of course, had read this story many times, but being there to see it for myself somehow brought it to life in ways that I can't describe.

"Why did you show me this?" I asked the angel.

"Dominion of the earth was given to the sons of man," the angel replied. "Without a man to exercise that dominion, nature remains out of control."

"I thought Jesus could do this because of His faith in the power of God."

"It was not God to whom the wind and waves listened that day. They hearkened to the voice of a Man who was Himself free from the bondage of sin, who believed in the dominion which God had given Him. This is the dominion which must be returned to

the children of God after they shake themselves from the bondage of sin."

I stood amazed, unable to conceive of this type of dominion. However, a scripture I had learned as a child took on a whole new meaning: "What is man that thou art mindful of him?"

10

Times of Testing

"For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist (Luke 21:15)."

As Jesus continued His ministry, Satan was learning more and more about the Christ. The Son of God engaged in the most unusual and unpredictable behaviors. Why had none of the religious leaders he had monitored so carefully over the years ever spoken of Him? Why was the Christ so different from them? He seemed to be a friend to the sinner. In many respects, He seemed to get along better with the Publicans than the religious community.

Hadn't the Almighty always instructed His people through prophecy about anything special He was about to do? And always in great detail? Why then, were they so ignorant of the Christ's ways?

It made no sense at all. Jesus didn't appear to resemble the Christ of the scriptures, at least not the way the Jews had always understood and taught them.

Satan decided to give up trying to glean information from the Hebrews and focus instead on using these religious leaders against the Christ. Somehow, he had to get everyone lined up against Him, and that would not be an easy task. So many of the Jews really wanted to believe that this Jesus was the Messiah.

I stood atop a nearby hill and watched Jesus and His disciples sit down by a well to rest. Jesus was

exceptionally tired from a day of ministry and journey. The disciples were less tired and convinced Jesus to allow them to continue on into the city to purchase food.

As they left, the angel pointed to a house on the other side of the hill. Demons were busy there, constantly going in and out. Finally, a woman left the house, walking in the direction of the well carrying an empty basin.

Jesus watched the Samaritan woman draw near to the well. She stopped when she saw Him and looked around for others. Having satisfied herself that He was alone, she continued over to the well. Jesus was aware that she must have recognized Him as Hebrew from His dress and grooming, even though she didn't seem bothered by that fact.

She smiled seductively, loosening her robe slightly at the neck. Her eyes met His, flirting with Him as she pulled her basin from the well.

Satan flew to the top of the hill and watched. "Go ahead, Jesus of Nazareth," he grinned. "Look closely at the tender smile she has for you. Notice the softness of her skin..."

Being yet a young man in His early thirties, Jesus did notice the way she responded to His presence. He was tempted as any other man would be. He recognized the opportunity to let the strongest of physical impulses have its way. But His desire to complete His purpose subjugated the fleshly desires before Him. He was resolved never to give in to sin.

"Would you give Me some water?"

The woman cocked her head, deliberately misreading His innocent request. "It's quite unusual

for a Hebrew to ask a Samaritan woman for anything. Just what is it that You really want?"

Jesus looked into her hurting heart. Years of abuse as a child had molded her into a woman who subconsciously sought out abusive men.

"You think I'm Hebrew?" Jesus paused just long enough for her heart to wonder. "If you really knew who I was, and if you really understood the gift God has given mankind, you would have asked Me to give you a drink of water that can bring the dead to life!"

The woman set down her basin and looked at Him curiously. "You don't have a basin to draw water from a well as deep as this, so I know You're not talking about this well. And before our father dug this well, there was no water in this valley at all. So if You're not speaking of this well water, from just where will You get it? Tell me, where is Your water?"

Jesus struggled to His tired feet, put His hand on her basin and shook it. Some of the water splashed out.

"Go ahead and drink this water. You'll just end up thirsty again, and you'll need to come back for more." He caught her eye and continued earnestly, "The water I'm talking about creates a life-giving spring within your heart. Its supply never runs dry. You'll never, ever thirst again."

The woman's countenance lit up. "Please, sir, I would like to try this water. I get so tired of having to carry this basin full of water home each night."

Jesus smiled. "Okay, then go get your husband and bring him here."

Her shining smile quickly turned into a guilty frown. "But I have no husband."

"That's an accurate statement. You don't have a husband. The fact is you've had five men live with

you as husbands, and the man who's living with you now is not your husband either."

The woman gasped and stepped away. "So you're a prophet!" She looked Jesus over carefully. Realizing the knowledge He must possess, the questions in her heart poured out. "My people have always worshipped Jehovah on this mountain, but the Hebrews say that we should be worshipping in Jerusalem. I've always wanted to know the truth. Your being a prophet, can You tell me?"

Jesus could sense the longing for God in her heart. She, like so many other people He met, longed for a relationship with God but didn't know where or how to find it.

"There's a time coming when you won't be able to worship God on this mountain or in Jerusalem. In fact, you're out here not even knowing what it is that you worship. At least the Hebrews are closer to the truth.

"Now listen carefully. The time will come when people worshipping God won't do it in a mountain or in a temple. They won't worship in a place at all. They'll do it from their hearts, spiritually. In fact, I'll tell you something even more astonishing. God's actually searching for people to worship Him this way even as we speak."

Fear started showing in the woman's face. "I... I've heard of the Messiah. You know, the one the Jews call Christ. He's supposed to tell us all things when He comes..." Her voice trailed off, not wanting to ask the obvious.

Jesus smiled. "You've been speaking to Him."

The woman had been so caught up in their conversation that she didn't hear the disciples until they were right beside her.

"Why are you talking to a Samaritan?" Peter asked.

The woman was startled and left her pot sitting at the well as she ran off to the city to tell the people what had happened.

I turned to the angel again. "I never realized just how much like us He was."

The angel nodded. "You'll face nothing in your lifetime that He didn't face. He understands your weaknesses more than you might expect. He found victory by turning His temptations into opportunities to glorify God."

The angel took my elbow and took me from the hill. A moment later, we stood near a small village in Israel...

Jesus was teaching a small crowd of people when He saw some of the local religious leaders nearing them. Their pompous behavior demonstrated their need for attention, and their contorted faces mirrored the rage in their hearts.

However, it was the young woman being dragged along by several men that caught His eye. Broken in spirit and body, her hands tied in front of her, the woman was unable to walk on her own. Sobs wracked her frail body, and her face was marred by deep cuts and bruises.

As the men shoved their way through the crowd, Jesus knelt down and began writing in the sand. The men yanked the woman to the front and tossed her on the ground in front of Him. She lay with her face to the ground, weeping softly.

One of the magistrates heading the mob pointed accusingly at the bleeding woman. "This woman was caught in the very act of adultery."

He held his head high, showing off his religious garb so everyone would know his position. "*Our law* says that she should be stoned. What do you say?" He scanned the intimidated faces of the crowd, deliberately avoiding Jesus' eyes.

Jesus had looked up at the man at the emphasis on the words *our law*. His inference that His teachings held out a different law, that He was not part of the Mosaic establishment, angered Jesus. It wasn't their law. It was God's law. Had they really adopted it as their own law, they would have understood that exploitation of the weak was just as much an abomination as the sin of adultery.

Jesus studied the eyes of each man in the mob. Where was the man who had sinned with her? Why was he not bound and dragged here?

He knew this event was designed specifically to trick Him. If He agreed with the mob, He would alienate Himself from the people. If He intervened to prevent her death, He would be branded a heretic. The religious leaders didn't believe He would condemn her and were prepared to use whatever He did against Him.

The crowd hushed as Jesus looked over at the weeping woman. His gaze returned to the men who had brought her. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

He dropped His eyes to the sand and began writing in it. Before long, the men saw His words:

Joshua, son of Caleb, committed adultery with Sarah, daughter of Lahem.

John, son of Philip, stole three of his neighbor's goats.

Nathan, son of Jeremiah, stole his father's robe.

Laben, son of Esau, bribed a magistrate with ten pieces of silver.

The wiser men had disappeared almost at once, and the crowd had completely dissipated within a few moments. He had shamed them. What they had intended to use for condemnation had served only to expose their own sin for all to see.

Finally, after the last man had left, Jesus looked over at the woman, still lying face down in the dirt. "Where are the men who accused you?"

Only then did she lift her tear-stained face to look around. Her questioning eyes turn back to Jesus. He began to unfasten the bonds that tied her wrists together. "They're... they're all... gone?"

"I have not come here to accuse you, either. As for your accusers, I really don't think they'll be bothering you again. Now, you have an opportunity to go your way and start over. Do things differently from now on. This time, live your life without sinning."

11

Betrayal

"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me (Psalm 41:9)."

Satan descended through the ceiling of the high priest's palace and landed on the floor next to where the pompous religious leader sat on his throne. As far as the religious community was concerned, he was the true king of Israel. Satan's enormous bat-like wings neatly folded up behind him as he leaned forward to tower over the high priest, Caiaphas.

"You arrogant fool!" he hissed. "You sit smugly on your little throne while outside that door your people worship Jesus of Nazareth!"

Almost as if he had heard Satan's words, Caiaphas stood and walked over to the window.

"You've said it yourself," Satan continued, following him across the room. "The Christ will come out of Bethlehem! How long are you going to let that puny runt make you look like a fool?" Satan threw his hands up and whispered disgustedly, "Which indeed you are!" He waddled over to the other side of the room, glaring at the books of the law stacked neatly on a golden table.

"You mean to tell me that there's nothing in this law of which He's guilty?" Satan turned back again to Caiaphas. "Do something! Don't just stand by and watch your whole institution blow away in the

wind! Don't worry about public opinion! They already think you're a joke! Jesus has seen to that!"

Caiaphas groaned and covered his face with his hands. Stepping to the doorway, he shouted into the hall, "Call for the elders to come here at once!" He turned back toward his throne. "I'm the protector of this institution."

Satan turned to the demon hordes following him. "Go quickly! Tell the spirits tormenting the disciple Judas that it is time to drive him to see the High Priest."

Certain sympathetic Pharisees were deliberately not invited. By request, others came, joining with Caiaphas in his palace to discuss their mutual problem. Perplexed, they all sat around the large feasting table pondering the reason for the meeting.

"I've tolerated the insolence of this Jesus of Nazareth for far too long. Rumor has it that He is the Christ. Do any of you believe that?"

Every head shook emphatically. Caiaphas was relieved. There were no followers present.

Jason was a respected Pharisee who had followed Jesus' ministry with mild interest. "He has been far too clever than to come right out and claim He's the Christ, especially in our presence. Instead, he always refers to Himself indirectly, with titles such as 'Son of Man' and 'Son of God.' He's very discrete. And clever."

Caiaphas eyed the group and carefully selected his next words. "Can I assume that we are in agreement that this Man is a heretic, and the law requires us to deal with Him?"

"Well, I don't think that we could establish that as a fact, either. He has never come out publicly and stated anything that would constitute heresy."

"Is that opinion shared by everyone here?"

"Maybe not," another Pharisee, Simon, replied. "It was reported to me that He said He would destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. That is a clear threat against God's temple!"

Caiaphas gasped in mock horror. "Blasphemy!"

Jason interrupted. "That's not what He said! His words were, 'Destroy this temple,' implying that someone else would destroy it."

Caiaphas ignored Jason and turned to Simon. "Can you bring more than one witness who heard Him say that?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good. Go and bring them here that I may speak with them."

Simon hurried from the table while the others continued to plot.

Finally, Caiaphas announced, "I might be willing to overlook this man's comments if I thought He was not a threat to our establishment. However, I grow weary of His flagrant disregard for the office of the priesthood. I will do whatever is necessary to protect this institution."

Before long, Simon returned with two of his servants. "These of my servants heard Him say that which I reported to you earlier."

Jason was not impressed. "How convenient for you."

Caiaphas motioned excitedly. "Bring them here that I may question them."

The two servants looked frightened and uncertain, but they stood before the high priest as they were ordered.

"Is it true that the Man Jesus announced His intention to destroy God's temple and rebuild it three days?"

The men shifted nervously, looking at each other and their master, then back at Caiaphas. They nodded.

"Where were you when you heard this thing?" Jason asked.

"Jordan..."

"Jerusalem..."

They responded in unison, and then stopped, not knowing what to do.

"I thought so." Jason turned to Caiaphas. "Obviously these servants have been instructed in their testimony. They would never stand up to closer examination."

Caiaphas looked at his witnesses and knew Jason to be correct. A public trial would only justify Jesus' claims and serve to humiliate him further.

"Oh, I've no intention of holding a public trial," Caiaphas murmured. "I'm calling an emergency meeting. Tonight, before the feast."

"You can't! That is contrary to our law!"

Caiaphas stopped to consider Jason's words. His hesitation indicated his agreement with Jason's reasoning.

Satan, standing in the corner with his demons, knew he had to act quickly. He pointed at Jason. "Shut that man's mouth!"

At once, three large demons bolted over to Jason and began to pelt his stomach. Jason bent over in pain, clutching himself.

Satan lurched toward Caiaphas. “I thought we cleared this up! Desperate times call for desperate measures!”

Caiaphas waved toward the scrolls of the law sitting on the small golden table. “Our very way of worship is in jeopardy! We must act to defend God! We must take whatever steps are necessary to protect our doctrine! I don’t need to tell you what will happen to us if Rome finds out that there is Someone among us claiming to be a King above Caesar!”

One of Caiaphas’ servants, a young man, entered the room and motioned to Caiaphas.

“What is it?”

“One of Jesus’ disciples is here to see you.”

Caiaphas’ mouth dropped open, and he rushed from the room. Out in the large entry room, an anguished man dressed in commoner’s clothing stood wringing his hands. Caiaphas smiled a comforting smile and welcomed him warmly. “Tell me, what can I do for you?”

Judas looked around the impressive room, completely intimidated. Caiaphas could see that, whatever he had come to do, he was now having second thoughts.

“You appear to be a well-educated man.”

“You can tell that?”

“Of course. I am a very good judge of people.”

Satan stepped up to Caiaphas and whispered in his ear. “He’s disillusioned with Jesus! Can’t you see that he’s come to offer Him up? Render him a bribe!”

“As a matter of fact, when I look at you, I can see that you’ve become mixed up in something that you now regret.”

“You can tell that?”

“Of course! A man of your intelligence shouldn’t be stumbling around the countryside in such

poverty. He should be living in this palace with me. I need intelligent men -- such as yourself -- to, uh, advise me."

Judas' eyes widened. Caiaphas knew he was pushing the right buttons. This man was not Jesus' disciple in his heart. He was in it for financial gain. He probably thought he could get rich by living off the people Jesus helped.

What a pathetic man, Caiaphas thought.

Caiaphas reached down to the money pouch at his side and opened it up. "Give me your hand."

Judas eagerly held out an open hand into which Caiaphas emptied the contents of the bag. Thirty pieces of silver. It wasn't much, but it was more than he had had before.

"Well? Will you come to work for me? There is much, much more where this came from. You'll be a very rich man!"

Judas looked back over his shoulder to the door. Unseen spirits clamored about him, whispering into his ear. Doubt, confusion, greed, anger, jealousy. They clung to him like leaves to a tree.

Judas looked back at Caiaphas and then at the money. His smile grew. The decision was made. "Just what is it that you expect me to do?"

"Well, to begin, I need to know that your loyalty is with me and no one else. Is that too much to ask?"

"I guess not."

"This man Jesus is causing me a lot of trouble. He's turning our establishment up side down. He is, in fact, jeopardizing *our* livelihood." Caiaphas pointed at the money in Judas' hand. "Do you understand?"

"So how can I help?"

"I have met with the elders, and we decided that we need to bring Jesus in to, uh, give Him a little

scare. Nothing serious, mind you. We only want Him to stop talking bad about us."

"I understand." Judas glanced down at the money.

"Let me assure you, there is much more where that came from. Now, I want you to wait here while I get some of my guards. I want you to take them to Jesus. They will escort Him back here to have a few words with me."

"Well..."

"You want to do the right thing for our people, don't you? You want to do the right thing for yourself?"

Caiaphas could see the struggle going on in Judas' mind. He knew that he must seize the opportunity, so he took him by the elbow and brought him down the hallway to his private quarters.

They entered a large, lavishly decorated bedroom full of golden furniture and draped with expensive cloth. "This is where you will stay. This will be your room."

"For me?" Judas squealed.

"Of course! All my closest aides live in splendor."

"I'll do anything you ask!"

"Good! Then take my servants to Jesus and point Him out. It may be necessary to explain why they are taking Him. You are to say that He has threatened to destroy the temple."

Judas pulled away and stepped back. "He never said anything like that."

Caiaphas pursed his lips and turned away. "That's not what I heard." He looked back threateningly at Judas. "It really doesn't matter, anyway, because all I want to do is talk with Him.

Privately. Oh, well, I thought you were someone I could trust. Someone with whom I could work."

Caiaphas started to move away, but Judas rushed up beside him. "I can be trusted! I do want to work with you! It's just that..."

Caiaphas raised a hand and continued to move away.

Judas stopped, watching Caiaphas leave. "All right, all right! I'll do it."

Caiaphas stopped and smiled.

Jesus had just finished His last supper with His disciples. Now He entered the garden that was called Gethsemane. Peter, James, and John, walked with Him deep into the garden.

He had been acting very strangely. His talk about dying and calling this supper His last, well, it worried Peter to such an extent that he strapped a sword to his side. He wasn't sure what to expect, but he wasn't going to be caught defenseless.

Suddenly, Jesus dropped to His knees, sobbing. His hand clutched at His chest. "My heart is overwhelmed!" He looked up toward heaven and cried, "Father, please, if there is any other way that Your will can be accomplished other than My death, please let it be so!"

In the distance, there were sounds that briefly caught Jesus' attention. Jesus looked back upward. "Whatever has to be, Father, let it be Your will that is done, and not Mine."

As I watched, I was overcome with emotion. The Man before me would soon endure the most indescribable suffering -- for my sake! Now more than ever, I fully realized His love and commitment to God. It wasn't for the numbers; it was for me and for His

Father. If I were the only one to ever live here, He would still have suffered through this for me!

I looked at the angel. "I guess I never really understood how difficult this was for Him. Somehow I just thought that it was easier for Him because He was the Son of God."

The angel was very reverent as we stood near the agonizing Christ. "The plea that was offered up to the Almighty moments ago came from the heart of a *Man*, a Man just like you."

A mist slowly enveloped us as the noises of men grew nearer and the light of their torches appeared through the trees.

12

Salvation

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (I Corinthians 2:7-8)."

Roman soldiers lifted the rough-hewn wooden cross and dropped it into the hole with a thud. Jesus, nailed to the cross by His hands and feet, screamed in agony as the cross jarred against the bottom of the hole, pulling His shoulder joints from their sockets. His bloodied body was hardly recognizable. Buzzing around Him, a multitude of demons had gathered, inciting the crowd into frenzy.

Standing directly in front of Him, Satan watched with amusement. The light which poured forth from His being was fading. It could mean only one thing: the Almighty was displeased with Him! He was taking away the light of His Spirit!

"How do You like Your throne?" Satan taunted. "I tried to tell You. You should have followed me. You could have had it all! You could be like me, Your own god! But no, You wouldn't listen."

Standing there, he towered over Jesus' cross that was itself some fifteen feet tall. "I would have given You anything, but You chose this. I don't understand men like You. I never have. Before this

day is over, You will be dead, and what will You have to show for it?"

Satan shook his head in disgust. "Nothing! Nothing has changed! Look around You! All of Your followers are gone, and everything You tried to achieve is but dust lost in the wind. You could have had so much more.

"Think about all Your suffering. All You taught in this lifetime. What has it gotten You? Death, by the very people You tried to help! Why, even Your own disciples have forsaken You. You're all alone!"

Satan moved close to Jesus' swollen face. "It's not too late. You can still serve me. Together, we can change the universe! I will set You up as king, and all nations will be under Your control."

Satan waited impatiently for a response from Jesus that never came. Jesus was ignoring him.

Satan grew furious. He turned toward the throne of God and laughed derisively. "Is this Your Conqueror? Is this the Man who is to sit on the throne of David? Look at Him! Even now His life drains from His haggard body."

Satan held up a long crooked finger and pointed it at the Almighty. "I took Your world, I took Your creation, and now I have taken Your Son. You are no match for one like me!"

Michael paced impatiently at the right side of God's throne. His powerful right hand stroked the handle of his sword, and his face expressed the resolve of his heart: he was ready for battle, to die for his Lord. At Satan's words, he drew his fiery sword to pierce the air with it.

"Send us forth!" he cried.

He and his army were lined up in ranks on either side of the throne. Their ranks extended into the

distance as far as the eye could see. Row upon row extended back behind the throne in endless columns. All around, great swords of fire flashed in the air. Nevertheless, the Lord was silent, motionless on His throne.

Michael knelt before the Almighty. "My Lord, I beseech You, let not this wickedness come against Your own Son. Look, even now the enemy mocks and laughs at His righteousness. Let us go forth now and put an end to this corruption. Satan will not last beyond one stroke of my sword."

The Almighty remained quiescent; watching as the demonic hordes laughed, danced, and mocked His Son hanging helplessly on the cross. Finally, He looked down upon Michael and spoke with great effort. "Their destruction will be by their own hands, of their own making." He looked upon His Son, wracked with pain. "This is My Son who hangs before Me in pain and humility, yet I can do nothing to help Him." The Almighty turned away.

Michael was confused. How could the Almighty allow such a thing to take place? No angel could act unless permitted to do so by the Lord.

Suddenly, his focus returned to the cross when he heard Jesus' plaintive cry, "Father, turn not Your face from Me!"

The light that had glowed so brightly in His soul was now extinguished. Life has left Him, and He now tasted death.

Michael gazed sympathetically upon the Son of the Most High. He had known more suffering in His lifetime than any other man would ever know.

In contrast, the gathered crowd was caught up in festivity. They were completely unaware of the source of their joy. Their celebration was nothing more than a reflection of the demonic gala taking place

all around them in the spiritual realm. None of them noticed the sudden darkness that settled over the land.

The earth, however, was not so deceived. In the beginning, there was only a gentle vibration, growing stronger and stronger until the nearby houses could no longer stand. Tremendous chasms opened, swallowing terrified people and livestock in the fields. Although there were no clouds in sight, the sun gradually, inexplicably, dimmed in brilliance. Finally, as if being snuffed out like a candle, the sun was gone.

Michael turned to Gabriel. "What's happening?"

"Look around us," Gabriel motioned with his hand. "All the universe stands in reverence and fear at the death of the Son of the Most High. Look at the earth! It trembles in fear, knowing that just a word from the Almighty would destroy it and all of mankind together. Look at the sun! Refusing to give its light for the celebration of the wicked.

"The entire universe is fearful, but not mankind. They understand not Who hangs before them this day. Their King, their only hope is about to die. They are about to lose their own salvation."

Michael hung his head. The great sword that had never seen defeat dropped uselessly to his side. He was Captain of the armies of God, the mightiest of all in the Lord's creation, yet he was helpless to prevent the death of the Almighty's own Son.

Satan was troubled by what was happening. One of his lieutenants approached him cautiously. "My lord, have you considered what will happen when He dies?"

Satan whirled around, backhanding him in the process. "I've considered everything. I am the wisest being ever created by the Almighty," he hissed.

The demon returned to his feet. “Yes, of course, my lord. But what happens to His soul? Every soul that dies on this world goes to the Abode of the Dead. They belong to you. Isn’t that so?”

“Of course, it is.” Satan tried not to show his concern. The demon was right. What would happen to this Man? Every soul that died belonged to him, but then every other soul had sinned. To his knowledge, this wasn’t true of the Christ.

“Well?” the demon pressed.

“Well... He must return to God. He’s committed no sin.”

“But I thought that because man gave his dominion to you, he belongs to you. When he dies, his soul is kept by you, no?”

“That’s true.” Satan’s voice quavered with uncertainty.

“Well, if the Christ was born a man, wouldn’t His soul...”

“Enough!” Satan roared, sending the demon toppling backward. “Stop your endless chatter. I need to think!”

Satan glanced up at the Christ. “What are You up to?”

Satan watched Jesus struggle in agony. Something wasn’t right. Why wasn’t the Almighty doing something to prevent this? Why wasn’t He sending angels to rescue His precious Son? It was too easy! Would the Almighty simply abandon His own Son?

“Father! Turn not Your face from Me!”

Could it be that the Christ had failed in some way? Could it be that He failed to meet expectations and was now rejected by the Almighty just like Adam?

Satan sauntered up to the Christ again. He was different. Not only was the light in His soul

completely out and His defending angels gone, but He also seemed completely unaware of Satan's presence.

"You don't see me anymore, do You? You're nothing more than a common man now. If that is the case, then Your soul will be mine!"

Jesus struggled for every breath. His body hung limp, but He managed to gather breath enough for one last cry. With a raspy voice, He groaned, "I don't know where I am to go, but I trust You, Father. Into Your hands of mercy, I am placing My spirit."

With those words, He died, and His soul left His body.

Almost at once, a violent quake shook the earth from pole to pole. Satan looked up at Gabriel, remembering his words to Michael. Maybe the Earth did know of the Almighty's wrath. If the Almighty meant to destroy the universe for this, now would be the time for it.

Satan shook off his reverie and leaned over to examine the Christ. Jesus' body was limp, and death was on His face.

He leaped up, jubilant. "It's over! The Almighty has failed!"

Quickly, he sailed into the sky, laughing and somersaulting through the air, his long red wings beating the air forcefully. Behind him, like a cloud, Satan's army of demons followed. There would be a great celebration in his lair tonight.

He scanned the earth below. It was all his now. The Almighty had given His most prized possession to this world in an effort to salvage it and failed miserably. Nothing could stop him!

He sunk into the earth with his army following. It took only a moment for him to reach the center of the earth and find his lair. His large wings fanned out to slow his descent, and he landed with a thud on his

perch above the others. All around him, other demons were arriving and cheering. Lucifer took credit, of course. He had outdone God again! The earth was his forever!

13

The Battle

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up to God and to his throne... And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12:4-5, 7-9)."

Satan lolled about in his den. His huge form hunched over, dwarfing the demons that gathered around him.

"It was too easy," he complained. "It was all too easy."

Goboth stood a short distance away with his huge gnarled claws tucked behind him. “I suppose it could have been an accident. I mean His dying and all.”

Satan stopped pacing and pinched his pointy chin. “No, I don’t buy it. For over thirty years, the Son of God was protected by Michael and his angels. They never left His side, not for one moment. Then, suddenly, they just disappear, poof, so we can have Him put to death? This has to be a setup. Now, think! What have we missed?”

Before they could come up with an answer, they noticed a small light glowing in the corner of the den. It was an unnatural light, like the one that had emanated from the Christ, blistering their hideous bodies.

Satan‘s eyes widened in disbelief. “It can’t be!”

The light rapidly increased in brilliance, sending Satan and his demons fleeing in all directions. Satan found a corner to cower in as far away from the light as possible. He lifted a large wing upward to shield himself from the emanating brilliance, but it did not help. The light vanquished the shadows from every corner of the den. Howls and cries resounded from the walls as demons sought some vestige of darkness in which to hide. Such blistering light could only be from one source: the Son of God!

Satan snarled from his slumped position in one corner, “You have no claim to this place!” He tried to peer at the Christ through the cracks between his gnarled fingers. “Why have You come to torment us?”

Jesus now stood among them, unmoved by their torment. Effortlessly, He glided over to the corner where Satan slouched. Satan’s massive body

quivered in fear and torment, burning in the pure spiritual light.

"But I do have claim," Jesus answered him. "I was born of man, flesh and blood, and inasmuch; I have a right to the dominion of this earth. So I, by heritage, have every right to be here."

"Not true!" Satan screeched. "Man gave his dominion to me! Me! Me! Me!" He beat his chest. "Now leave!"

"It is true that all born of Adam have forfeited their dominion, but My Father is God Almighty. My right to the dominion of this earth was never yielded, nor was the condemnation of disobedience passed on to Me. In bringing about My death, you have sealed Me. I have died in a condition of perfection. I have never sinned! Thanks to you, there is no possibility that I ever will. So now I claim the heritage that was given to man by My Father. I claim dominion. The souls that you keep in prison are no longer yours. So give Me the keys to Death and Hell."

"What?" Satan lifted his head and squinted at the light. His eyes were immediately scorched, and he shrieked in misery. "The souls imprisoned here belong to me! They submitted themselves as servants to me by freely choosing disobedience to the Almighty! I will not give up a single soul!" Satan shook a gnarled fist. "If the Almighty is just, then these souls must pay their debt!"

"I have offered My suffering and death as payment for their sin and disobedience. My Father's servants who have died also have a right to My sacrifice. I have come to offer it to them."

"No! You can't do that! A sacrifice must be provided by man!"

"It was. The High Priest, Caiaphas, forcibly took Me and offered Me up. Since I have committed

no sin worthy of death, My death is now available to any of My Father's servants who desire freedom from your pit. I have become the perfect sacrifice."

"Tricks!" Satan grabbed the nearest rock and tossed it upward as if throwing it at God.

"There were no tricks, Satan. My Father's plan was both written and spoken since the foundation of the world. So give Me the keys, Satan. I claim ownership to this pit, and I mean to use it at the appointed time to resurrect My Father's servants."

Satan shook and cried out in pain. He had no recourse but to comply. The Christ had beaten him. He had to hand over the keys.

Armed with the keys, Jesus headed for the prisons where the souls of man were held waiting Judgment Day. Satan and his demons fled from the den while the Christ explained the salvation plan to the servants of the Almighty. He offered them His sacrifice which they gratefully accepted. Then, with a turn of the key, they were released.

Satan watched from a distance, unable to act. Then, as the last ray of light faded from sight, Satan howled, overwhelmed by his wrath. His mouth dripping with foam, he beat his chest. "What have we done? Why didn't we see this coming?" He shook his fist toward the Almighty. "Had I known this, I would have never have had Him crucified! I'd have let Him live His miserable life as a religious reject!"

A small demon spoke up, trying to make excuses for their actions. "So He has a few souls. We still have the rest."

"Fool!" Satan flattened the small creature with his fist. "Don't any of you understand what this means? Now the Almighty has witnesses He can use to condemn us! Those few souls He took with Him are the proof He needs to counter all my claims! Those

souls died after living a lifetime of faith! They chose to follow the Almighty of their own free will! They served Him without having ever seen Him to know of His existence! While they were here, captive in my prison, they posed no threat. But now... now they're free! Free to stand before the Almighty to witness against us! This is the worst possible thing that could ever have happened!"

Satan threw both fists in the air and roared again. "Quickly! There may still be time! Assemble the legions! Leave only the principalities, powers, and the rulers of darkness that currently rule the nations. We must bring all of our spiritual wickedness into the heavenly places at once. We must go now before Michael has time to prepare! We must take heaven by force!"

Michael and his Guild were waiting when Satan and his legion arrived. His mighty sword was drawn and ready. Behind him, the heavenly host stood lined up and ready for battle.

"Give it up!" Michael shouted at Satan. "Your right to this place has come to an end. There's no place found here for you!"

"We demand our place in the kingdom!" Satan hissed.

"I don't think so. The Son of God has overcome, proving your charges against the Almighty are groundless. You gave up your place here when you rejected obedience to the Almighty's Lordship. How can you even think that there is a way you can enter here after having crucified the Almighty's Son? Leave now, or feel the edge of my sword!"

Satan lifted his own great sword high. "I no longer recognize any rule or authority of the Almighty.

I claim this dominion for my own. The Almighty used trickery to get His own way, so this test is now void!"

Satan howled again and pointed his sword forward. At once, his demon army charged. Their ranks broke as the mixture of every hideous-looking creature brought into existence charged the defending angels. Some flew, others crawled or slithered, still others ran on two or more legs. Some resembled insects; some looked like dragons and other reptilian creatures and snakes. Nevertheless, all of them carried swords, and all retained the same darkness within their reprobated hearts.

It was the first war that heaven ever knew. The armies of God fought the howling demons in a savage battle that lasted more than a day in heaven. Eventually, Michael's angels sent the howling masses to flight, while Michael overpowered Satan and held his blade to Satan's throat. "I should end your existence right now," Michael whispered. "Instead, I want to see you bow before the Almighty on the Savior's Day."

Then, at the point of his blade, Michael forced Satan into the bottomless pit. There he would be held away from his servants for an appointed time. Then he would be loosed again from his prison for a short time to deceive the nations.

There was only one place in the universe where Satan's demons could still dwell: the earth! So long as the servants of the Almighty, the redeemed of mankind, did not take back their heritage and dominion, the demons could stay. However, every other place in the physical and spiritual universe was now totally, unquestionably, the Lord's dominion.

Michael's angels surrounded the earth like a veil facing inward. Never again would they allow Satan's demons or his legion to leave. Not until the

time they would force them into the Outer Darkness that the Lord had prepared for them.

Now it was up to the servants of the Almighty. The Christ had brought the heavenly realm under God's dominion; the saints must do the same on earth. Satan would soon be sent back to the earth with great wrath -- and knowledge of his impending doom. He would need to contain the servants of the Almighty from realizing their potential and taking back their dominion. His war was no longer focused against God but upon the servants of God who threatened his existence!

14

To Carry Away the Woman

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:13-17)."

The victory of God's army had far reaching consequences. It was as though a giant sword had struck Lucifer in the head leaving him for dead.

But Lucifer would not be without his revenge. If he could not exact his toll from the Son of God, he would exact it from God's people who gave Him birth.

Through persecution and war he would see the Hebrew people scattered from one end of the earth to the other. He would dilute the Hebrew seed until their heritage was lost into oblivion. Without a nation or

heritage they would become just another tribe that once dwelt on the face of the earth.

But God was not about to abandon the Hebrew. He would cause the earth to come to the rescue…

On May 8, 1947, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of the Jewish Agency for Palestine addressed the United Nations General Assembly.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and representatives of the United Nations. The problem of Palestine is, of course, of paramount importance to the Jewish people. We thank all those who so warmly urged our audition for their goodwill and their gallant action. The Jewish Agency, you will recall, is recognized in the mandate for Palestine as a public body authorized to speak and act on behalf of the Jewish people in and out of Palestine in matters affecting the establishment of the Jewish national home."

"The Balfour Declaration, which was issued by His Majesty's Government as a 'declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations,' declares: 'His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.'"

"A generation ago, the international community of the world, of which the United Nations today is the political and spiritual heir, decreed that the Jewish people should be given the right, long denied, and the opportunity to reconstitute its national home in Palestine. That national home is still in the making; it has not yet been fully established. No international community has cancelled or even questioned that right."

"Additionally, on October 28, 1946, President Truman wrote as follows: 'The Government and people of the United States have given support to the

concept of a Jewish national home in Palestine ever since the termination of the First World War.'"

This speech paved the way for a UN resolution that recognized a homeland for Israel, and, in doing so, the earth swallowed up the flood cast from the dragon's mouth that would have swept away the woman.

Divine intervention may well have protected the Hebrew people in the flood of the world's cultures and races, but could God keep His believers from the mixing pot of the world?

15

Five Have Fallen…

"And there are seven kings: five are, and one is, and the other is yet to come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. (Revelation 17:10-11)"

I am not certain how I understood this, for it was as if this knowledge was put directly into my mind.

The five kings that had *fallen* at the time of John's Revelation were the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylon, Medo-Persian, and Greek. The one that *was* during the days of John was the Roman Empire. The one that was *to come* was the Holy Roman Empire. The eighth was "of the seven," or to come from the seven -- all of the other kings combined -- and would succeed in taking the world into perdition. Whereas the other kingdoms had failed when it came to fully and completely reprobating the inhabitants of the earth, this one would succeed!

The seventh king, the Holy Roman Empire, inexplicably diminished in strength and unity and then vanished into obscurity when Lucifer was cast into the Bottomless Pit. Accordingly, the world had not known a kingdom to dominate its expanse for almost one thousand years! Instead, nation rose up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Without the lordship of the chief of all demons, the demon hoards fought amongst themselves for dominion and power. But the

day would come again when the chief evil one would be released from his prison and unify the ranks of perdition.

During his time in prison, Lucifer had ample time to reflect on his failures. Time and time again he had managed to unify the nations of the world into a great kingdom that eventually surrounded the tiny nation of God's people, and each time God had intervened for His people when they turned to Him with repentant hearts.

But everything had changed now. God's people were no longer confined within the borders of the tiny nation of Israel. They were spreading as an infectious disease throughout the whole earth. Lucifer knew his approach must change. Before, he needed merely to surround their pathetic little nation, conquer them, and then carry them away in captivity. Now, captivity had a whole new meaning.

So Lucifer sat in his prison planning and devising. He would be free again soon enough!

16

The Four Horsemen

"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:1-8)."

Suddenly, all about me was a thick mist, and coming from the mist I could hear distant sounds of galloping hooves approaching. Then, just as suddenly, the horse appeared out of the mist, almost on top of me.

The horse stopped no more than a few feet before me and reared up on its hind legs. It was pure white, without a single blemish. I stumbled backward and fell to the ground. It was then that I noticed the rider. As the horse continued to rear up, the rider held the reins with his left hand and thrust his right hand into the air. In his hand was a rainbow!

The rainbow shone of every color imaginable so brilliantly that it hurt my eyes to look upon it. The mist that surrounded us seemed to become a cascading cinema of colors.

As I lay on the ground, the horse settled down and a glistening golden crown descended from high above and settled onto the rider's head. Then, with a shake of the reins, the horse galloped ahead and disappeared into the mist.

I got to my feet still gazing in the direction the horse went. The mist seemed to clear and I found myself standing on a street corner in what appeared to be about the time of the turn of the century.

The streets were made of red brick; the people, dressed in Victorian garments, did not seem to notice me. The gentle wind blew a newspaper across the street and up against my legs. Interested in knowing the date, I picked it up and smoothed the wrinkles: Los Angeles Times April 18, 1906

My eyes went to an article on the front page titled, *The Happenings at Azusa Street*. The article was gripping and a portion of it read as follows:

"Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand, the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles. Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, near San Pedro Street, and devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howling of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking [sic] attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have "the gift of tongues;" and to be able to comprehend the babble.

Such a startling claim has never yet been made by any company of fanatics, even in Los Angeles, the home of almost numberless creeds. Sacred tenets, reverently mentioned by the orthodox believer, are dealt with in a familiar, if nor irreverent, manner by these latest religionists.

Stony Optic Defies

An old colored exhort, blind in one eye, is the major-domo of the company. With his stony optic fixed on some luckless unbeliever, the old man yells his defiance and challenges an answer. Anathemas are heaped upon him who shall dare to gainsay the utterances of the preacher.

Clasped in his big fist the colored brother holds a miniature Bible from which he

reads at intervals one or two words-never more. After an hour spent in exhortation the brethren [sic] present are invited to join in a "meeting of prayer, song and testimony." Then it is that pandemonium breaks loose, and the bounds of reason are passed by those who are "filled with the spirit," whatever that may be."

I looked up at the street sign of the corner where I stood. *Azusa Street*, it read. *I should have guessed*. Behind me I could hear what sounded like moans emanating from a shack. It seemed the likely thing to do, so I walked to the shack and looked in the door. It was packed full of people from every walk of life. Rich men with tailored suits knelt by poor men in tattered clothes. There were men, women, and children from European, African, and Asian descent. All were praising God with very little awareness that other people were near them. I was witnessing the outpouring of God's spirit in the early 1900's.

My excitement at witnessing first-hand this historical event faded as I noticed the mist ascending about me once again and the voices faded away. I was back to where I had begun in the thick void of the mist. Then the sound of more hoof beats approaching. And once again a horse appeared suddenly almost on top of me. This time, however, the horse was blood red.

A bright flash temporarily blinded me, as the rider swiftly drew his glistening sword from its sheath and swung it high into the air. Again I stumbled back and fell to the ground. Then, still swinging the sword about, the rider and his horse disappeared back into the mist.

I was beginning to understand the pattern that was emerging, so I stood and waited for the mist to clear. It did so soon enough, and I found myself standing in a snow-covered city park surrounded by

hundreds of people. The signs around me were all in Russian, but somehow I understood every word. At the front of this crowd was a raised platform with a crude podium. Then a man stepped to the podium bundled in thick winter clothes. Lenin? I had seen his picture many times in historical documents. It was definitely him!

Almost immediately I could feel the pressure of the crowd pushing forward to get a better look at the speaker. The crowd began to cheer and shout as if standing in the presence of royalty. Lenin raised his hands to silence the crowd and began to speak. He spoke in Russian but by some miracle I understood every word.

"Comrades!" he shouted. "Are you enjoying this beautiful December day?"

Once again, the crowd roared.

"Okay, okay," he replied. Then he leaned over the little podium which creaked in protest.

"I have but two questions that take precedence over all other political questions—the question of bread and the question of peace." Lenin scanned the now silent crowd.

I was amazed at the respect this man commanded. In a single sentence, he set a level of expectation unrivaled by any speaker I had ever heard before. His reference to war made me realize that it was probably late 1917.

"The Imperialist war now being fought is between the biggest and richest states, Britain and Germany. Their goal is for world domination. In the balance is the division of the spoils, the plunder of small and weak nations. This horrible atrocity is a criminal war and has ruined all countries, exhausted all peoples, and confronted mankind with the alternative; to either sacrifice all civilization and perish or throw

off the capitalist yoke in the revolutionary way. I say that the only alternative is to win with socialism and a durable peace."

His speech was eloquent and compelling. Written on the faces surrounding me was desperation, people who were poor, hungry, and tired of war. They were looking for a deliverer to step forward and offer them hope. Is this what it will be like when the Anti-Christ comes? I wondered.

"Only socialism can prevent peace between the capitalist states from being only a truce, or interlude. Without socialism, peace will only be a time of preparation for a fresh slaughter of the peoples. I conclude that peace and bread are the basic demands of the workers and the exploited, and this war has made these demands extremely urgent. This great war, this world war, has brought hunger to the most civilized countries. But what these imperialistic nations fail to understand is that this war has accelerated social development at an unprecedented manner. It is now becoming clear to all that capitalism has developed into imperialism, and under the influence of the war it has become a state-run monopoly of capitalism. Comrades, we are now at the stage of world economy where the logical next step is worldwide socialism. What you see here in Russia is only the beginning!"

As the crowd roared in near hysteria, I noticed the mist beginning to form again. The cheers and shouts faded away as the mists settled around me, leaving me in complete silence.

Though stunned by what I had just witnessed, I instinctively braced myself for the sudden appearance of the next horse. I did not have to wait long, for the sound of hooves in the distance quickly gave way to the sudden emergence of a horse as black as ink. It

was stunningly beautiful, though I tried not to allow it to distract my attention from its rider.

The rider held up an old pair of balances that dangled from a simple chain. From high above, I heard a voice call out, "*A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.*"

As the horse and rider vanished into the mist I braced myself for the next apparition.

Then I was standing in what appeared to be a town hall. A long line of people extended out the doors of this building to a set of wooden tables at the front of the hall. A small wooden sign was propped up against one wall; it read:

The Fifth Ward Precinct, Houston, Texas

"This is outrageous!" a protestation rose from the front of the line. He was a distinguished-looking African-American man who was obviously a professional.

"This isn't the 1800's! This is 1940! I have the right to vote in this primary!"

The man at the table was brazen. "Look Mr . . . ., uh . . ., Mr. . . ." His voice trailed off as he scanned the document before him for a name.

"Lonnie Smith. That is *Dr.* Lonnie Smith," he leaned forward over the desk, his voice brisk and professional, portraying neither apology nor excuse for his plight.

"Look, Smith," the man at the table retorted. "I've no time nor concern to deal with ya now. Yer not gonna vote here! And that's jess the way tings is in dese parts. Now scoot yerself outta here or we'll toss ya out!"

Scanning the crowd, I knew in an instant that they all shared the same feelings about this tall dark man. Dr. Smith stood there for a moment, and then turned to leave. Since he seemed to be the subject of this episode, I followed him.

Outside the building, Mr. Smith turned and looked straight at me. I had not expected him to see me!

"Do you know who Themis is?" he asked?

I thought for a moment. "Yes," I replied. "She is Lady Justice."

"Justice?" he asked. "Was that justice?" He gestured back toward the building.

"Themis is blind-folded, holding balances and a sword. And do you know what the balances depict?"

"I guess I never really thought about it."

"Equality! Equal justice, because every man is created equal in the sight of God!"

With that, he turned on his heels and left. I stood there for a moment, pondering his words. Then I knew. The balances in the hand of Lady Justice and the man on the black horse had the same meaning: equality!

I was so entrenched in my thoughts that I had not noticed the mists that once again swirling about me and a new set of hooves was approached.

This time the horse was gray. But it was his rider who captured my attention. He was completely covered in a long black robe. So completely covered that when I tried to look at his face under the black hood, I could see nothing but shadow. I remembered the scripture: his name was Death!

Then, as suddenly as the horse and rider had appeared, they vanished again into the mist. I waited for the mist to clear but it did not. Instead I heard the voice of the angel from behind me.

"Unto thee it is given to understand these things."

I turned to face the angel, unafraid. "I think I understand some of it, but . . . The first horse - the white one. It was the outpouring of the Spirit in the early 1900's?"

"The rider represents the event. The horse is the strength of, or that which gives power to, the rider. With the white horse, the rider depicted the re-establishing of the covenant relationship between God and His people as demonstrated by the rainbow – the symbol of a covenant. This, the first seal, was opened near the turn of the century. What gave this outpouring strength was the Holiness Movement of the late 1800's as symbolized by the white horse."

The first seal was opened around 1900, I thought. I had always assumed that the white horse was the early church.

"The red horse is communism, right?" I asked.

"The rider of the red horse brandishes a great sword, offering the world a replacement for God's Word, the true sword of God's people. The great sword is the communistic-humanistic philosophy that offered the world a true replacement for God. The strength of the movement was war, fear, hunger, and violence."

"This seal must have been opened about twenty years after the first," I said.

The angel nodded.

"And with the next horse, the black one, I heard someone say the date," I said while replaying the event in my mind. "It was 1940!"

"The rider of the third horse carried scales, representing the equality demanded in the Equal Rights Movement. The strength behind that movement came from the oppressed people of African descent."

"And what about the voice?" I asked.

"*A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny*."

"Yes!"

"One measure of wheat for three measures of barley demonstrates the inequality that exists between wheat and barley."

"And once again about twenty years from the prior seal," I said, deep in thought.

"The final horse was gray, and the rider was Death . . ."

"Yes, but I didn't see the event," I responded. "Am I not to know what it represents?"

"To understand the event you must first understand the strength behind it – gray. Gray is neither black nor white, hot nor cold. It is neutral.

The late 1950's gave rise to a number of initiatives that the enemy put in place to eliminate the moral fabric of the world. Rock music targeted the youth of humanity as well as entertainment in the form of television targeted the families. The grip that these things have on humanity can only be described as obsessive. The Bible was translated into so many versions that few people now believe that any version of it is completely of God and without flaw. Drugs gave way to a new spiritual awakening that did not require the Spirit of God nor obedience to His Word. Humanism, the belief that all humanity is god, worked its way into the textbooks used to teach in public schools.

The 1960's gave rise to a generation who respected neither right nor wrong. Morality became subjective to one's own values, and the standard of God's Word was lost. For this generation, the view of morality is gray.

The sixties also began Lucifer's plot to devalue human life. It began with the introduction of the birth control pill that gave way to abortion. Abortion has given way to euthanasia, and euthanasia shall give way to the killing of the criminally and mentally insane. When that happens, and the world neither believes in nor respects God, would it be such a stretch to view Christians as insane? When the plot to devalue human life has matured, people will kill Christians thinking they are doing them a service!

Just as Death is rider of the fourth horse, so will death be the result of this seal. And its strength is the breakdown of the moral fabric of this world."

It was a lot to absorb! Then, the obvious occurred to me. "It's been twenty years since that seal. Has the fifth seal been opened?"

17

Lucifer Set Free

"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast…

…And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (Rev 13:1-3; 20:1-3)"

With the thousand years of imprisonment now over, Lucifer was due to be released. He peered through the bars at his captor and smirked.

"That's the problem with a just God," he snarled. "He has to obey His own law."

"You are referring to your forthcoming release?" Michael asked, his back toward the prison.

Michael slowly turned and walked up to the bars, bringing his face to within inches of Lucifer's face.

"I don't see this as a problem. I see it as an opportunity to do away with you once and for all. You do realize that there is a very good reason why God kept me from ending you, don't you?"

Lucifer's smirk withered.

"Yes," Michael continued, "you're part of His great plan. If He had allowed me to end you then, His plan would never be fully realized."

Lucifer stepped backward. Was it possible? Could his every action only be playing into God's hands?

No! Lucifer thought. *My guile is unprecedented! Not even God could know!*

Lucifer spun around at the sudden sound of the cell door opening.

"Go!" Michael commanded.

Lucifer stepped from his cell and gazed into the sky at the swirling demon hoards awaiting him. "It's been two thousand years since the birth of God's Son," he announced in a loud booming voice. "I believe it's time for His rule to end!"

Michael watched as the huge beast lifted his bat-like wings and streaked away. He knew that this would not be his final encounter with Lucifer.

"Beware, Humanity," Michael murmured, knowing that no one was listening. "The deadly wound has been healed."

18

First Assembly

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed (Acts 16:25-26)."

Suddenly, as a man startled from a deep sleep, I became aware that I was standing in the balcony of a very large church. I had no recollection of my journey to this place nor indication of the time it took to get here. Hundreds of people were entering the sanctuary for a service soon to begin.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"This is the First Assembly," the angel explained.

"What happened to Satan? Is he still locked in the pit?"

"No. The time came for him to be loosed from his prison. He now roams the earth with great anger. His failed attempt to take heaven and his subsequent imprisonment made him understand the reality of being condemned to the Outer Darkness. And he understands that his threat is not from God, but from God's saints. If His saints take back the dominion of the earth, there will be no place left for Satan. And Satan knows he cannot let that happen."

I suddenly realized that the angel had brought me to the present. “Why are we here in this church?” I wondered aloud.

The angel turned to me. “The people of this congregation have known a time of refreshing for approximately one year. Reports of this revival have spread across the land, so Satan has marshaled his forces together in an attempt to stem the rising tide of God’s Spirit and His power demonstrated here.”

The angel turned again and looked at the people. Many were at the front of the church praying; others were reading their Bibles. The atmosphere was one of reverence.

I noticed that some of the people gathered had demons clinging to them like leeches. Some of the demons had their arms clutched around their human host's head or waist. Others perpetually whispered in the ears of their hosts. Still more pelted their hosts with continual blows or covered the bodies of a few individuals like great weights.

Yet the congregation seemed unaware of the demonic presence.

...set aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us...

Then the service started, and the people stood, some more quickly than others. With upraised hands they began to sing.

Hissing and groaning sounds from behind me drew my attention. I spun around and saw hideous monsters penetrating the exterior walls of the balcony. They swarmed into the church in all sizes and shapes.

Some of the creatures resembled snakes; others had the likeness of dragons. Many appeared to be mixtures of wild beasts and reptiles. Even so, all of them bore the same red scaly skin covering their entire bodies and glowing red eyes. I backed away to take

shelter behind the angel, who did not appear to be concerned about them at all.

The congregation took no notice of the monsters. I wanted to run into the middle of the crowd and warn them of the impending danger. I wanted to shout out, *Flee while you still can!* Instead, I just stood there and watched helplessly, as though hypnotized by the drama unfolding. *Surely this angel will do something to stop the demons*, I told myself.

The demons poured in until they packed the balcony where I stood. They ignored my angel companion and me as well in order to leer at the worshipers below us.

I looked up at the angel. "Aren't you going to stop them?"

The angel didn't acknowledge my question. He simply nodded toward the congregation.

I looked toward the crowd and saw what appeared to be a small whirlwind beginning at its center. Then I became aware of a vibration resonating throughout the building. No one else appeared to be aware of the fearful events that were unfolding before my eyes. The people just continued to sing and praise God with outstretched arms and faces aglow with joy.

Then I realized that the fervor of the whirlwind was directly proportional to the praises of the people. It wasn't the intensity of their voices, but the passion of their hearts.

I studied the people who were gathered. What was the purpose for the whirlwind, and why were there so many demons gathered here? I had been in praise services all my life, and this one didn't seem that different from those to which I had become accustomed.

Then I looked carefully at the faces of this crowd. That is when I understood. These people

loved their God in their praise. It wasn't a matter of paying homage out of duty or respect. They were enjoying... no, they were loving every minute of this. Uninhibited in showing their feelings to their Lord, they were telling Him that He was all that mattered.

The vibration intensified into a shaking, like a strong earthquake. I found it difficult to stand upright and took hold of the seats in front of me to keep my balance. The shaking must have been happening only in the spiritual realm, for none of the congregation seemed aware of it nor did it seem to affect them.

But the demons were aware. They clung to their human hosts that much tighter, looking fearfully around the room. They were drowning men, clutching the safety of a life raft.

As I watched, the whirlwind grew larger, stronger, and faster as it spiraled upward, reaching for the ceiling. Then, as if exploding upward, the ceiling disappeared, revealing the clear sky above. I could see the clouds, and I marveled as the whirlwind rose up through them.

The worshipers remained unaware of the spectacle taking place in the spiritual realm. They continued to sing and worship God.

I clung to the seats near me as the wind rushed past, lifting me from the ground. The demon hordes braced themselves against the wind like ships adrift in the midst of a storm.

The whirlwind climbed higher and higher still, its funnel extending up to heaven. I felt as if I were struggling against a tornado. The roar of the wind drowned out the sounds of the praise. Unbelievably, I had strength to hold fast.

I watched as the whirlwind burst through the upper atmosphere. Wondering how much higher it would go and what its purpose was, I watched as it

pressed upward until it reached the veil of Michael's angels that encompassed the earth. Then, one by one, the angels were plucked away from the veil and sucked down the funnel into the church where I stood.

Free in the sanctuary, the angels quickly drew their brilliant swords and charged into the demon ranks. The demons cried like tortured wild animals as they bolted from the church in every direction, disappearing through the walls. Those clinging to human hosts dropped to the floor as if burned by a hot iron and fled.

The worshippers, now freed of their oppression, lifted their faces to cry out to God. Some mouthed silent words of thanksgiving while others joyfully praised the God of creation. Each had no doubt that deliverance and spiritual healing had visited them.

I looked around the building and realized that both angels and demons were gone. The trembling had stopped. The whirlwind had dissipated. Even the ceiling was back in its place.

A battle of epic proportions had been fought before my very eyes as God's people sang and praised His name. I turned to the angel with tears in my eyes. "Why do we ever stop praising God?"

The angel turned to face me. "It was intended for you to understand these things. Desperate times are about to fall upon God's people. Carry this message to them: *The battle belongs to God.*"

The angel turned to study the congregation, and then returned his puzzled gaze to me. "Why *do* God's people not praise Him always?"

19

Global Power

"And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful (Revelations 17:11-14)."

Still contemplating the events I had just witnessed, I turned away from the angel to find myself standing in an impressive conference room. I was no longer in the First Assembly! Instead, I found myself standing before a large oval table that took up much of the prestigious room. The window that made up one wall yielded an inspiring view of San Francisco Bay. Filling the opposite wall was a world map. Little symbols were placed strategically on the map with lines drawn between them. All around the conference table, important-looking, well-dressed men sat quietly, waiting.

Suddenly, a set of double doors swung inward and a very striking gentleman entered. He had a

commanding aura about him. His piercing eyes instantly sized up everyone in the room.

Shoulders back and chin lifted, he stood just inside the door, smiling confidently. "I trust you have all examined the stock reports?"

An elderly man sitting at the far side of the table stood and lifted a single sheet of paper. He fixed his eyes on the man in the doorway. "It was just as you predicted, Mr. Ford. Every stock you said would rise did so, and likewise with those you said would fall."

"But that's not why you asked me to return, is it?" Ford moved confidently toward the map. He looked it over with interest, and then turned back to the old gentleman. "Mr. Powers, you and your colleagues here are more interested in other events that have transpired since we met a week ago. In fact, each of you made a specific request of me, and you have seen your individual requests come to pass."

Ford smiled again, scanning the intense faces of his audience. Their eyes were locked on him in anticipation.

Powers tossed the paper onto the table. "That's correct, and that's why we asked you back. We've used psychics before, but, understand, predicting market changes is of little value to us. We are rich enough that we make money no matter which way the market goes. These gentlemen," he swept his arm toward them with a gesture of obeisance, "are affiliates of mine from all over the world. Controlling markets is what we do best."

Powers slowly moved around the table and stood behind Mr. Ling, a rotund Chinese dignitary. "You, on the other hand," he continued to address Ford, "presented us with some interesting prospects. You didn't just predict the future; you altered it to unfold the way we desired. The war we wanted in

Argentina started just as we asked. That government will now have to end its current investigation into Mr. Ling's business activities," he placed his hand on Ling's shoulder, "and cause them to seek his assistance in supplying military hardware."

With that, Powers turned away from Ford and continued to walk slowly around the table. He paused behind a conservative dark-skinned Turk. "At the same time, the Minister of Commerce in Turkey inexplicably died in his sleep. And, just as we requested, a little known associate of his was appointed to his seat, a new minister who just happens to appreciate kickbacks and payoffs." The Turk smiled approvingly and looked away.

Powers turned to face Ford again. "However, the most impressive display of your -- shall we say, endowment -- was the fall of King Phaisue. He stole billions from us when he nationalized his country's industry. The new military dictator promises to return it providing we assist him by re-investing in his country. We now stand to double our profits from that country."

Ford expressed no emotion as his piercing eyes probed each man in the room.

Powers returned to his place at the head of the table, his back turned to Ford. "You've proven to us that controlling governments and markets are within the scope of your power. So tell us, then: what exactly do you expect from us in return?"

As I scrutinized the faces of the men gathered around the table, I became aware of an indistinguishable noise: Heavy breathing. I froze, chills all over my body. With dread, I realized where I had heard that sound before. I closed my eyes tightly hoping to avert what I knew would come next.

I didn't have to wait long. The familiar deep, raspy voice began to speak. "I am a very religious man."

My eyes opened only to be met by the scene of a huge red beast leaning over Ford. It resembled a pterodactyl, filling the room with its long scaly body, contorted beak, and bat-like wings. Its head jerked back and forth on its long extended neck as it peered with waspish eyes around the room. The beast's every movement was imitated by Ford, as if Ford were a puppet controlled by strings. He was completely under the control of the beast. When the beast spoke, Ford's mouth moved.

"My goal is to establish my ministers as essential parts of society. I simply require your influence to make this happen."

Now Powers spun about to face Ford, jerking his glasses from his face. "That's all?"

"That's all."

"What kind of influence are you looking for?"

"Predominately television. Almost the entire movie and television industry is controlled by the men in this room."

Ford found an empty chair and sat down at the table. He folded his hands in front of him and looked thoughtfully at the men seated around him. "In the past, psychics like myself have been viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, looked upon as evil. I need that to change if we are to be accepted as the true priesthood that God has established for the earth."

"Just how do you mean to achieve this?"

"First, you must back shows that promote psychics and expose the conservative Christian Church for what it really is: prejudicial, racist, judgmental, near-sighted, self-centered, and intolerant. Secondly,

these programs must present the spiritual realm as what it really is: a realm of goodness. There is no devil! Support and promote programs that introduce only the activities of angels. The general public must understand that there is no evil in the world, aside from the conservative Christians who serve only to corrupt government and bleed the public of finances."

"Is that *all* you want from us?"

"More or less. You see, conservative Christians can destroy all that we have tried to establish."

Powers studied Ford for a moment with a keen eye. "You mean to say that you have no power over Christians?"

The veins stood out in Ford's neck. *"That's not what I said!"*

"It's certainly what you've implied. You're suggesting that Christian influence can change governments and invalidate your power."

Ford jumped to his feet and leaned intimidatingly toward Mr. Powers, his eyes ablaze. *"Do you want my help or not?"*

Powers smiled up at him and nodded, confident of his control in the situation. "Of course. What you ask is a very small thing. Surely there must be more?"

Ford adjusted his suit and took a deep breath before sitting down. "We'll discuss other opportunities in the future."

I was appalled. For years I had looked at the movie industry's sudden focus on angels as a good thing. I had given no thought to the effect it might have on the unsaved public.

What consequence was it having? Could the general public really be deceived into thinking there was no evil influence in the world?

Suddenly I could see how all the specials and talk shows about psychics was part of an overall design. And we in the Church were sitting back, allowing the Trojan horse into our midst.

20

Sebastian

"And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do... (Revelation 13:11-14)."

Inexplicably, I suddenly found myself standing in the middle of the street where my journey began. But the angel, the Magician, and the monster were gone. There was just an eerie feeling that... that maybe none of what I remembered actually took place. I found this very hard to accept. I could vividly remember every detail, even down to the smells of the places I had visited. In a way, it was more-or-less a let down now that it was all over, especially since there was a question as to whether or not it even happened.

I returned to my church in Arkansas the next day. I spent the remainder of the week in prayer concerning my... well, my vision, if indeed that's what it was.

As Sunday approached, I debated over whether I should inform my congregation of what I had seen. In the end, I found I couldn't stay away from the subject. The more I tried, the more difficult it became to contain it. Without meaning to, I poured out my heart to my congregation. The service lasted for almost three hours despite my best efforts to keep it short. I'm not completely sure whether my small assembly actually believed me or not, but they pledged their support anyway.

I needed to do what I believed God had called me to, so I told them. So I sold what few belongings I had and headed West. I can't say that I didn't feel like I was abandoning them, because I did, but I truly believed that I was being summoned to "be about my Father's business."

I arrived in Los Angeles with only a few weeks before Christmas. The end of the millennium was quickly approaching, so I was told.

Inwardly, I wished that it had been the future God had shown me and not the past, but I knew that God must have had His reasons for what He chose to show me.

I spent the first few days in the area of Los Angeles where I had first seen the monster. I tried to minister to the few people who would listen, but no one seemed even remotely interested. There was just nothing intriguing about what a southern country preacher had to say.

Part of the problem was my lack of direction. I really didn't understand my purpose for being there nor the message I was to bring.

I was about to give up when I noticed a poster stapled to a light pole. On it was a man holding a Bible in one hand and a pentagram in the other.

How odd, I thought. *Like mixing oil and water.*

The poster spoke of Sebastian, a prophet sent from God. The Prophet would be holding a meeting in the Convention Center that very night. It explained that Sebastian's gift of prophecy was given him by God and that he would be answering the questions about why the world was experiencing such chaos. It claimed that Sebastian could provide the answers to feed a searching soul. I knew instantly that I was supposed to be at that meeting.

I arrived at the Convention Center shortly before the meeting started. The Center was already packed. I was one of the last people allowed to enter, and I had to stand in the aisle. The auditorium seated twenty thousand, but there had to be at least thirty thousand gathered. Thousands more were turned away for lack of space. The air conditioning units were unable to keep up, and the enormous auditorium began to grow uncomfortably warm.

When Sebastian finally stepped onto the stage, the auditorium came alive with cheers and shouts.

Just who is this man? I wondered.

"Hello, everyone," he began "My name is Sebastian." He dripped charisma with every word, gripping his audience firmly. His tall, trim, handsome features gave him an air of refinement. He was distinguished yet not intimidating, the kind of person to whom you could listen to for hours. Before I knew it, I was laughing at his jokes and smiling at his wit. I found myself enjoying every minute there.

Sebastian told of his life, growing up a Jewish boy, the prejudice of people he met. He described in vivid detail his personal struggles in life and what he had learned from them.

Everyone became totally absorbed in his narrative. Tears filled the eyes of the listeners as we came to understand his pain.

Then, as a skilled speaker who sensed his control, Sebastian took full advantage of our susceptibility. At this point, he skillfully introduced concepts that we might not have otherwise accepted.

I watched, totally absorbed in his story, as he stepped down from the platform to walk among us.

"I was a confused and angry young man with no future and a past that I wanted to forget," he said passionately. "Then, one night, as that angry young man considered how he might take his own life, God appeared to him."

A hush fell over the auditorium. All eyes were riveted on this extraordinary man.

He paused to pull a handkerchief from his pocket and dry his eyes. "I didn't know who it was at first." The intensity in his face made me feel the pain in his heart. "He began to show me things." Sebastian began to sob, one hand held over his heart.

"I found out that I was created for a greater purpose than I could ever believe."

This would be a perfect place for an altar call, I thought.

"God explained to me not just what I was to do, but more importantly, He told me who I am. Watch now as I write my name on that wall."

He pointed to an area on the outside wall. Suddenly a large translucent hand appeared and began to write on the solid cement. Huge chunks of cement fell from the wall as if a large chisel were carving it out. People sitting near the wall fled the area as the cement poured down like rain.

Sebastian moved his finger through the air as if he were doing the writing himself. The large hand followed his every movement. Slowly, the name on the wall began to take shape:

I didn't know exactly what to think at first. This demonstration of his power was so awesome that I honestly *wanted* to believe in him.

"God told me that the time for the salvation of the Gentiles is almost over. I am to go forth in His power and prepare the way for His Messiah to come bringing salvation to His people, the Jews."

I was still mesmerized by what was happening. It all sounded completely plausible.

"If you want to be part of the movement of God in this last hour, you must be willing to renounce the sanctimonious traditions you've learned from the denominations that have kept you in bondage. You must be willing to follow after me in a pure life."

Sebastian's voice continued to grow louder and deeper. "Are you willing to come out of the bondage of the denominational churches and discover what God has for you in these last days? Those churches have fulfilled the purpose that God had for them. He now wants you to prepare yourself for the arrival of His Messiah."

Suddenly, I could see what was happening in the spirit. Completely covering Sebastian was an immense demon of great power. The beast seemed to exercise complete control over Sebastian. Sebastian was nothing more than a puppet for it.

No longer did I hear Sebastian's voice but the demon's grating words. He spoke in the same deep metallic voice I had heard from the Magician's demon, although this demon was much larger. It was so large that it had to bend over just to fit under the three-story-high ceiling.

Then, it wasn't a dream I had before, I told myself. *It really did happen!*

I closed my eyes and covered my face, realizing how easily I could have been sucked into this deception. Even after seeing the demon stand in control of this man, something inside me acknowledged that what Sebastian said made good sense.

I opened my eyes and looked at all the people around me shouting and cheering. *It's all so subtle*, I thought. The false prophet hadn't come speaking blasphemy against God. He came as a good man talking about following God. What could be so wrong with that? He even demonstrated great power that he attributed to God!

"I'm not going to tell you anything of which you're not already aware," Sebastian shouted. "You'll know in your hearts that what I'm telling you is true. The fact is, denominational churches have sucked you dry. Even when hard times came and most of us found ourselves without work, those churches insisted that you give what you had. Ask yourself this: if they're really ordained by God, why do they need your money? Why does God need anything from you? If He rules the universe, then it is He who should be giving and you who should be receiving!"

Suddenly, out from the ceiling dropped demons by the thousands. They fluttered closely around everyone in the auditorium. Except me. They seemed to sense that I could see them and stayed away. Then, as suddenly as they had come, they flew back up into the ceiling.

"To prove to you that I'm telling the truth, all you have to do is to reach into your pocket. You'll find that God has placed twenty dollars in it."

Shouts of affirmation filled the room, and thousands of hands extended upward, holding up the money. It was almost mass hysteria.

"You see what I'm talking about? Denominational churches have been sucking dry your finances for long enough. It's time we rise up and say 'no more!' It's time we start acting like the people that God wants us to be!"

Cheers shook the auditorium as Sebastian continued, the intensity in his voice growing with each spoken word.

"God told me that the denominational churches are the Great Whore of Revelation. We must come out of them before God destroys them! You must stop supporting them, for they're the reason prosperity was taken from this land in the first place! If you stop supporting them, prosperity will return! God has shown each of you tonight that what I'm saying is true: He's blessed each of you with money in your pocket!"

Spontaneous applause broke forth as the crowd rose to their feet. Sebastian returned to the stage, and as the crowd quieted, he renewed his charm. "Fakes always want something from you, but I don't! I don't want your money! I don't want your time! Instead, I want to give to you! Keep your money and your time! I want you to enjoy yourself! There's one last sign I'm going to give you to prove my words are from God."

Sebastian stepped away from the podium. The audience was obviously captivated, wondering what would happen next.

"Do you remember in your Bibles how Elijah and the false prophets of Baal were tested to see which was speaking the Word of God? Elijah challenged the false prophets to call fire down from heaven to prove they were speaking for God. They tried all day and couldn't do it. Finally, Elijah looked up toward heaven."

The audience stood, completely enthralled as Sebastian knelt down and held out his hands toward the podium. “Are my words true?”

Suddenly the ceiling over the podium burst open. A ball of fire shot through the opening and exploded on the stage, completely consuming the podium. The atmosphere was electric. People were shouting and cheering in frenzied exultation.

“Need you any further proof?” Sebastian shouted over the din. “Now go and be prosperous! Leave the oppression of the ceremonialism you’ve known in the denominational churches! Prepare yourself for the coming of the Messiah! He will bring world peace and harmony! He will, for the very first time, bring unity to the Jews and Gentiles! An end to war and poverty!”

Without saying another word, Sebastian promptly turned on his heel and left the stage, the crowd left clamoring behind him. I stood there dumbfounded while the crowd rushed past me out of the building, excited and happy.

What kind of argument could I make in view of what these people just experienced? I knew exactly what Sebastian was doing, but I could think of no way to make them see! He was playing to their lusts and desires, disguised in a cloak of religion. I could understand why Jesus said that if it were possible even the very elect would be deceived.

21

MegaNet

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities... How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore her plagues come in ***one day****, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth who have committed fornication and live deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in* ***one hour*** *is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more (Revelation 18:4-11)."*

It was the dawn of the new millennium, and the Western world knew a time of prosperity unparalleled in history. For the previous decade, stock markets around the world had experienced a boom that produced millionaires en masse. Driving this prosperity was a technological revolution that promised to affect every part of society and daily lives. It was called the internet.

The internet - though initially just a network that allowed universities, industrial/military corporations, and government agencies to share communications and data - had grown into a super network that pressed its way into every nation, connecting consumers, businesses, organizations, and every person on the earth. The internet was as common as the radio but far more important. It eliminated the need to travel to work and provided nearly every type of entertainment a user could desire. Companies that provided services to internet subscribers boomed in inexplicable wealth as investors begged to share in their success. The unexpected success of these internet-based companies fueled a massive rise in investment, ushering in this new era of prosperity. No one could possibly dream that its end might soon be near.

And then, without warning, the unexpected occurred! Markets around the world began to collapse as investors realized the promises of these techno-stocks were inflated and that the earnings they had expected would never be realized.

It was called “a domino effect.” Not a single soul on the earth was untouched. The nations that had embraced this technology with the most vigor were proportionally affected.

For the first few years, a third of all the effects were far reaching. One third of the workers in the industrial nations found themselves unemployed. Supermarket shelves were quickly bared. Long lines quickly formed outside charitable and social service offices, and people stood for days waiting their turn to receive a ration of food. Recession turned into depression with no end to the economical calamity in sight.

It was the darkest hour America had ever known.

But there was one achievement that remained completely overlooked in the shadow of this chaos: the internet. Throughout the disasters that followed in those early years, the internet continued to grow and function flawlessly.

A new economical frontier emerged on the internet. Many companies survived the chaos by establishing their trade through electronic commerce. Companies found new vendors who could supply materials at a fraction of the cost they had been paying, and new customers came in from all around the world. The internet became the life-sustaining blood, pumping new energy into the collapsed economies of the industrialized world.

All over the world, companies searching for a market found it on the internet. At first, they appeared like little mushrooms, springing up here and there all over the world. Through the internet, they found that distance from their customers and vendors ceased to be a limiting factor. The commerce utopia once promised now slowly came into being. Something else was rapidly becoming clear the world over: no company was buying or selling except through internet access.

No longer was the internet a fad or a device designed to give entertainment to the masses. It was

now the life force of business and industry. Its growth and value exploded. Light was finally emerging from a world that had nearly collapsed.

World leaders cautiously learned to trust the life-sustaining value of this new commerce and slowly moved in to protect it. The first international police force was formed and given unlimited jurisdiction to enter any country and forcibly extradite those who threatened the health of the internet technology.

Thus, the MegaNet was born -- a social, industrial, and political entity that had the power to serve and control the lives of every inhabitant on the earth.

At first, the charter of the new MegaNet police force was limited to coping with hackers and virus factories. But eventually there was a need to establish laws to describe and define its use and abuse. And in this new era of world commerce, the United States had just one vote among many. For too long, America had enjoyed setting the rules for world commerce. Now it was faced with the same problems that even the smallest third world country had.

During these first epic years, people demanded answers. In particular, they were interested in two things: whom can they look to for hope, and whom can they blame. The churches were the big losers. For decades, people had been promised that they would be "raptured" out of the world before tribulation began. No one doubted that this could be anything other than the tribulation. Few pastors could refute it. As a result, public dissatisfaction with churches was unparalleled. The media seized on their golden opportunity to blame churches for everything, painting them as the source of every evil and abominable trial that the public now faced.

Then, almost unnoticed by the general public, a new threat to the Church began to take shape. Just as the American federal government used the commerce laws to gain its federal power over individual states, the United Nations began using many of the same arguments to increase its influence in policing the MegaNet.

The new charter, later known as the International Internet Commerce, or IIC, began to exercise jurisdiction over the international police force and began to extradite and prosecute criminals in every country. The law was as broad as it was vague. Almost anyone could be taken with little or no opposition from government. The IIC rapidly gained power over all nations, including the United States. Like fire in a dry field, its bureaucracy grew and expanded.

The idea of global government gained momentum by redefining its role to address other issues that might be linked to commerce. For example, if one country's policies had adverse effects on another, this new institution, IIC, would exert its influence. It gained strength initially by focusing on environmental concerns like global warming and nuclear power.

And of course, this global institution, comprised primarily of third world nations, had absolutely no respect for Christians or Christian churches. The IIC covertly made good on the promise made to Mr. Ford. The Church, still one of the wealthiest institutions on earth, was victimized as the source of every problem. Then, to replace the Church's spiritual influence, an unsuspected group prepared to step forward with the answers...

22

Conspiracy

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Revelation 6:9-11)."

The early years of the second millennium were bad for everyone, particularly Christians. What began as market correction to the inflated market of the late 1990's developed into full-fledged recession. The market seemed to make gains for the next few years but eventually lost all momentum and begun a long spiral downturn. The result was a depression that would have worldwide effects.

The crash of the U.S. economy brought down the economies of all other nations of the world. No nation's economy could stand on its own.

Unlike the depression era of the 1920's and 30's, this time the United States was ill-prepared to deal with its problems. Generations before, when its

population masses lived on farms in the country, raising their own produce, and were used to hard work, depression was at least tolerable. But in this new self-centered culture that had lost respect for moral values, the masses quickly abandoned any hope for mutual social cooperation. It was everyone for himself. Lawless mobs roamed the cities, and crime was at epidemic proportions. The black market became the norm for obtaining even the most meager of supplies. Only a small segment of society had prepared its properties for self-sufficiency.

I remained in Los Angeles and eventually found a small mission that provided shelter at night. It wasn't much, but at least it was clean. There must have been fifty people crammed into the tiny basement, each with a single cot. We were packed together in neat rows with only inches between to maneuver. However, with unemployment sky-rocketing, I counted myself blessed to have even this much.

Then one night, I was feeling particularly down about the loss of direction in my life. At least back in Arkansas I had a small fellowship of believers to support me. I don't remember thinking about anything other than that after lying down, so I must have fallen asleep quickly. I'm not sure how long I slept, but it seemed like only moments later that a hand shook me.

I woke up to find the angel standing beside my bed. I can't tell you how good it felt to see his familiar face. I had begun to think I was never going to see him again!

The angel showed no emotion. He simply took my hand and said, "Come with me."

I followed the angel through the doorway of the basement and found myself standing in the same conference room where I had first seen Powers and

Ford. The same men were gathered as before, but this time, Ford sat at the table with the others.

"I've given you everything you've asked me for, have I not?" Ford asked.

"Yes, you have," Powers agreed.

"You asked me to grant your business consortium international control over the global market. I gave you a police force and appointed you the controlling board members. You can now control not just the world's markets but their governments as well."

Ford sat back in his chair and looked around the room. "You gentlemen are the eighth empire to have ruled this world. The ten of you are the kings of the earth."

Powers removed his glasses and looked across the table at Ford. "You once said that you would be asking more from us at a later date. Why do I have the feeling that now is that time?"

Ford smiled. "You're very perceptive. Tell me; just what is your new empire worth to you?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean"

"You don't really understand the power I've given you, do you?" Ford looked each man in the face. "You control the MegaNet, the life blood of this planet. You control the governments and nations through the IIC. You have power beyond that which even Caesar had. You literally control the world."

Ford leaned forward across the table to stare directly at Powers. "I want you to rid the world of an infection that threatens to bring down all we've worked so hard to build."

"Let me guess," Powers replied. "Christianity."

Ford smiled. "Not in the general sense. I have no real issue with those inept people who pacify their

needs for social interaction by an occasional visit to church."

Ford looked around the room before continuing. "Nor do I care about those that attend church in hopes that somehow their invisible God will bless them with unexplainable wealth."

Ford looked down and took a deep breath. "I want the zealot, the fanatic, those who have no hope of social redemption."

Ford's fist was clenched and his knuckles turned white. "I want them all!"

Silence filled the room. Then, finally, Powers broke the silence.

"How did I know this was coming," Powers said. "You sound like the devil. You can control the world but not a single Christian. You're afraid of them. You refuse to confront them directly, except through us."

The plastic smile drained from Ford's face and his voice changed. "I am the devil!"

Sudden fear registered on all their faces. A pen dropped to the table, a glass of water tipped over, and several men scooted away from the table. They had all heard it! It wasn't just me!

Ford spoke with the same deep raspy voice of the beast. "You, gentlemen, have slept with the devil and must now pay the price."

"What do you want?" Powers asked a bit more contrite.

"Well, to begin with, I want the Christian churches raped while I watch. Strip the Church of its tax exemption and levy huge duties against its property value. Most churches will not be able to survive."

"You really do hate them, don't you?" Powers whispered.

"How would you feel if you had been imprisoned for a thousand years?" Ford's voice was non-human, almost mechanical. Then he hissed, "Yes, I hate them, and anyone who sides with them. Now, can I count on your support?"

Powers looked around at the other men. They appeared to be too terrified to answer. The look on Power's face proved that they had come too far; they could not easily give up their vast fortunes. "Of course. We'll do anything you require." Powers finally replied.

Ford rose from his seat and moved over to the map. He began to reposition certain symbols on the map. "These symbols are on five small cities located in third world countries. You'll find small Christian social groups emerging there. They are conservative Christian groups that have rejected the MegaNet and international trade in favor of what they consider to be a simpler lifestyle. The IIC must raid these cities and kill those who dwell there."

Shock and outrage flared in one of the other men. "How can we possibly justify something like that? We're businessmen, not your hatchet men! Do your own dirty work!"

"Do you really believe you are so different from me?" Ford snapped. "You step on the weak and needy every day to give yourselves a better advantage! Look around you, gentlemen! We are all users, and we are all willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the security of our empires!"

Ford paused and lowered his voice before continuing. "You can justify anything! You already do! Just say they were... right-wing radicals plotting to destroy the MegaNet. Society doesn't question anything anymore, as long as they see it on television. Face it, gentlemen, no one really cares!"

"Then you will -- slowly, mind you -- start targeting any and all Christian groups. You see, I learned something over the years. Humans will accept anything if you present it to them slowly. So begin by labeling Christians as right-wing radicals bent on destroying our way of life. Call them… Call them Anti-MegaNeters if you want. Before long, all Christians will be viewed as threats, and hated as such! Then we can rid the world of this infection!"

But the man refused to back down. "You're trying to start a war!"

"Yes!" he hissed, slamming his fist on the table. "I'm declaring war on the Christian Church!"

Powers interrupted. "How do you know about these cities you've identified on the map?"

Ford looked ominously into Powers' eyes. "There is nothing about this world that I don't know about."

"So, do you mean to say we've sold our souls to the devil?" Powers asked half-heartedly, apparently unable to discern whether Ford had been serious before.

Ford smiled slyly. "You and I, Mr. Powers... Men like us have no souls."

A sinister smile slowly spread across Powers' face. "You finally said something upon which we can both agree."

I turned to the angel. "What can I do? They're plotting the Great Tribulation! The martyring of the saints! I'm watching it unfold before my very eyes!"

The angel did not reply. He just continued to observe the discussion with a cool, sober expression. I realized then how solemn the occasion really was. This was a turning point. Up until now, the Church

had merely been ridiculed. Now true persecution was about to begin!

23

Framed!

"All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24:8-13)."

The virus was introduced into the system through a document attached to an e-mail message. The clerk who read the anonymous message had no way of knowing what she had done to cause the change in public support for the IIC.

Once infected, the workstation became a breeding ground for the virus. The document that triggered it contained encrypted encoding with specific instructions as to its target and its actions.

The virus carefully disguised itself as part of the middleware's messaging system, eluding the sophisticated anti-virus software. This was no ordinary virus: it was customized for this particular environment.

The virus continued to multiply and spread through the enterprise, infecting one UNIX server after

another. Once a server became infected, the virus carefully examined the databases on that server for information about the customers. Within micro-seconds every server in the entire network was being scrutinized by the dreadful germ.

Eventually, the virus found its target. Four large mainframes functioning in a SYSPLEX environment contained the database it needed to perform its mission. The virus took the customer base information and instructed the database to recall every loan to each of its clients. Within seconds, the financial status of each customer was ruined. The database showed that they had all defaulted on their loans and the rules-based systems began to refuse any more credit.

The transactions were automatic. Database triggers fired off subroutines sending demands through electronic commerce, known as EDI, instructing each customer to pay back their loans in full.

At the customer site, the effect was felt immediately. Business stopped as the databases locked all accounts. Within an hour of the initial infection, worldwide commerce came to a screeching halt.

The site of the initial virus attack was the United States Federal Reserve, and its customers were banks all across the country. Every business was affected one way or another, directly or indirectly.

Initially, no one understood what was happening as accounts were being frozen. It was so disastrous that everyone thought it was another crippling market crash. Technicians scattered to begin their diagnostics, searching for the logs that tracked each database transaction. Unfortunately, the virus had anticipated their actions and had deleted the logs

following every transaction. It was careful to cover its tracks.

Even so, within a matter of hours, most of the bank technicians had come to the same conclusion: it was all a mistake! They began restoring the database from backup archives, a slow and painful resolution to the problem.

But their solution was short-lived. The presence of the virus at the Federal Reserve was not discovered until almost two days later. Each time a customer's record was restored, new transactions were sent demanding full payment again. The cycle continued until the Federal Reserve was finally able to remove the virus and correct the problem. However, business was not able to return to normal for almost a week.

A right-wing militia group was said to have claimed responsibility for the virus and the infection. The IIC declared that this was a Christian control group that believes electronic commerce is demonic. Without a single trial, the IIC's police force raided twenty-seven religious groups and arrested over ten thousand men, women, and children.

But that was just the beginning.

24

Commerce

"And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Revelation 13:11, 16-17)."

The days that followed were full of turmoil for everyone, not just Christians. Major economical upheaval caused a riotous outcry from the public for a more efficient government and less waste. During these troublesome times, the burden of taxation was just too much for most people to bear.

After years of lip service by legislators who promised lower taxes but succeeded only in further complicating the existing tax system, the public demanded true change. Thus came the inception of the flat tax system. This new system made possible another technological accomplishment: Instant Tax Payment, known as ITP.

By institutionalizing the ITP, it became possible for the federal government to disband the much-hated IRS. ITP was so much simpler. Every company was required by the Federal government to pay all wages directly to United States Treasury for

processing. Taxes for federal, state, and local municipalities were collected along with child support payments and other court judgments. Then a credit for the balance was issued to the employee's bank.

To the employee, very little had actually changed. By this time, most people were already used to having their checks deposited electronically. The real change took place behind the scenes. Each employee was given a federal employee number. Without it, no one could work.

The ITP was embraced by the public because it translated into a sizable reduction in taxes. Government at all levels could reduce their payrolls by eliminating the tax collection organization. As a result, there was a massive reduction in court cases and an increased amount of collectable income for the government.

In addition, super computers tracked every transaction from every company and calculated the taxable profit. This helped the government amass a tremendous database from which industries could draw.

The success of the ITP led the way for most major businesses to no longer accept cash or checks. With debit-only transactions, companies and banks were able to cut all costs associated with the handling of cash transactions. Before long, most banks were able to force businesses to accept only Electronic Fund Transfers. In the end, no one could buy or sell unless they had an employee number and a bank account. And since the changes were brought about a little bit at a time, society accepted them easily.

In the midst of this economic revolution, governments were able to pass laws virtually unnoticed by the general public, and these laws would eventually have severe impact. Many people were developing

their land to help provide food that was more and more in short supply. Most people were unaware that the government had added food supplements to a list of FDA-regulated items. The FDA began by regulating vitamins, protein powders, and dietary supplies. It quickly expanded this to include garden-variety herbs and seeds.

Harvesting seeds from produce was an offense equal to that of harvesting drugs. All seeds were to be obtained from government offices regulated by the FDA and came in the form of hybrids. The seeds from the mature plants were useless. The result of this action was to target many Christian homes and groups that were trying to be self-sufficient.

Another law that went into effect gave FEMA global power to handle biological terrorism by requiring the population to take part in vaccination programs. Failure to comply meant that the rebelling person or family would be quarantined and their property seized. This power was quickly abused as FEMA would quarantine entire communities of Christians who attempted to become self-sufficient.

Finally, a small special interest group was able to push the issue of euthanasia through the Supreme Court. In a most disturbing development, the High Court legalized what was euphemistically termed "death with dignity." The public focus was on economical issues rather than social, so the High Court's ruling went almost unnoticed.

25

Abomination of Desolation

"For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22)."

"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand (Daniel 8:23-25)."

I remember sitting on a hillside overlooking a suburb of Los Angeles one early summer day. I was afraid to show myself in the city for fear that someone would remember me, that I was a Christian. From

where I sat, I could count at least five burning churches.

I still could not comprehend how things could have become so bad for Christians so quickly. Such a short time ago, we were considered the "conscience" of this nation. A voice to be reckoned with. We influenced the government. We were the voice of morality the world over.

Perhaps we are the victims of our own arrogance, I thought.

I looked at the setting sun that hung just above the distant ocean and marveled at its beauty.

God created that, I told myself. *Then He just disappeared.*

That's what many Christians must be thinking right now, I thought. They are also trying to understand their plight.

I would need a place to sleep for the night. I dreaded the thought that I might have to bed down on the ground under one of the nearby trees.

I knew I should count myself blessed. I thought of the Christians who were taken and imprisoned, the children who had been separated from their parents. All of these were unjustly held by an organization that even the United States government couldn't touch.

"Why didn't we see this coming?" I asked out loud.

Then I heard a voice behind me. "Come with me."

The voice was familiar. I turned around without fear. It was the same angel who had shown so much to me already.

As I rose, I found myself once again in the same conference room that I had visited twice before. But as I looked around the table this time, there were

only five men gathered, two of whom were Ford and Powers.

Powers was leaning anxiously toward Ford. "You did it, didn't you? The virus, I mean!"

"Of course!" Ford grinned, looking quite proud of himself. "I've given the IIC a reason to apprehend Christians throughout the world."

"We'll end up having to arrest more than half the world!"

"No, you won't! Remember, I know mankind better than they know themselves. At the first hint of persecution, they will cast off their Christian pennant in droves. After the action the IIC took today, you will not find a person in this city admitting to being Christian."

"What are we to do with these people we're holding?"

"For now, just hold them. What to do with them will become clear shortly. Others will be joining them."

"Why?"

"Because those right wing fanatics have just begun to cause trouble."

Powers removed his glasses and looked down at the table. "What you mean to say is that you're going to manufacture more problems to blame on them."

"Say it however you want, but the outcome will be the same. And don't even consider crossing me! I can remove you just as easily as I can remove a president or a king. Just continue to do as I say, and you will remain in control of the world."

Ford stood to leave but stopped and raised a finger. "There's one more thing. I need you to have the IIC connect with the United States Treasury computers."

"Whatever for?"

"In a few days, an associate of mine will be bringing some specialists to the IIC. They're database experts. They'll be setting up some rather complex algorithms to examine spending habits. We should be able to determine who the Christians are and where they're hiding. We'll begin in the United States and then go abroad."

Powers looked confused. "The ITP computers don't contain that information."

"Oh, but they do! You see, I learned a few things from a preacher whom I used to study a long time ago. He once said, 'Wherever a man's treasure is, there you will find his heart.' In other words, if you want to know something about someone, just watch how they spend their money."

"The Great Tribulation." I turned to the angel.

The angel nodded. "It is truly a dreadful time for the servants of the Most High."

When I returned, it was already morning, but I felt fully rested. I headed down the hill to the town below. As I walked down the sidewalk, the headlines of the local paper caught my eye: Radical Christian Militia Strikes Again.

I felt chills as I read the article. Yesterday, at exactly noon, Eastern Standard Time, five communication hubs located in New York City, Reno, Rome, Moscow, and Tokyo were bombed. The bombs, poorly placed, did little actual damage to the MegaNet, but they caused the deaths of more than twenty-three people. According to the article, the Religious Right had supposedly claimed responsibility.

But I knew the truth.

I went to a nearby electronics store to view a display television. Just as I suspected, they were airing

a special report on a shoot-out between the IIC and an allegedly Christian right-wing militia. It appeared to be an all-out war! I knew that the confrontation was either staged or an attack on a militia that had nothing whatever to do with Christianity.

During the report, several scientists were interviewed to discuss new medical findings about the so-called "Christian gene." Several psychologists confirmed their findings that certain sociopath people had a tendency toward Christian behavior. The behavior, they claimed, manifested because Christianity promotes rebellion. They went on to assert that the United States was originally settled by people rebelling against the rule of Great Britain.

After that report, the scene changed to show the victorious IIC leading away prisoners. Then a distinguished-looking man began to discuss policy changes with the IIC.

"The United States Supreme Court today has ruled that euthanasia for the criminally and mentally insane is indeed an act of humanity. We in the IIC believe in the wisdom of the court. We have seen the pain that causes fanatical people to act irrationally. The bombing and viruses recently released by these people are nothing more than cries for help. Therefore, we have made the following decisions.

"First, we will have our psychologists evaluate each criminal arrested to determine whether or not they can be rehabilitated. Secondly, we will use everything at our disposal to see that any criminals capable of rehabilitation are treated.

"Finally, after every effort for rehabilitation has been exhausted and the criminal shows no signs of improvement, we will have the criminal euthanized in a final act of humanity."

I turned away from the television and walked out onto the street, tears filling my eyes. We were being marked criminally insane, systematically rounded up, and executed. I didn't know what to do, so I headed east away from town. Maybe, by chance, I could find others like me. If there were other Christians around, I suspected that they would be heading away from town as well.

26

The Witnesses

"*And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over*

them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth (Revelation 11:3-10)."

As I made my way down the side streets of Los Angeles on my way out of town, I was careful not to look anyone in the face. I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, blending into the crowd where I could. I hadn't gotten very far when a poster on a nearby light pole caught my eye. Sebastian. He was holding another meeting today.

That's where I'm supposed to be.

I took mostly side streets to get to the Convention Center, and I arrived just as the meeting started. Sebastian was walking onto the stage just as I entered the auditorium.

"Greetings!"

He went into the same narrative as before, and despite my knowledge of the power behind him, I was amused and could not help but smile at his charm. I had to close my eyes and breathe a silent prayer, for I realized that his words contained the power of an incantation. When I opened my eyes again, I could see in the Spirit. Standing over Sebastian was the monster, a red mist gushing out of his mouth as he spoke.

"*What am I to do?"* I asked the Lord.

Then, as if answering my silent prayer, a voice boomed out of the crowd. "Behold the Dragon that speaks as a Lamb!"

I turned around but could not locate the source of the voice. Then I looked back to Sebastian, whose face betrayed the slightest hint of fear.

From across the auditorium, I saw a light, a brilliant light that cast no shadows. It took me a moment to remember where I had seen it before. Then

I remembered: that same light had emanated from the Christ.

The beast behind Sebastian roared and tried to shield itself with its great wings. However, nothing in either the natural or the supernatural world could protect the beast from the light.

"Why have you come here, Michael?" The beast roared.

Shock appeared on the faces of those about me. They had heard the voice, too! It was audible!

"I am a witness sent forth from the Almighty to expose the darkness you perpetrate on this land," was the reply.

The answer came from the other end of the auditorium.

"You must leave this place!" This time the beast's words came from Sebastian's mouth.

"Not until the truth is made known. Not until these people see that you only pose as the servant of the Almighty when in reality you've come from the bowels of hell."

I stood on my chair to see the man who spoke. He was an unpretentious man in his forties, dressed in casual clothing. He stood in the center aisle, his heart ablaze with fire. Flashes of light shot forth from him like lightning. Instinctively I sheltered my eyes from the brilliance and peeked around wondering why the dazzling light did not affect the other people. It seemed that only the beast and I were able to see it.

"I am he who is sent from God! You are the impostor!" the beast roared as Sebastian mouthed the words. It was if I were seeing and hearing the physical and the spiritual worlds combined.

"You seek to shed the mantle of your condemnation on all those who hear you. And because these people have turned from God, He has hardened

their hearts so that they will not repent of their sins. Behold even now the messengers of God have gone forth to pour out sorrow without measure upon this land."

"Name your challenge!"

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I seal the heavens from rain," the man cried out with upraised hand. "I take the dominion that is rightfully mine over this earth and sky! Hear me ye clouds above! Obey my words! You will not give a single drop of water upon this land that I curse!"

Then he pointed at Sebastian. "This land will know a drought unparalleled in history. It will spread across the nation without respect of person. If you are indeed from the Almighty, you will prevent this from happening."

The man of God swept his hand around the audience. "You are a nation that has rejected God! You are a people with hearts so hardened you will not repent from your sin even though your very nation is cursed! The people of Nineveh will condemn you in the day of judgment, for unlike you, they repented when their land was cursed!"

Sebastian pointed his finger at the man. "You're not the only one who can call a curse! I call down fire from God upon you!"

Nothing happened.

The man stepped forward. "Where is your fire?"

Sebastian looked around, apparently lost for words. I could see the beast behind him cowering in fear. Perhaps Sebastian could sense the loss of his power.

The man of God lifted his hands. "Here is the fire! In the name of Jesus Christ, let there be fire!"

At his words, the building began to shake. Sebastian ran from the stage just as the ceiling burst open above him, splintering in pieces by what could only be described as a ball of flames. The stage was quickly transformed into a flaming inferno. Metal beams, plaster, and roofing rained down upon the stage. Panicked people ran in every direction, and I lost track of the stranger.

I pushed through the crowd hoping to catch a glimpse of the man. I wanted so much to talk to him, but I couldn't determine the direction he went. Could it be that he just... disappeared?

By the time I made my way to the spot where he had been standing, the auditorium was completely empty. I didn't know where he went, but somehow I believed I knew whom he was. He was one of God's two Anointed Ones, sent to minister in these last days.

I left the auditorium and began to sweep the surrounding area, ears peeled for his distinctive booming voice. Street after street I searched. Hours later, I came to the conclusion that I was not meant to find him. It was growing late, and I needed to find a place for the night.

As I passed through the downtown area of this small community, I heard the voice coming from a small electronics store, speaking of God's impending judgment. I turned and rushed into the store to see who would be boldly speaking about God across public television. I found the display from which the voice was coming and watched eagerly.

The speaker obviously held the same authority as the man I had heard in the auditorium. But this man was black and spoke with a South African accent. "People, the Lord wants you to know that if you will but seek His face and turn from your sin, He will once again bless this land."

The man lifted his arms. “I speak to the clouds and sky above! Seal up your heavenly fountain, and produce no more rain!”

He was standing on a platform overlooking thousands of people, and these words appeared at the top of the screen:

Special Report

The man lowered his arms. “Many false prophets have gone out into the land claiming to be sent of God. But unless they are proclaiming this same message of repentance to you, they are not of God! Avoid any prophets advancing a message of prosperity! Stay away from them! For the Lord God Almighty is angry with this land and the hardness of your hearts! He has sent me forth to curse the land unless you repent!”

The screen changed to a pleasant-looking commentator.

They must have realized how stupid they were to televise that, I thought. Now the whole world has heard his words as a witness against them.

“At this time we know very little about the man who was just speaking,” the commentator began. “We do know that trouble has followed him wherever he’s traveled. Currently, the IIC believes him to be associated with the Christian militia that has claimed responsibility for the crippling internet virus and the recent rash of bombings. An investigation is underway to determine whether he should be arrested.”

Go ahead and try.

27

Citadel

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent (Revelation 12:13-14)."

I left the store and headed eastward toward the edge of town. I felt compelled... No, I was driven! It was almost as if a great unseen hand was leading me.

Darkness soon settled like a fog on the dirt back road as it snaked gracefully deep into the forest. I was about to stop to spend the night under a nearby tree when I clearly heard a man shout.

"I love you, Jesus!"

I turned in the direction from which the voice had come. There was only darkness and silence. But I knew I had heard a voice. So I continued on through the woods. After about fifteen minutes, I could hear voices growing louder as I approached.

Finally, I burst through the trees into a clearing. A campground! There were dozens of log cabins at the edge of a picturesque lake. Just beyond the cabins were gardens and fruit trees. Next to them were cattle. The people who lived here were obviously self-sufficient.

What caught my attention was at the center of the camp; a small group of people knelt worshipping God around a campfire. I recognized the love for God in their faces, and heartfelt words of praise. After so many months of being alone, I was starved for fellowship. So, I rushed into their midst, praising my Lord.

After a short time, a young lady came over and introduced herself. She told me the camp was a vacation resort belonging to her family. When things began to grow bleak for Christians, they opened it up as a sanctuary. It quickly became known as the Citadel.

Before I had a chance to ask her all the questions that were on my heart, the leader began to speak. "Come in close, everyone. I need to talk with you."

Dressed in overalls and a flannel shirt, he looked like a farmer. Noting his long black ponytail and squarish dark-skinned face, I knew he had to be of Native American descent.

He flashed a bright smile. "God has not forsaken His people as some of you are wondering. I realize that most of us do not know each other, but I trust that will change."

I looked around the group. It was true. Most people sat separate from each other, not in groups as I would have expected. I could see more people coming out of the forest.

"We are experiencing the Great Tribulation. Even as we speak, many Christians are dying all over the world. Right now, God's two witnesses are prophesying His final invitation to repentance. If the world repents, God will heal the nations. If not, the end will come swiftly. Are we going to die? No!"

That got my attention! What made us any different from the others who were captured and put to death?

"In understanding why this is happening to Christians, we have the keys to our salvation. God has always used troubles and trials to bring His people back to Him. The trouble we are in is meant to strip us of our earthly cares, so that we may lay aside every fleshly weight that holds us back from God.

"Tonight, while we prayed, the Lord opened my eyes. I saw His people marching forth in armor of light. I saw the demonic host fleeing from His great army. Then I asked the Lord, 'What is it that You would have us do?'"

Tears flooded the preacher's eyes, and he stopped to wipe them. "God replied with four words: *Take back your dominion!*"

Yes, that was it! That was exactly what the angel had been showing me! Ever since Adam had invited Satan into this world by an act of rebellion, the prophets of God had been crying for God's people to *take it back*! The power of God was at our disposal, if only we knew it!

"Are we to hide here? No! Jesus said, 'A city set atop a hill cannot easily be hidden!' We are not to hide out here! We're to live out here! We have allowed evil and sin into this world for too long! It's time we took this world back! And when it is once again under God's dominion, there will be no place for Satan!"

I was like a dry sponge, soaking up everything! It had been so long since I had been around people who longed for the will of God in their lives.

Later that evening, the preacher came over. "Hello, my name is John."

"My name is..."

"Paul Barnes."

My surprise must have shown because he smiled. "I was told that you would be joining us. An angel, like the one that is with you, explained to me where you've been."

"An angel?" I looked around.

"I'm sorry. I thought you knew of his presence."

"Oh... yes! I mean, no... what I mean is... from time to time an angel has appeared and showed me things, but..."

John nodded and took me by the elbow to sit by the fire. "As you draw closer to the Lord in these times, you will see more and more of the spiritual realm. It's like the tabernacle of the wilderness. When the priests entered it, they found that they were completely surrounded by angels. Angels were engraved in the gold-clad walls. Angelic images were sewn on the white linen cloth that covered the roof, which could only be seen from inside. Being in the Holy Place -- as the Hebrew priesthood was -- is something like walking in the Spirit."

He handed me a drink and continued, "I'm sure you've heard of many evangelists who, during a move of God's spirit, could see both angels and demons in a certain place, and who would know things about people that they couldn't have possibly known by themselves. In fact, in reading the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, you find that angels were prevalent. So don't think it strange. God has something in store for you, and you'll just have to wait to see what it is."

"Are you saying that I haven't walked in the Spirit before?"

John smiled. “We have all loved God most of our lives. However, as Jesus warned, the cares of this life have often clouded our vision.”

We talked for most of the night about the events of the preceding months. I knew that I had found a home. I knew I was exactly where God wanted me to be.

28

Time of the Gentiles

"For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (Matthew 24:24)."

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24)."

From time to time, I traveled out and abroad from the Citadel. I tried to minister to whoever would hear it but usually without much luck. I was surprised at just how hard peoples' hearts were becoming. On one occasion, my second journey away from the camp, I went back into the city.

It was a pathetic sight. The city was in ruins. Poverty and anarchy had taken its toll. The sight reminded me of a war torn city ravaged and pillaged by the plunder of war.

As I explored the outskirts of town I would from time to time come across a market or business that was still open. However, the masses that littered the streets were homeless and destitute.

To my surprise, many churches were open that Sunday morning. I went into one and sat in the back as

people began to fill the auditorium. I was excited that so many were gathering during such bad times.

But as I looked closer, I noticed that there was something odd about the people. They seemed to be distracted, and they were using vulgar language as they conversed before service started.

My questions faded when the minister stepped up to the platform. He was dressed entirely in black, engulfed by a full black cape. He wore a large pentagram necklace and had long black fingernails.

This is no man of God, I observed. He was a spiritualist, and the service was a mockery to God.

Suddenly, I was in the spirit. Hanging from the ceiling and walls like bats in a cave were a myriad of demons! However, this time I was alone! There was no angel for me to hide behind or to explain what was happening, and this time it wasn't a vision. I was really here and the demons saw me! Demons dropped from the ceiling like hail and fluttered around me shouting curses and urging me to leave.

"There! In the back! He's a cursed being, one that calls himself a Christian! He is one of those responsible for our troubles!"

I looked again for my protecting angel but quickly came to the realization that he wouldn't be coming to my aid. This was my time! Just like millions of other Christians the world over, I had been discovered and would now be dragged away!

What should I do? How should I respond? I tried to control my fear and remember the lessons God had shown me.

At once, the demons and the room around me seemed to fade, and the sounds appeared to vanish. I found myself standing in a house looking at the front door. I was having a vision! I examined the door and found that it was open just a crack. A large lion was

outside the door trying to get in. It placed its paw through the opening in the door and slowly pushed it open wider and wider. I ran into another room and slammed the door shut, but it was too late. The lion was in the house. It knocked down the door, charging after me. I ran desperately from room to room, but the lion stayed right on my tail. Finally, there were no rooms left to which I could flee. There the vision ended.

I remembered the Scripture: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

I'm not sure how it all happened, but I know I had settled in my heart that this would not be a victory for Satan. Somehow I knew that this was not my time to die.

I realized that the demons were swarming on me. It struck me that I could physically feel their wings batting me, the agony as their talons dug into my flesh. The memory of the charging lion filled my mind. This time, it would be different. This time, I wasn't about to run.

The memory of Christ in the boat facing the storm suddenly filled my mind. *This is my storm*, I thought. *And I have dominion over it!*

"Jesus," I said calmly, "let there be peace."

For an instant, I felt the demons release their grip. Then they clutched all the tighter. I became aware that there were voices speaking in my mind, voices I knew to be demons attempting to sap my strength.

"Don't resist," they said. "You're supposed to give your life for the sake of Christ."

"I rebuke this religious spirit in the name of Jesus!"

"Neither God nor His angels are coming to your aid. You must be out of God's will!"

"I rebuke the accusing spirit in the name of Jesus Christ!"

One by one, I felt the demons lose their hold on me and fall away. Then I became aware of a light radiating from my own heart. Stunned, the demons jumped away like animals avoiding a fire.

The Sword of my spirit, I thought. *Its blade is as none other in the universe.*

Suddenly, I had no fear. My soul was ablaze with the power of the Spirit, and I realized that none of the powers in this building could touch me.

Infuriated, the spiritualist pointed a long back fingernail at me. "The powers of the universe are at my command! I curse you with disease and pestilence! I curse your tongue to dry up in your mouth!"

I felt no fear as I stepped into the aisle to walk toward the front. The people moved aside, out of my way, terrified looks on their faces. Undaunted by the finger he extended, I advanced until my face was inches away from his long black nail. "Your deception is an abomination that has brought desolation to this land. Your wicked heart is as cold and hard as the floor on which you stand. Therefore, the Lord causes your words to return onto your own head. You will not speak again until you see the Christ returning in the Eastern sky."

My heart pounded as my hands flung themselves into the air. "Your mouth is sealed until the day you will be forced to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all!"

A strange look came over the spiritualist's face. His hands were now raised toward me in fear, as if

sheltering himself from my words. Stepping back, he opened his mouth to speak but could not utter a sound. He grabbed at his throat and tried again and again, but he could not utter a sound.

I turned around to look at the people. "Will you now turn from your wickedness and serve the Lord God Almighty?"

They shouted back that they wanted nothing to do with God. They had found the lord of this earth, and they would only accept him as the god they would serve.

"Get out!" they cried. "Leave us alone!"

"The trouble you attribute to Christians has come from your own rejection of God," I told them. "If you continue in disobedience, killing His saints, your trouble will become even worse!"

An elderly man stood in the front pew. He appeared rational, unlike the emotional crowd behind him. "How can we stop all this trouble from continuing?"

"The Scripture says: *'If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.'"*

The man frowned and hung his head. "That is not something we are willing to do."

I realized that there was no conviction of the Spirit in these people's hearts. God had withdrawn His invitation for communion with them, as the scripture says: "*And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was*

found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

The times of the Gentiles are fulfilled! Now I knew for sure that things would not be improving. The outside world would continue to go from bad to worse.

I left the church and headed back to camp. I had not traveled very far when I felt a hand touch my shoulder. At first I thought the police had come to arrest me, but then I recognized the familiar voice of the angel.

"Come with me."

I turned around to find myself in a remote desert. Thousands of people were gathered together. At the center of the masses stood the two Anointed Ones, surrounded by hundreds of spiritualists arrayed in their long black robes. There seemed to be some competition among them as to which could look the most mystical.

Television cameras from major news stations were filming... whatever this was. I was about to turn to ask the angel what was happening when I heard one of the Anointed Ones speak.

"The door of God's mercy is closing. Soon, no one will be able to partake in Christ's everlasting life. So shall the scripture be fulfilled that says: 'And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.'"

The man was dressed casually, certainly nothing you'd expect from a world-renowned minister. This tall black man spoke with authority.

"The time has come for you to choose! If the Lord God be God, then serve Him!"

One of the more arrogant spiritualists stepped forward. "God is a fool! If all is as you say, then explain how an omnipotent God could allow such

rebellion to His Lordship to even exist? The god *we* serve has no mercy on the weak and foolish! There is no room for failure! Before this day is over, all the world will see the might of the god of the earth."

He turned around to face the crowd, and they all began to cheer. He then turned back to the Anointed Ones. "We challenge you and your God!"

The same Anointed One stepped forward. "The challenge has already been made by your master before the world came into existence. So, call unto your god! If he can answer with fire from heaven then he is the one true God! But, if he fails, I will call unto *my* God for the heavenly fire. He who answers from heaven with fire is the one true God!"

Once again I could see in the Spirit. High above, a white cloud began to form. It grew larger and larger until it encompassed the valley where we were gathered. Then it began to spin faster and faster. As it spun, a funnel formed. It continued to pick up speed while dropping lower and lower. Then lightning and thunder began to echo from the cloud.

I looked at the people, but they seemed completely unaware of the storm.

As the funnel dropped, I noticed that it wasn't a cloud at all. It was a swirling mass of beings! They were angels! And the white that I saw was the brilliant clothing which they wore. I could not begin to fathom their number!

The funnel dropped right at the center of the Anointed Ones and spiritualists. As a tidal wave, heavenly beings poured out in all directions. Demons fled before them. The angels spread out to form a protective perimeter all around the valley, like a solid white wall extending from the ground to the sky!

I looked back at the spiritualists. They seemed dazed, confused. They looked at each other as if they

didn't know what to do. They were utterly without power, and now they knew it!

They began to chant, to cry out, but nothing happened. They wailed and waved their hands, but there was no response from their gods. Within an hour, they stripped down and cut their bodies with knives. They beat on themselves. Some even took their own lives. But still the sky remained silent.

As the morning turned to afternoon, and afternoon turned to evening, it was clear to all. Their gods would not be answering.

Then as the last spiritualist collapsed from exhaustion, the same Anointed One who had issued the challenge stepped forward. He took a stick and carefully drew the symbol of a cross in the sand. He made it large so that everyone could see it. Then he stood back.

The second Anointed One stepped forward and looked over the hushed crowd. "How is it that you ignore your God? He is not a garment that can be kept in a closet! He is a being who fills the universe and stands in judgment of you today!"

Then the man of God looked up into the clear blue sky, his voice tender. "Lord, speak to us!"

From out of the clear sky, lightning thundered forth, striking the sand where the cross had been drawn. It burst into flames that seemed to feed upon the sand. The flames grew larger and higher, seeming to reach into heaven. Phenomenal! It grew until it appeared as a pillar of fire extending up as far as I could see. Flames licked out, consuming the spiritualists who dared to challenge God. I watched as they ran for shelter, looking like blazing torches. But nothing in this world could ease their pain or answer their cries. They had tempted the Maker of the world and were now paying the price!

Even as night fell, the flames of the pillar continued to burn, so hot that nothing could come near it, so bright that it burned our eyes to look at it, and so powerful that it could not be put out. God had lit a fire that could not be quenched.

God allowed the fire to burn for three days as a witness, proving that it could not possibly be a natural act. He had answered those men, as if saying; *I am here just as I have always been.*

29

Two Hundred Thousand Thousand

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should

not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts (Revelation 9:13-21)."

Famine was having its effect. The third month passed without rain in North America and part of South America, Europe, and Asia. Christians were blamed for it, and so began the great pursuit.

Christians were actively hunted. In some places, there were bounties placed on their heads. They were slaughtered wherever they were found. Like the Jews in World War II, they were exterminated indiscriminately.

After the ninth month without rain, worldwide panic set in. Every country set all its resources toward finding alternate sources of water. In some countries, massive migrations were underway to other countries where water could still be found. Many countries had nationalized their water supply, surrounding it with their military forces.

The most volatile area was between China and Russia. China was in severe need of resources for their growing population. For nearly two months, China stealthily amassed its army along the eastern boarder of Mongolia. Russia countered by mobilizing an additional three hundred thousand men to its already one million strong, but it was no match for the army that China had at its disposal.

In the clear blue sky of an early summer morning, China attacked. More than twenty million men and women took part in the initial battle. An additional fifteen million were involved in support and

logistics. Still more army units were moving up every day.

Russia's one million men were quickly overwhelmed in the attack. They mobilized what remained of their military and started calling in their reserves. Elite forces in the West were drained to skeleton crews as they were rushed to Mongolia. But nothing could stem the tide of the Red Chinese army.

Within two weeks, all but a quarter of western Mongolia was under China's control. More than two million Russians and a hundred million Chinese were committed to the battle. Losses on both sides were staggering. And no prisoners were being taken.

Years of hatred and enmity were unleashed in the suicidal battle over Mongolia. China needed the Mongolian resources to survive, but Russia refused to give it up.

By the end of the first month, China had committed two hundred million soldiers. However, with the momentum moving swiftly in China's favor, and given the magnitude of China's army, it became a monster impossible for China to control.

Chinese forces crossed the Mongolian border into Russia, pushing back with it what remained of the Russian army. Russian strategists pointed out that the Chinese would not be able to logistically support an army of this size for more than another week at most. If Russia could just hold on, the Chinese army would collapse under its own weight and retreat back into its own country. But this opinion was not shared by the Russian leaders.

So, coordinated to begin at the same time of day as the initial Chinese attack, Russia lunched one hundred tactical nuclear missiles at military supply arteries throughout Mongolia. They intended to cut off the Chinese army from their supplies. In addition, the

attack was directed to land inside a Mongolia area that was neither Chinese nor Russian directly. It was a compromise meant to stop the invasion and ruin any benefit that China could possibly get from occupying Mongolia.

China's response was swift. Fifty tactical nuclear missiles were launched at Russian military installations throughout southeastern Russia. The scale of the nuclear exchange quickly escalated, and more attacks were exchanged against each side's military bases. Before long, both sides were targeting each other's cities.

In the end, China finally halted the exchange, but only because the loss of its communication network made it impossible to coordinate any more attacks.

Casualties mounted. Thirty million Chinese and five million Russians were already dead. But the carnage had just begun.

Russia and China were not alone in their suffering. Effects of the nuclear exchange were felt the world over. Clouds of dust and nuclear fallout drifted eastward across the Pacific Ocean, slowly spreading around the globe. In North America, tons of radioactive dust fell into the remaining fresh water supply. So many fish died that some lakes actually turned red from bacteria, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

> *"And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as if it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the*

third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter (Revelation 8:10-11)."

Millions of tons of dust that had been thrown into the air from the nuclear blasts formed a belt of clouds which covered most of the northern hemisphere. It stretched from the equator to the arctic circle.

Though the effect wasn't as severe as it might have been in an all-out nuclear war, it did cause grave problems. Hurricanes pounded both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, completely wiping out the populations on the Hawaiian, Caribbean, and Philippine Islands. A high pressure zone over the southwestern United States and Mexico drove temperatures up over 120 degrees for more than three months. The northeast United States and Florida experienced freezing temperatures in the summer. Florida's citrus crops and those of the Midwest were ruined by frost.

The radioactive fallout alone killed millions, if not from direct exposure then from the contaminated food supply. Cattle and plants alike were exposed to the deadly material. In some cases, the survivors suffered the most. Cancer ran rampant from the radioactive dust. Those unfortunate enough to survive the elements found their lives filled with intolerable pain and suffering.

And again, the Christians were blamed because they were responsible for the famine that started it all.

As I pondered the events, I thought about the Christian masses that were also dying. As food and water became scarce, they were the first that society wanted to exterminate in order to preserve their short supply.

If only my bothers and sisters understood the power of God at their disposal, I thought.

And for the first time, I truly understood the reality of the Old Testament scripture: *"My people perish for lack of knowledge."*

30

Man of Sin

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (II Thessalonians 2:1-5)."

It had been almost three years with hardly a drop of rain at all. The land was no longer rich and green but desolate and parched, gaping with hard, dusty cracks splitting deep into the earth. Cities had emptied long ago as people left to find food and water in remote areas. Massive dust storms blanketed the land.

The Great Lakes around Michigan had shrunk to less than half their size as industry and government drained them. Huge factories had been built all along the coasts to remove salt from the seawater and pump it inland.

Government negotiators were sent in to reason with the two Anointed Ones. Some Christians were promised that their lives would be spared if they would bring about rain, even just a little.

But the one thing that could have saved the land -- that the people refused to give. They would not repent.

The lake near our cabins had dried up long ago and the forest had died. However, our water jugs never ran dry, and our food supply never ran out. I could now fully appreciate how miraculous it was that the Israelis survived forty years in the desert.

We lived in a state of constant anticipation. With Christians being hunted the world over, we wondered how long it would be before our small camp was invaded. But as the months went by, we began to wonder if perhaps there was some kind of Divine protection upon us.

I got up early to pray and found John sitting in my favorite praying spot. I knew by his smile that he had been waiting there to talk with me.

"It's difficult to remember how beautiful this forest once was," he commented, nodding at the dead decaying trees surrounding us.

I smiled and waited, knowing there was more on his mind. Then his demeanor became serious.

"Paul, the end is drawing near. Do you know what that means for us?"

"The New Jerusalem is about to descend!"

John smiled as if amused. "The New Jerusalem has been here since the Day of Pentecost. Remember, in Hebrews Twelve the Apostle Paul wrote:

> *'But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an*

innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

Remember, also what the angel told John in the Book of Revelation:

'And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.'

Notice how he told John that he was going to show him the bride of Christ, and he showed him the New Jerusalem."

John smiled again. "That leads right in to what I wanted to talk to you about. The Apostle Paul also wrote in Hebrews, *'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'* We are a city without a permanent resting place. We cannot build the foundation of our city in a land we do not own. The end is nearing, and it is time for us to take back the heritage that was so long ago promised to mankind, permanently planting our foundations deep into the soil."

I could feel the power of God in his words and understood now that God was granting us the power of His Spirit comparable to the power that was granted Satan in these last days.

But John wasn't finished. "Remember the words of the angel that explained Daniel's dream? The angel said:

> *'And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.'*

Those three and a half years are almost up! The angel told what would happen next when he said:

> *'But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.'*

My question to you, Paul, is who are *they*? If you look at it closely, you'll find he was talking about the saints. Then the angel said:

> *'And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'"*

I stood astonished! It all made sense! It was Moses who brought down the plagues on Egypt. It was Elijah who stopped it from raining during the backslidden time in Israel. Jonah was sent to Nineveh. The more I considered it, the more I realized that God always used His people to prophesy in judgment as a

witness against the land. Could it be that now it was our turn?

John seemed to know that I understood and left me to pray. But I hadn't contemplated the matter very long when a hand touched my shoulder. The angel had returned.

"Come with me."

As I stood up, I found myself on a dried lake bed. The ground was hard and cracked, and in the distance I could see water. I turned and looked behind me. As far as I could see was nothing but dried lake bed.

"Isn't this one of the Great Lakes?"

"This is Lake Michigan, and over there is one of the two Anointed Ones."

I turned to look in the direction the angel indicated. A single figure was walking along the shore line. The angel started toward him, and I followed.

As we drew near, I could hear the man praying. I recognized him as the man I had seen years before at the Convention Center. He stopped and held up his hands.

"Lord, I have done what You asked and still these people will not repent. Their evil hearts are cold and hard, without conscience or shame. They take joy in murdering Your people.

"I command now a plague on the water. Water, be sour and desolate of life. Poison the fountains of the deep that replenish you."

Then I saw gigantic splashes out in the water. Something was falling into it. Immense rock-like objects were falling from the sky!

I turned to the angel. "What's happening?"

"The sea is about to die."

The angel then took my elbow to lead me away into a mist. When it cleared, I was standing in a wheat

field. How beautiful it was! Large green shoots stood proud and ripe. Not far away, irrigation equipment showered the field with a gentle cascade of water.

I heard a voice behind me cry out. It was the voice of the other Anointed One. I had heard his voice on television years before. Surrounding him were many people with cameras and microphones.

"You have committed the ultimate abomination! You have persecuted and killed the saints of the Most High! This abomination has left the world bereft of a reason for the Lord to tolerate you any longer. It is an abomination that has left this world desolate. Because the cries of His people have reached into heaven itself, I have been sent to begin judgment!"

He pointed toward the Eastern sky. "Behold, I command the earth to bring forth a plague of locusts to desolate the land!"

I became aware of a low hum in the distance. I squinted to see from where it was coming, but all I could see was a dark cloud. Suddenly I realized that it wasn't a cloud at all. Locusts! A swarm was so dense that it darkened the entire sky!

The hum soon grew to a deafening roar. The people ran for shelter as the sky turned black as night.

"This plague of locusts will soon cover the entire world! Before long, you will not be able to purchase food at any price."

31

The Sixth Seal

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondsman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Revelation 6:12-17)?"

Famine and disease were driving people to desperate measures. The bowels of hell were opened, and demons of unimaginable power and craft came forth. Those of us who were still alive found that we literally had to pray without ceasing. Barbaric spirits of death were sent as assassins to kill us. We were

surrounded on every side by adversity and death, but we refused to yield. The few of us who remained were determined that we would yield no more of this land to Satan. In fact, we proposed to get it back!

As I worked in a garden late one afternoon I was startled to see the angel standing near me.

"Come and see!" he said.

I arose and found that I was suddenly standing on a mountain overlooking the rolling plains.

"What am I to see?" I asked.

"The people of earth believed things could not get any worse, but things were about to. Approaching earth from the direction of the sun is a large asteroid."

I looked up toward the sky. A ball of fire was burning as it fell toward earth. It moved painfully slow giving me an idea of just how big the object was. As it burned parts of the object broke away. Some exploded in brilliant bursts of light while others found their own course toward the earth.

As I watched, the object struck the earth with such power that the ground began to ripple. The ripples were like water when a stone is tossed into it. I could see the ground raising and lowering as it fanned out in all directions. Then the shock wave hit the mountain upon which I stood. It knocked me to the ground and all around me mountains began to collapse into valleys. At once I remembered the scripture, "*every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*"

As burning pieces of the object fell around me, it appeared as though the stars of heaven were falling. I noticed too that the sun seemed to be dimming. Then I realized that a huge black cloud was quickly forming from the point of impact. As I continued to watch, it was if nighttime had come. I could hardly see anything.

A shiver swept over my body as I realized that I was witnessing the opening of the sixth seal! I remembered the scripture, *"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth."*

I felt the hand of the angel on my shoulder. He then took my hand and as I stood I found myself once again in the garden. The angel was nowhere to be found.

It appeared to be night so I looked at my watch. It was now 9pm. Something was wrong and it took me a moment to understand just what it was. The moon was full and high in the night sky. But instead of the white glowing orb that I expected, it was blood red and dimly lit! And there were no stars at all. The dust from the asteroid's impact had created a cloud that was blanketing the earth.

Then, as I became enthralled with the moon, I once again heard the voice of the angel. "Come and see!". I turned in the direction of the voice and found myself standing on a city street. Thousands of people crowded around me. Then I heard someone shout, "Behold, I present to you the Christ who has come to bring peace and prosperity to the land!"

I recognized that voice. Sebastian! I pushed through the crowd until I could see. Sebastian stood on a raised platform that appeared to be the entry of a well-kept building. Probably the only one kept in this condition in the entire city.

"I present to you the prince of this world!"

The crowd began to cheer and applaud. Sebastian bowed and backed away from the entrance. The door opened, and Mr. Ford walked out. He moved

to the front of the platform and stood emotionless until the crowd quieted.

"This is my kingdom! I will no longer tolerate those so-called prophets' curses! They are not prophets, they are anti-Christs. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. While they profess to know God they destroy the works of His hands. I have brought them tonight and will deliver the evil ones into your hands!"

Ford turned toward the door. Several large men led the two Anointed Ones, bound in chains, from the building. On seeing the two men, the crowd quickly turned into a violent mob. The prophets were brought to the edge of the platform, as the riotous crowd clamored for them, tearing at their clothing.

The Anointed Ones did not resist, but just before they were tossed to the crowd, both men turned their heads to look directly at me.

The crowd laid into the two men, beating them to death, and leaving their bloodied bodies in a heap on the street. Almost immediately, rain began to fall for the first time in three and a half years.

The people began to whoop and dance about. The curses were lifted! They could begin to enjoy life and prosperity again!

Ford lifted his hands in the rain. "The powers of the universe are at my command! Neither God, nor His Anointed dare challenge me! Do you take me as your leader?"

"Yes!"

"Then worship me!"

This self-proclaimed messiah had rid the world of the men who plagued it and brought rain once again. The entire world was amazed at his power and eagerly followed him.

32

"When He had opened the seventh seal…"

The curses that plagued the earth from the prophecies of the two witnesses ended with their deaths. Christianity, in the traditional sense, no longer existed. The turmoil from the last years, depravity of society, persecution of God's people, and deception of the anti-Christ had fashioned a completely new concept of God and what it meant to serve Him.

Christians, churches, and pastors had either been killed or were living in remote regions and were all but forgotten. The Jehovah of the Scriptures was replaced by Mr. Ford. Pastors were replaced by spiritualists, and references to Christian documents had gradually disappeared from textbooks and libraries.

It was the dawning of a new age that placed Lucifer as the unchallenged lord of the earth, and it appeared that God and His people were vanquished from the face of the earth. It was if there was silence in heaven!

So confident was Lucifer in his victory that the few remaining Christians who survived received little consideration, though they were not completely forgotten. After all, there was the matter of revenge, and Lucifer was determined to have it.

Even as the forces of evil began to encompass the camps of Christians, those who survived continued to seek God and grow closer to Him. It appeared that the final chapter for God's people was drawing to a close. Then, as Lucifer reveled in the knowledge that

his place on earth was now forever guaranteed, the Seventh Seal was opened!

As the day of Pentecost had ushered in a new testament for God's people, a new outpouring of the Spirit in a measure never before known to mankind began to fall.

The few remaining Christians at the Citadel, including me, had been seeking God non-stop for several days. With the two witnesses gone, we were lacking in direction and faced no other alternative but to wait for our eventual discovery and certain death. So we prayed.

33

"…and then shall the end come." Matt. 24:14

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke 21:25-28)

I was still standing on the small hill a few miles away from our camp as I continued to watch the end of the world unfold. The camp was, in fact, just over the distant hill before me. Streaks of light extended up from where I knew the camp to be located, like lightning continuously reaching up into the sky.

High above the camp, demons by the thousands circled like vultures anticipating the death of their prey. Clearly they were waiting for something. Perhaps they wanted to attack but couldn't because of the light.

Then I noticed that I was also ablaze with the light. My body glowed with the same brilliance I had seen in Jesus.

This must be it. It is time to take back the kingdom for our Lord.

I made my way to the camp, praying as I traveled. All the while, above me the demons circled, trying to find a weakness. I continued to pray as I went.

"Satan, the dominion of the land that you have enjoyed for millennia is ended. In the name of Jesus Christ I take back the land that my fathers surrendered to you."

Immediately the earth shook beneath me. It was the same shaking that I felt when Jesus was crucified.

The earth is in travail! God's sons are in birth!

"There is now no place found for you, Satan! This world is no longer your sanctuary!" I shouted.

I was at the top of a hill overlooking the camp. I looked back to discover that a great army was following me. Soldiers, trucks, tanks, and other equipment were massing in a final assault upon the Citadel. The armies of the world were gathering in their effort to rid the world of Christians once and for all. It was a most terrible sight!

I had an urge to flee, desperate for the protection of the Citadel, but I knew that God had placed me away from it for a reason. I knew that I must stand my ground.

Here was where the Lord put me, and here I will make my stand.

Far above me, another kind of war was being waged as Satan's forces attacked on every front. Sensing the impending judgment, an innumerable company of demons charged the angelic barrier surrounding the earth in a fight-to-the-death battle. Brilliant swords of light wielded valiantly by the angels of God against forces of darkness.

The cataclysmic encounter between these two supernatural forces lit up the sky, creating the

inexplicable phenomenon of aurora borealis glowing high above. Perhaps that mysterious phenomenon of nature finally had an explanation!

"Satan, I rebuke thee! Surrender this world! It is no longer your dominion!"

My knees scraped the hard dry soil as I knelt and lifted my hands to God. I focused on Scripture so the mocking curses from the demons would not distract me.

"...And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world... He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved..."

The ground underneath me continued to tremble. It was unlike any earthquake in that it went on and on. I could see mountains in the distance collapsing into the valleys. Huge gaping cracks formed in the valley floor, swallowing up large portions of the forthcoming army.

The shaking intensified, as if the earth were literally tearing itself apart. I closed my eyes and focused on the Lord, shouting out scriptures above the roar of the surrounding devastation.

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms... Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusts in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be past..." I said with upraised hands.

Then, all at once, the sun was gone. Snuffed out like a candle in a strong wind. Once again, I had seen this before: when Christ died on the cross.

As I looked about, the demons and the remnant of the army pressed forward, disregarding the darkness. This was not a natural phenomenon. The sun was simply refusing to give light, hiding itself from the wrath of God.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever!"

"I know whom I have believed," I said, "and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I committed unto Him against that day..."

I thought again of the camp. What was happening there? As I turned to look I could see Pastor John and many others walking up the hill toward me.

John waved at me. "Jesus said that when you see these things taking place, then look to the East, for your redemption draws near."

I turned and looked to the East. We all stood there together watching in awe as the heavens departed as a scroll, just as the prophecies foretold. The dark veil that the angel had shown me earlier was now drawn back, and the magnificent glory of God's Kingdom burst forth in indescribable majesty and splendor! The stars in the dark black sky seemed to be swallowed up in a fountain of light!

Then, in the midst of this brilliant light, another light brighter than any light in the natural realm split the sky. Like lightning, it streaked across the sky from the east to the west. I was forced to cover my eyes for the brightness.

When I opened them again, radiant beings clothed in glimmering white covered the sky. But this time, they weren't angels. They were the saints of the Most High returning with Christ. The sky was ablaze with their glory! It was the consummation of the ages, the judgment of Satan, the resurrection of the dead, and the final undisputed victory of our God!

Tears blurred my vision. *"...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee... Not even to the end of the age."*

My body shook from weeping as I turned to see the angel I had come to know so well.

"It's over, isn't it?" It was a statement more than a question. "Is it the dawning of a new day?"

The angel looked around as if taking it all in. "Of course!" he replied with a smile. "It's the Savior's Day!"

You can spend eternity with the Lord. Did you know that:

There is only one way to Heaven.
"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me (John 14:6)."

Being a good person cannot save you.
"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)."

To be saved you must:

Confess your sin.
"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)."

Be willing to turn from sin.
"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:5)."

Believe that Jesus Christ died for you.
"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16)."
"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."

And ask Jesus to save you.
"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13)."
"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Romans 10:9)."

You can be saved right now. Stop and pray these words:
"Dear God, I confess my sin and I desperately need your forgiveness. I give to You my heart, and I ask You to help me. Help me to turn from sin. Help me to live for You. Come now and live in my heart."

If you've given your heart to the Lord please write me and tell me about it. My Email address is *kmsrjs@triton.net*.