

1 *Setting the Stage*

Through all the wonders and tragedies of human history, in both the joys and the suffering, the Bible reveals that One Being reigns supreme over all that has, is, or ever will take place on the stage of this world. From before the universe began until the end of time, God has been and will be on the throne of heaven and all creation. Never doubt that! The Lord will have His way in the end and, if love, truth, and justice have not yet prevailed, it is because the story is not yet finished. As the Lord declared in Isaiah 46:9-10 (NIV):

Remember the former things,
those of long ago;
I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.
I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times,
what is still to come.
I say: My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.

What God has spoken will take place, for as Psalm 119:89 states, “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled

in heaven.” That word “settled” comes from the Hebrew word *נָצַב* (*nits-tsáb*), meaning erected, set up, or established, i.e., something decided long ago *which will not change*.¹ Or as Malachi 3:6 affirms about God Himself, “For I am the LORD, I do not change....”

No matter what people may say to challenge the veracity of the Scriptures, God’s Word remains eternal, faithful, and true. Every word of the Old and New Testaments will have its fulfillment for it is the revelation to us of God’s eternal, unchanging plan.

1.1 THIS WORLD UNDER THE SWAY OF THE EVIL ONE

Yes, God is on the throne. But meanwhile, the apostle John wrote of this place where we live that, “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” Or as the *New International Version* (NIV) translates this, “the whole world is under the *control* of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19, emphasis added) How can this be? Isn’t our world under God’s *control*, a word people use when questioning God in trying times? How can a world created by a loving, all-powerful God be filled with evil? That is a question that puzzles believers and unbelievers alike. The Bible is in fact the most honest book ever written. It speaks of both good *and* evil, not covering over the flaws of even its greatest heroes or hiding the fallen condition of our world.

As the famous nineteenth-century English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon declared:

I daresay you have heard people rise pretty phrases about the dignity of human nature

and so on. They are lying phrases, for human nature is as bad as it can be. If you want the proof of that assertion, behold how God, Himself, came here among men, Incarnate Virtue robed in love! Did men love Him? Did they fall down before Him and do Him homage? The homage of the world was, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” The world hates virtue—it cannot bear perfection—it might endure benevolence, but absolute purity and righteousness it cannot! Its native instincts are wrong. It is not towards the Light of God that men are going—their backs are to the sun—they are journeying into the thick darkness.²

If you are searching the Bible for easy optimism about human nature, you will be disappointed. Instead, you will find authentic stories about real people who struggled and made fateful choices, choices that had both wonderful and fearful consequences. As Randy Alcorn wrote in his book *Heaven*:

For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to Hell. For unbelievers, it is the closest they will come to Heaven.³

God is almighty, all-knowing, and all-seeing. Yet the Bible describes Him as having stepped back, deliberately limiting His infinite power so that angels and men can freely make their own choices. And those decisions will affect them for all eternity. Adam and Eve were not the

first to sin and be banished from the presence of the Lord. Satan's original name was Lucifer, an English translation from the Latin Bible which itself was translated from the Hebrew (לְיָלֵל *hēylēl*, "the morning star," from Isaiah 14:12).⁴ He was created as the most beautiful angel of all. His first condition and later fall are described in Ezekiel 28:12-15. The prophet seems at first to be speaking only about judgment upon the earthly "king of Tyre," an ancient city on the coast of Lebanon. Yet, as is often the case with prophetic Scriptures, it goes on to reach far beyond earthly events and reveal truth about the spiritual powers of darkness behind those events:

"You were the seal of perfection,
 Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
 You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 Every precious stone was your
 covering:
 The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
 Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
 Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with
 gold.
 The workmanship of your timbrels and
 pipes
 Was prepared for you on the day you
 were created.

"You were the anointed cherub who covers;
 I established you;
 You were on the holy mountain of God;
 You walked back and forth in the midst
 of fiery stones.

You were perfect in your ways from the day
you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.”

Lucifer, the “son of the morning,” was created by a good and loving God. In fact, he was the most beautiful of all the angels ever created. Yet he, like us, had a decision to make. Would he remain faithful to the Lord who made him? Or would he deny the One who gave him life and try to exalt himself as a “god,” in rebellion against the eternal and only true God? He chose the latter and was therefore cast out of heaven.

Have we, human beings created in the image of the eternal God, learned anything from what happened to Lucifer? Have we humbled ourselves under the hand of Almighty God? Or are we marching along those same paths of rebellion and pride as Satan, with the same terrible consequences of eternal judgment and loss? When we set our desires, our ideas, our beliefs (or unbelief) up against the will of the Most High, we are walking on the broad path that leads to judgment. This is the path Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7:13: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” Or as Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:18-19:

18 Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.
19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the
lowly,
Than to divide the spoil with the proud.