


angels

&


DEMONS

GREG LAURIE

angels & DEMONS

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BELIEVING IN ANGELS

It is an interesting thing that most Americans believe that there are angels all around us. In fact, *Time* magazine conducted a poll and it revealed that 69 percent of Americans confirm that they believe in the existence of angels. Not only that, but 46 percent of those who were polled believe that they have their own guardian angel.

Belief in angels is even higher among teenagers. Another poll revealed that three out of every four teenagers believe in angels today. I think we hold this belief for good reason. We have all had those experiences in life where we had a close brush with death—a time when you almost died or the plane almost crashed or the car was spinning out of control or some other experience where you know that you came close to checking out and you thought, “Was that an angel that helped me out?” And it may well have been an angel intervening on your behalf.

Of course, Hollywood has been obsessed with angels. There have been so many movies done about them over the years. There is the classic that is played every Christmas called *It's a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart. Then there is the Disney movie *Angels in the Outfield*. Whitney Houston met an angel that was played by Denzel Washington in a movie called *The Preacher's Wife*. There was a movie some years ago with Meg Ryan and Nicholas Cage called *City of Angels*. Then John Travolta played a fallen angel in a movie called *Michael*. And every Sunday night you used to be able to watch *Touched by an Angel* on TV. The problem with most of these depictions that we see in Hollywood is they are not accurate. They are Hollywood angels.

Angels are all around us. We may not be aware of their presence because the way that they work is undercover, but their activity is constant. Billy Graham in his book about angels described them as “God’s secret agents,” and I think that is a good description of them. The reason you don’t know about angels specifically or can’t peg a time in your life when you encountered an angel is because they are God’s secret agents. They are operating undercover. They are operating incognito. One thing we do know is that angels are actively involved in the life of the believer. In fact, Psalm 34:7 says, “The angel of the Lord is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear Him” (NLT). Another reason we know that angels are involved in our lives is because the Bible tells us in Hebrews 1:14, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” There is story after story in the Bible of angels coming to intervene on behalf of God’s people, like the story in Acts where Simon Peter was arrested and thrown into prison. The church started to pray and an angel was sent to deliver him. The Bible also says that we should not forget to entertain strangers, for in doing so some have entertained angels unaware (see Hebrews 13:2). That means there are probably angels around us right now, incognito. Of course, they are in a supernatural world. They are in the invisible world so we can’t see them.

In his book on angels, Billy Graham tells the story of a missionary whose name was John Paton. He was doing some outreach work in the New Hebrides Islands. One night, hostile natives surrounded his mission station intent on burning out the missionaries and killing them. The pastor and his wife prayed that night that God would deliver them. Much to their amazement, these hostile natives did not come in. The Patons were gloriously delivered and gave praise to God. A year later, the chief of that tribe put his faith in Christ. This

missionary talked to him and said, “You have to tell me what happened on that night when you guys were coming to kill us and all of a sudden you turned back.” The chief was surprised that John Paton would ask him this. The chief said, “Let me ask you this. Who were those men that were with you there?” John Paton said, “I didn’t know about any men who were present.” The chief said that he was afraid to attack because he had seen hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords circling the mission station. Could that be angelic intervention? It very well could be. It sounds like it to me. Angels are involved in our lives.

Have you ever put on polarized sunglasses and then looked at the ocean? You see stuff you wouldn’t normally have seen. You can see reefs in the water and subtle color changes. In the same way, if we could put on a pair of supernatural glasses, we would see that there are angels all around us.

Or have you ever put on a pair of 3-D glasses? We went to the Disney park called California Adventure a while ago. They had a room you go into that was called *It’s Tough to Be a Bug*. It was really good. You put on 3-D glasses. It’s amazing because when you take these glasses off you don’t see any of this stuff, but as soon as you put the glasses on there are bugs in front of you. You see things you don’t normally see. In that case it was an illusion. But if we could see into the invisible world, this supernatural realm, we would see that there are angels around us doing the work that they do.

There is a good illustration of this in the Bible. It is when the prophet Elisha was with his servant. As it happened, their enemies surrounded them. Elisha was relaxed. He wasn’t worried. But his servant was freaking out. His servant wakes him up and says, “Master, what are we

going to do? We are surrounded by our enemies.” Elisha says, “Lord, would You just open his eyes.” The Bible tells us that God opened that servant’s eyes to the supernatural realm and the servant suddenly saw the mountains full of horses, and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha. What happened was that his servant was given a behind-the-scenes look at the supernatural world. Around Elisha were God’s angels (see 2 Kings 6:15–20). The same is true of each of us. The angels of the Lord guard those that fear Him.

ANGEL MANIA

The fact of the matter is that the topic of angels is very popular. You see it reflected in TV programs and movies. If you go down to any bookstore, you will find so many books on angels written by people who say they have conversations with angels, or that angels give them special revelations and visions. You have to buy the book to find out what those are. There have been articles in magazines written about people who actually go to angel seminars. They have angel calendars, angel postcards, angel T-shirts, angel sunglasses, and even angel collectors clubs. One article that I read said that people will get together in retreats and discuss angelic encounters. One person talked about getting in touch with your inner angel. That confuses me because I thought I was supposed to be getting in touch with my inner child. Now I have an angel and a child inside me? I wonder what else I have in there. This is ridiculous when you stop and think about it.

Life magazine did a cover story on angels. The person who wrote it mentioned that he went to a meeting in Irvine, California, of the ACCA, which is the Angel Collectors Club of America. This is what he said. “Talking to people at the ACCA meeting, I soon learned that the strong, relatively silent type that dominated angel-dom ever

since celestial beings destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and saved Daniel in the lions' den have given way to a more benign and bite-sized kind of angel, cuddly as a lapdog, and conscientious as a school crossing guard." This writer said, "I heard angels likened to spiritual kissing cousins and flower delivery messengers."

Time magazine also did a cover story on angels. They came to this conclusion: "For those who choke too easily on God and His rules, theologians observe, angels are the handy compromise, all fluff and meringue, kind, nonjudgmental. And they are available to everyone, like aspirin." Some people in this meeting talked about how they have angels that help them to find parking spaces. Angels help them to make better casseroles. This is nuts. These aren't angels at all. At best these are figments of people's imaginations. At worst they are demons masquerading as angels. These angels are taking the place of God in the lives of these people. They can make the angel into their own image. We should not be asking the angels to give us some message; nor should we be trying to get in touch with our inner angel. That is not the role or purpose of angels at all. Angels basically fly under the radar to do the bidding and work of God.

Sometimes the question is asked, "How many angels are there?" No one can answer with certainty, but there are lots and lots of them. Do you remember when the angels appeared to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night? It says there was a great company of the heavenly host saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased" (Luke 2:14 NLT). Daniel 7:10 tells us that there are thousands upon thousands of angels and that ten thousand times ten thousand stood before the Lord. That would be 100 million angels. I think there are plenty to go around.

Not only are there lots of angels out there, but they are very well organized. 1 Peter 3:22 tells us that the angels have rankings. It says that Jesus Christ “has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him” (NIV). Note the rankings in Heaven. There are angels, authorities, and powers; different rankings of these supernatural beings. We don’t know the names of these angels. There are different people that have a whole bunch of names that they will use for various angels, but the Bible only names three angels. We know there is Michael the archangel. There is Gabriel. And there is Lucifer, though he is a fallen angel. The top-dog angel, without question, is Michael, the powerful archangel.

MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Michael is the only one in Scripture that is actually called the archangel. It is interesting because this term *archangel* occurs only twice in the New Testament. In both instances it is used in the singular and it is preceded by the definite article *the*. He is *the* archangel, not *an* archangel or *one among many* archangels. We know that Michael will play a special role in the rapture of the church. 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 says, “The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (NIV). When the Lord takes us up to meet Him in the rapture, we will hear the voice of the archangel Michael.

To better give you an idea of his ranking as the archangel, there is an amazing story in Daniel 10. The prophet Daniel had been praying. He prayed and prayed

for a certain thing. Suddenly a powerful, dazzling, and glorious angel stood before him. Daniel was awestruck. We read in Daniel 10:5-6, “I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people” (NLT). You can see that Daniel is reaching for the best words to describe the awesomeness of this angel. And he was so overtaken that he was weak in the knees and he sank down. The angel reached down, lifted Daniel to his feet, and proceeded to tell him an amazing story.

This angel essentially said, “Daniel, remember that thing you started praying for about 21 days ago? Here is what happened. I was sent from Heaven with an answer to your prayer. As I was on my way to you with the answer, I was met by a high-ranking demon power known as the Prince of Persia. I was grappling with the Prince of Persia and I could not overcome him” (see Daniel 10:12-13). Here is this angel fighting with this high-ranking demon. Then God dispatched Michael to get this lesser angel out of the jam he was in. Michael intervenes. The angel is released and finally comes to Daniel with the answer to his prayer. This is interesting because it shows that there are some high-ranking demon powers potentially stronger than some angel powers.

What an amazing behind-the-scenes look at what happens when you pray. That means that when you bring a petition before God, there might be an angel dispatched with an answer. It also shows you the power of Michael. God had to call out a heavyweight to help this angel that couldn't quite overcome his adversary. It also reminds us that sometimes when our prayers are not answered as quickly as we would like them to be,

it doesn't mean that God isn't answering our prayers. God's delays aren't necessarily His denials. Sometimes God says yes. Sometimes He says no. Sometimes He says wait. Why does He say wait? Maybe because He wants us to learn something first. Maybe because there is some heavy duty behind-the-scenes spiritual warfare going on that we don't even know about. There might even be an angel dispatched with an answer to your prayer right now, but there is a spiritual battle that is raging.

We also know that one day Michael is going to prevail over Satan. Revelation 12:7 says, "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. That great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (NIV).

GABRIEL

Whenever Gabriel showed up, you knew that something big was going to happen. There are angels and then there are *angels*. We don't know if Gabriel is an archangel. The Bible doesn't specifically say, but we know that he is heavy duty. He is very powerful as well as very privileged. We know that Gabriel had the great honor of revealing the future to Daniel the prophet (see Daniel 8). And when Jesus was coming to this earth, of course the Lord pulled out all the stops. He needed a major angel. He sent Gabriel—first dispatched to the aged Zacharias. The angel told him he was going to be the father of the forerunner of Jesus—John the Baptist.

Look, Zacharias was an old dude. He was using his senior citizen discount at the movie theater along with his wife,

Elisabeth. He wasn't really sure if Gabriel was legit. "How do I know if you are really an angel?" I love what Gabriel says to him. He says, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God." It is like, "What is wrong with you? I am not just any old angel, though that would be more than enough. I am Gabriel. Maybe you have heard of me before." Why is Gabriel significant? Because he stands in the presence of God (see Luke 1).

Gabriel also had the great privilege of personally announcing to Mary that she was going to give birth to a child who would be the Messiah of Israel. In Luke 1:26 we read that the angel Gabriel was dispatched to Nazareth. It had been 400 years since Israel had heard from God. No prophets. No angelic appearances. No miracles. No messages from Heaven. Just sort of an icy silence. God broke the silence and sent not just any angel but the mega angel Gabriel to Mary, a peasant girl living in the little village of Nazareth. It was Gabriel, dispatched from Heaven, who said to Mary in Luke 1:30-31, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus." It was revealed to her that this Son of God would be supernaturally conceived in her womb. Can you imagine being in Mary's shoes and trying to explain that to someone else? Fortunately, Gabriel also appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife, for she was going to bring forth a Son, and Joseph was to "call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

CHERUBIM

There are two other types of angels we read about specifically in the Bible. They are the cherubim and the seraphim. The cherubim are depicted in Scripture as powerful and majestic angelic creatures that surround the

throne of God. Their unusual appearance is described in Ezekiel 1:5-14:

They had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

Interestingly, not only do these angelic creatures surround God's throne, but God sent them to guard the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Remember when Adam and Eve sinned against God? The Lord sent cherubim to guard it so Adam and Eve would not go back in again. We read in Genesis 3:24, "After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden

cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (NIV).

SERAPHIM

Isaiah vividly describes the magnificent angelic creatures known as seraphim in Isaiah 6:1–3. He says,

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried out to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!

The seraphim seem to have the special privilege of waiting before the throne of God and worshipping Him.

AN ANGEL IN THE LIONS’ DEN

Now let’s look at one of the most well-known stories about angels in Scripture. In Daniel 6, we read the story of Daniel in the lions’ den. Daniel was God’s man. King Darius had placed him in a position of great influence. Darius was not a believer in the true God, but he was very impressed with Daniel’s wisdom and his uncompromised stance. He always knew that Daniel would speak up for what he believed. Darius had so much respect for him that he let Daniel worship his God and live the way that he wanted to live.

Daniel had enemies, as every true believer will. They were looking for a way to trip him up. They carefully scrutinized his life, looking for some sin, some

inconsistency, or something wrong. Your enemies will do the same with you, wanting to trip you up or find something wrong so they can conveniently hang their doubt on that and say, “These Christians are all a bunch of phonies.” Daniel was such a godly man that his enemies couldn’t find anything wrong with him.

They determined the only way they would be able to trip him up was if they found something concerning him and his God. Daniel had a custom, and it was a good one. Every day he would bow his head in prayer and face Jerusalem. He would open up his shutters and pray toward Jerusalem, bowing before God. His enemies thought, “This is what we can do: we can go to the king and get him to sign some decree that he doesn’t even understand saying no man can pray to any god except the king. If he does, he is breaking the law.” They went to the king with this. He signed this and put his signet ring into the wax, not realizing that he essentially sealed the fate of his friend Daniel. Sure enough, the next day, though he knew about this decree, Daniel still prayed.

If you were in Daniel’s sandals, wouldn’t you be tempted to maybe not pray that particular time? Or at least pray incognito? Maybe you’ve been embarrassed or intimidated to pray when you are out at a restaurant with a nonbeliever. You are afraid of what they are going to think of you, that you are not cool. Daniel was in a predicament far worse than that. It was not just that someone was going to think he was uncool. It was that he could lose his life. Would you still pray publicly if you knew that you could be put to death for it? That was the dilemma that Daniel was in. But for him, there was no question what he was going to do. He was going to pray like he always did. He wasn’t about to change it now. He opened up his shutters, got down on his knees and prayed. He was arrested and brought before the king.

In Daniel 6:16–22, we read:

So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed. Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me.”

This is a great story of angels working behind the scenes. All appeared lost for Daniel on what could have been his last night on earth. But God was at work. He dispatched one of His secret agents, an angel of the Lord, sent there to deliver Daniel. Here is the king in all of the comforts of the palace having a sleepless night. Meanwhile Daniel slept like a baby in the midst of a den of hungry lions. This is a scary thought. Lions are frightening creatures.

It reminds me of when I was in Ethiopia. I was with my friends Dennis Agajanian and Franklin Graham. We went to the Ethiopian Zoo. There was nobody watching it. There were no zookeepers. It was practically empty. We go to

this cage and there are lions in it. You can go right up to the cage. There is no barrier where you can't get to them. So we go up to the cage and over in the corner are these emaciated lions. I have never seen more miserably thin lions in my life. I looked at them and said, "Those don't look like fierce lions to me." Dennis, being as crazy as he is, started shaking the bars and screaming. This one scrawny lion stands up and lets out a roar reminding us he was still a lion. It is enough to make your blood curdle. I think he was looking at Dennis thinking that he would be a good meal.

A lions' den is a frightening prospect. Do you envision this scene of Daniel in there with the lions hanging around? I think initially the lions saw him, got a hungry look on their face, and started moving toward him. Then the angels intervened. Daniel felt safe. Better to be in a lions' den with God than anywhere else without Him. You are safe in the arms of Jesus.

The great thing about being a Christian is you can say, "My life is in God's hands. If this is my day to go, then I am going to be lunch for Leo and the boys and that is it. If this isn't my day, then no matter what those lions are thinking, I am going to still be around. My life is in the hands of God." Essentially a Christian is indestructible until God is done with him. Even kryptonite can't stop us. But when our number is up, it's up. Isn't it interesting that those lions had enough sense to know the power of an angel?

AN ANGEL, A SWORD, AND BALAAM'S DONKEY

Another animal story in the Bible where an angel is involved is found in Numbers 22. Balak was king of the Moabites, enemies of the children of Israel. He hated the Israelites and wanted to kill them. So he looked for a prophet to curse them and bring the judgment of God upon them. He found a prophet for hire named Balaam.

When you look at Balaam it seems like his title should have been spelled *profit* instead of *prophet*. Balak asked, “Would you come and curse these Israelites?” Balaam says, “Is there money in it?” Balak says, “Lots of money.” So Balaam says, “I will do it.” But when Balaam is getting ready to curse the Israelites, God comes to him and says, “Don’t you dare curse those people. Those are My people.” Balaam still wanted that money so he saddles up his donkey and decides he is going to curse the Israelites anyway, and the Bible says, “God’s anger was aroused because he went” (see Numbers 22).

As he is on his way with his donkey, suddenly the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand and turns out of the way into a field. Balaam says, “Come on, you stupid donkey. Let’s go.” Then the donkey goes a little further and stops and actually goes up against a wall and is crushing Balaam’s leg. Balaam is getting angrier and is beating the donkey and yelling at the donkey. Finally, the donkey just lies down and stops. The Bible says that the Lord opened the donkey’s mouth. The donkey said, “Why are you beating me? What have I done to deserve this beating these three times?” That is amazing that the Lord opened a donkey’s mouth. What is more amazing to me is that without missing a beat, Balaam says, “Because you are not doing what I told you to do,” as if he normally had conversations with his donkey.

Have you ever noticed how people talk to dogs or cats? I’ve done it before and thought, “Why am I doing this?” I would say to my dog, “How are you today? What have you been doing?” and the dog would just look at me. Who knows what he was thinking? Probably, *I am going to get some toilet water in a moment, but I will sit here for now.* Why would I talk to a dog? The only time he would answer back was when I asked, “Has it been a good day or a rough day?” *Ruff!* “What is a tree made out of?” *Bark!*

Anyway, the Lord opened the donkey's mouth and they are having this ridiculous conversation. Suddenly the Lord opened Balaam's eyes and he sees what the donkey has been seeing, an angel standing in front of them with a sword in his hand. The angel said, "Why did you beat your donkey three times?" The angel didn't like him beating on his donkey. Then the angel says, "I came to stop you because you were headed for destruction. Your donkey saw me. It is a good thing that he stopped because I was about to kill you and spare the donkey." This is a true story of angelic intervention and a talking donkey found in the Bible (see Numbers 22:22-40).

GUARDIAN ANGELS

Personally, we don't know when angels have worked behind the scenes, when they have spoken to us, when they have delivered us. But the one question that I am probably asked more than any other about angels is, "Do we have guardian angels?" I am not quite sure where this whole idea started. I mentioned in the beginning that many Americans believe they have their own guardian angel—a personal angel that is assigned just to you. Perhaps some of us might need two or three because of the way that we live, depending on how reckless we are. I don't know that I can say with certainty that we each have a personal angel, though there are a couple of verses that imply we do.

In Matthew 18:10, Jesus said, speaking of children, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (NIV). Notice "their angels in heaven." Some would assume perhaps Jesus was suggesting or outright stating that at least children have guardian angels.

In Acts 12, Peter was imprisoned by King Herod, and it says that he was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each,

until a public trial could be had after the Passover. The church earnestly prayed to God for Peter. The night before the trial, an angel was sent to deliver Peter. After loosing Peter's chains, the angel and Peter passed the first and second guards, made way to an iron gate which opened by itself, and they walked down the street. Suddenly the angel left. After the angel got Peter out of prison, Peter came and knocked on the door of a house where some Christians were praying. A girl named Rhoda answered the door. This is a comical scene. They are praying for the deliverance of Peter. This girl answers the door and it is Peter. She goes to this back room where these great men of God are praying. She interrupts. They basically tell her, "Don't bother us. We are praying."

"But the answer to your prayers is standing in the front room. Peter is here," she answers. Then they pretty much tell her she is out of her mind. God had answered their prayer. What amazes me about that story is that it says Rhoda told them that Peter was there and they said, "It must be his angel." That says something to me. They believed that Peter might have had his own angel. If I knew there was an angel in the other room, I would stop and go out and talk to him. Wouldn't you? Perhaps we have guardian angels. No one can say with complete certainty if we do or not, but we do know that angels are involved in our lives.

Psalm 91:1-2 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust.'" That is the condition to a whole bunch of unbelievable promises. One of those promises given to you in Psalm 91 is angelic protection. If you will live in fellowship and communion with God—if you will seek to walk in His will—then, Psalm 91:11-12 says, "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you

will not strike your foot against a stone” (NIV). That means, if you seek to the best of your ability to walk in the will of God, He will dispatch His angels, His secret agents, to protect you, to guide you, and to lead you. You have to make sure that you are doing your part.

In other words, the context of Psalm 91 is conditional. *If* you are walking in fellowship with God, seeking to do the will of God, He will keep you in all your ways because your ways are His ways. In contrast, if you are rebelling, if you are breaking His commandments, if you are being foolish and stupid and testing the Lord, that promise is not necessarily there for you.

Clearly any promise of angelic protection is not given to humanity as a whole. It is given to the follower of Jesus Christ. In fact, to be very blunt with you, if you are not a Christian, you don't have angelic protection. If you are not a Christian, you don't have angels working in your life. Let me take it a step further. If you are not a Christian, there are fallen angels (demons) that are at work in your life seeking to lead you astray, which I will talk about more later in this book.

ANGELS AND OUR LORD

Not only are angels involved in our lives, but angels played a dramatic role in the life of our Lord. They were there announcing His birth. They were there in the Garden of Gethsemane when He contemplated the horrors of Calvary and He said, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me” and an angel was sent to comfort Him (see Luke 22:42-43). You can be sure that they were there with swords drawn at the cross just waiting for the signal. *Lord, just call on us and we will lop off so many Roman heads they wouldn't know what hit them.*

But Jesus wouldn't call upon the angels for deliverance. Even when Simon Peter tried to save Him there in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he pulled out his sword and cut off a guy's ear, Jesus said to Peter, "Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and He would send them instantly?" (Matthew 26:53 NLT). A legion is around 6,000 soldiers. Jesus is using Roman military jargon here and is saying to Peter, "Buddy, listen. I have 72,000 angels at my beck and call right now. I really don't need your help. Thank you very much." The angels were held at bay because Jesus had to die on the cross for the sin of the world. After Jesus was resurrected from the dead, it was angels that were at his tomb announcing His resurrection. They played an important role in the life of our Lord.

AN ANGELIC ESCORT TO HEAVEN

We could probably all say that we know of a young person, maybe a child, who died. So where was their guardian angel? Taking a break? Was God asleep on the watch? No. Understand that angels have a job to do. Their job is to protect you, watch over you, and do the work of God in your life until God is done with you and it is time to go home. When it is time for you to go home, the roles of angels change. Instead of protecting you, their position now is to personally usher you into the presence of God.

In the Book of Luke there is the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus was a poor man who was covered in sores and lived a miserable existence but who had faith in God. The rich man is not named, but he fared sumptuously, or in other words, he flaunted his wealth. He had the ultimate crib. He had the mega-estate. In fact, he would take bread and wipe his fingers with it. They didn't use napkins in those days. They wiped the oils and grease off their fingers with bread. This rich man wiped his hands on

this bread and threw it out. Guess what Lazarus lived off of? That bread. That was all he had. Every day the rich man would come out in his big chariot and cruise by. Here is Lazarus, this poor guy, getting a used piece of bread and eating it. It was pathetic.

But then death came, and death is the great equalizer. It doesn't matter if you are Bill Gates or if you are someone people have never heard of before. It doesn't matter if you are powerful and influential or completely anonymous—death comes to everyone. There is no getting around it.

It was a different scene beyond the grave. The Bible tells us that the rich man was taken to a place of torment—not because he was rich, but because he had no place in his life for God. He couldn't care less about God. Lazarus was taken into a place of comfort into the bosom of Abraham. The Scripture says in Luke 16:22, "The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom." When you die as a believer, the angels personally escort you into the presence of God. That is great to know. An angelic escort.

While you are here on earth doing the work of God, seeking to walk in the will of God, angels will protect you. Angels will watch out for you. When your day comes to go meet the Lord as a Christian, you will be taken into the presence of God and you will receive your reward. When the nonbeliever dies, they don't have that hope. In fact, we got a glimpse of it in this story. The rich man who had no faith in God went to a place of torment. When a nonbeliever dies, he goes to this place of torment known as Hades. Ultimately nonbelievers will go to Hell. When a believer dies, they go straight into the presence of God. The moment you take your last breath on earth you take your first breath in Heaven. When a nonbeliever dies, they go to this place of judgment, and will ultimately stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of Jesus Christ

and then will be sent to the Lake of Fire. There are no other chances. What is going to happen to you when you die? Are you going to have an angelic escort to Heaven or are you going to face judgment in Hell like the devil and his demons?

SATAN, THE FALLEN ANGEL

Talking about the devil and demons is a subject that most of us would like to avoid and, I think, for good reason. Yet at the same time, I think we need to know more about these mysterious creatures known as Satan (Lucifer, the devil) and his demons.

The problem is that references to the devil are so commonplace today that many would dismiss him as a mere metaphor. In fact, you will hear the devil's name to describe so many things. If you are sick, you might say, "I have caught the devil of a cold." If you mess up, you say, "You have the devil to pay." If you disagree with someone, you say, "Let me play the devil's advocate for just a moment." If you are talking about somebody and they come walking into the room unexpectedly, you say, "Speak of the devil."

Because his name is used this way and we have this caricatured cartoon version of him, sometimes I think we become a little desensitized that there really is a person, a powerful spirit being, known as the devil. In fact, he is very popular in youth culture and design. Go down to any skateboard shop and look at how many decks have images of Satan or demons on them. Sometimes they are drawn in a cartoon way, but other times in a very frightening style. You see it on tattoos and things like that. The very image of Satan is very much a part of our culture today. I think we have to be very careful.

You might think this is all innocent and it doesn't matter, but you don't want to mess around with the devil. The great British author C. S. Lewis made this statement, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." We have to be careful about both of these extremes.

As we look at mankind, in spite of our rapid and dramatic advances in technology and learning, look at the wickedness that happens in our culture today, ranging from the Holocaust to a more present-day illustration like school shootings. How is it possible that someone could do what Adolph Hitler did, or do what one young man did in Parkland, Florida, or do the other senseless and radical acts of violence we hear about on the news: Columbine, Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, San Bernardino, Sutherland Springs—the list continues to grow. It is because there is a devil, the mastermind to all of it, and there are his demons. Know this: just as surely as there is a God in Heaven who loves you, there is a Satan and demons who hate you. Let's consider now what the Bible says about the devil. Where did he come from? Or as it is often phrased, how could a God of love create someone as horrible as the devil?

Before I answer that question, I have to address the premise of it. It is really based on flawed reasoning to say something like "How could a God of love create someone as horrible as the devil?" The very question implies that God somehow messed up and essentially the asker is putting himself in a position to critique God. There are those who will jump to the conclusion that God is not just because He created someone as horrible as the devil and somehow He blew it.

A Gallup poll revealed that 70 percent of all Americans believe in the devil—half of them saying that he is a personal force and half of them saying he is an impersonal force. First of all, God did not create the devil (or his demons) as we know him today. A chain of events took place that resulted in that wicked personality we know today as Satan. We read in Genesis 1:31 that when God created the world, He saw that everything He made was good. That means that at that point in the angelic world there had been no fall or rebellion yet, because everything was good. By the time we get to Genesis 3, we find that Satan is coming in the form of a serpent and tempting Eve to sin. Therefore something dramatic happened between the events of Genesis 1 and Genesis 3. That something that happened was a rebellion in the angelic realm with many angels turning against God and becoming evil, and Satan himself leading this rebellion.

Why? We will probably never know. Apparently angels, including Lucifer, have a free will just as we do. They can choose to do the right thing or the wrong thing. We need to realize that Satan was not always this wicked personality that we know today. In fact, at one time he was a high-ranking angel known as Lucifer. Some even wonder if he might have been an archangel. Though we can't say for sure about that, we know certainly he was in a position of great prominence. The Bible says this of Lucifer before his fall:

You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you. . . . You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from

the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.

Ezekiel 28:12-17 NIV

Satan was once a guardian cherub. He was a beautiful and magnificent angel. He was known as Lucifer. Lucifer means “star of the morning.” That is what he once was. But he sinned. What happened? It says that wickedness was found in him. His heart was lifted up because of his incredible beauty. Lucifer allowed his perfection to be the cause of his corruption. God’s judgment came upon him as a result. Isaiah recorded the event in chapter 14, which says,

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.” Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.

Ezekiel 28:12-15 NIV

When Satan fell, he did not fall alone. We are told in Revelation 12 that he took a third of the angels with him in his fall. How many that is no one can say with complete certainty. As I’ve already mentioned, Daniel 7 tells us that there are millions and millions of angels. So if Satan took one third of those angels that would mean he has a formidable demon force now doing his bidding—demons that are now under his control. The devil has an army, so to speak. He is not alone. He has a well-organized network

of demon powers helping him to accomplish his purposes. What are those purposes? As given to us by Jesus in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (NIV). If you have ever wondered what the devil’s ultimate agenda is, there it is in a nutshell: to steal, kill, and destroy.

So Satan is a powerful spirit being with many demon entities under his control. And he hates God. And he hates anybody that follows God. And that is why he hates you. And that is why he wants to bring you down. The question is asked why God would let this happen. Why didn’t God just skip this whole devil/demons episode? Because God gave to Lucifer and the angels the same thing that He gave to you and me. It is called free will. It is the ability to choose to do the right or the wrong thing. And Satan exercised that free will in the wrong direction.

There are many titles given to Satan in the Bible. Each one will help us gain a little more insight into what his agenda and character are really all about.

1. THE BIBLE LIKENS HIM TO A DRAGON.

Revelation 20:2 labels him “the dragon, that old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan.” We also read of that dragon taking one third of the stars with him. The dragon interestingly is a very popular symbol today.

2. HE IS REFERRED TO IN THE BIBLE AS BEELZEBUB.

When Jesus was casting demons out of people, the Pharisees said that he did it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons. The name or title *Beelzebub* originally meant the lord of the flies, but the Jews later changed it to the lord of the dunghill. I guess Satan is the lord of poop.

3. HE IS THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD.

Jesus said in John 12:31-32, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (NIV). What does this mean? We understand the idea of a dragon or the lord of the flies, but what is with “the prince of this world”? This speaks of Satan’s rule and influence on culture and the government of this world.

4. HE IS ALSO REFERRED TO AS THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR.

Ephesians 2:2 says, “You used to live like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God” (NLT). This is essentially the same as calling him the prince of this world. It just shows his power and influence in the culture.

5. HE IS REFERRED TO AS THE GOD OF THIS WORLD.

2 Corinthians 4:4 says, “Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News” (NLT).

6. SATAN IS REFERRED TO AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT.

This is interesting. On one hand he is a dragon and the lord of the flies but on the other hand he is the prince of the power of the air, he is the god of this earth, and the angel of light. We always think of Satan as someone who comes to us in a wicked personification. But we must realize that he is a fallen angel. He can come under the guise of religion, mysticism, spirituality, and things of that nature.

New Age spirituality is so popular in our culture, but in many ways it is just Lucifer masquerading as an angel of light giving a false message for people to believe so they will not believe in the true message of the Bible. It is a Satanic substitute with enough truth to make it believable but enough error to ultimately destroy you.

7. HE IS THE FATHER OF LIES.

In John 8:44, Jesus says, “You [speaking to the religious leaders] belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (NIV).

So we as Christians are in a battle. Not a physical battle, but a spiritual one that’s just as real. The Bible tells us that we are fighting against principalities and powers and spiritual might in high places—in the supernatural realm. Ephesians 6:12 says, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” It would blow our minds if God were to pull back the curtain and let us see into the spiritual world—the world of God and Satan, the world of angels and demons, the world of Heaven and Hell. As I have often said, the Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground. So here is our choice. We are either going to win or lose in this battle. We are either going to gain ground or lose ground. We are going to advance or retreat. It is a decision we need to make.

Revelation 12 describes a war in Heaven. Who would ever think there would be a war in Heaven? Indeed there is. It is a war among the angels. Earlier, in Revelation 8, angels are likened to stars. This is literally “star wars” here. We

see Michael the archangel duking it out with Satan, who is called the dragon.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Revelation 12:7-12

Here in this heavenly scene we have Michael and Satan fighting it out. Not God and Satan. Because if Satan has an equal, it would be Michael the archangel—not God. These two powerful angels are warring against each other. This is ironic because they once served on the same side. Not unlike the Civil War. Remember General Grant led the Union forces and General Lee led the Confederate forces. Prior to that, they both attended West Point together. They both fought side by side in the Mexican-American War. But in the Civil War they found themselves on the opposite side of each other. Ultimately General Grant prevailed over

General Lee. In the same way, we find Michael prevailing over Lucifer.

Revelation 12 is an exciting chapter. I don't think the devil wants us to read this chapter. I certainly don't think the devil wants us to discover some very important truths that are revealed in it. Here are some things he doesn't want you to know.

1. SATAN IS NOWHERE NEAR TO BEING THE EQUAL OF GOD.

Satan is mighty, but God is almighty. Satan is a destroyer, but God will ultimately destroy the destroyer. Here is what we know about God: He is omnipotent. He is omniscient. He is omnipresent. Omnipotent means He has unlimited power. Omniscient means He has unlimited knowledge. Omnipresent means He is present everywhere. The devil does not have those qualities. The devil is certainly not omnipotent. He has a lot of power but nothing like the power of God. He is not omniscient. Satan knows quite a few things, but he doesn't know *all* things like God. He is not omnipresent. He can only be in one place at a time. When we say, "The devil was tempting me," the fact is it was probably one of the demons. He has a well-organized network of fallen angels that do his bidding.

2. THE DEVIL CAN DO NOTHING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN WITHOUT GOD'S PERMISSION.

This may come as a surprise to some, but the devil has some access to Heaven. Revelation 12:8 says, "They did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer." What we see in Revelation 12 has not happened yet. This is still in the future. But at the current moment, the devil does have some access to Heaven. However, it is

not unlimited access. Now, before his fall, Lucifer had an all-access pass. He was a high-ranking angel in some kind of a worship-leading role. Then he rebelled against God and led an angelic rebellion. He lost his all-access pass, if you will, but he does have some access still in Heaven. One thing is clear. Satan is on his way down. If you follow him, you are going to go down with him.

Periodically, the devil is called into the presence of God. We have a behind-the-scenes look at this in the Book of Job. We read in Job 1, “One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the LORD, ‘From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it’” (Job 1:6-7 NIV). What a perfect description of Satan. Just roaming about like a lion looking for prey. Checking everything out.

“Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil’” (verse 8 NIV). The devil says (loose paraphrase here), “Give me a break. Does Job fear You for nothing? He fears You because You have put a hedge of protection, a wall, around him” (see verses 9-10).

But here is the point. The devil wanted to attack Job but he recognized there was protection around God’s servant. In the same way, when the devil comes our way, he has to first get permission from God. He cannot just run through our life willy-nilly. Know this: whatever God allows in your life, He allows it for a purpose.

3. THE DEVIL DOES NOT WANT YOU TO KNOW HE IS DOOMED.

Commentator John Phillips wrote the following: “Satan is now like a caged lion enraged beyond words by the limitations now placed upon his freedom. He picks himself up from the dust of the earth, shakes his fist at the sky and glares around choking with fury for ways to vent his hatred and spite among humankind.” Well said.

Why is the devil behaving as a cornered animal ready to strike? Why is Satan filled with so much venom and hatred? Why does Satan want our destruction? Because He knows Jesus Christ is coming back again. Revelation 12:12 says the devil has come down to you in great anger and he knows he has little time. Listen, even if some liberal theologians don’t believe it, the devil believes Jesus Christ is coming back. His goal and objective is to wreak as much havoc as he can in that time. We need to wake up to the reality of it. That is why the devil attacks us.

Sometimes it seems like we are getting hit from every side. I heard a story from the Korean War that illustrates the attitude that we ought to have. As enemy forces were advancing, Baker Company was cut off from the rest of the regiment. For several hours, no word was heard, even though headquarters was trying to communicate with this missing unit. Finally a faint signal was received. Straining to hear each word, a corpsman asked Baker Company, “Do you read me?” The reply: “This is Baker Company.”

“What is your situation?”

Baker company replied, “The enemy is to the east of us. The enemy is to the west of us. The enemy is to the south of us and to the north of us.” After a brief pause the sergeant from Baker Company said, “And we are not going

to let them escape this time.”

I like that. That is the attitude. Sometimes it feels like the devil is hitting us from the north and the south and the east and the west. Everywhere we turn, there is an attack, there is a temptation, there is a problem, there is an issue. But listen, God will give us the strength to get through these things.

4. HE DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT HE ATTACKS PRIMARILY THROUGH ACCUSATION.

It is good for us to know how the devil works. Paul said, “We are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). It was Victor Hugo, author of the book *Les Misérables*, who wrote these words, “A good general must penetrate the brain of his enemy.” How does the devil attack us? Often through accusation. Look at Revelation 12:10. “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’” That is the devil: he is the accuser of the brethren.

He is quite clever. Here is how it works. He comes to you with a temptation. By the way, it is not a sin to be tempted. Sometimes I don't think we know that. It is not the bait that constitutes the sin; it is the bite. So let's say you do give in to a temptation. The devil tempts you and you take the bait. Now he comes to you and says, “You are a hypocrite. God would never hear your prayer. Don't ever even think about going to God in prayer and asking for His forgiveness. You are not worthy to approach God.”

Your response to the accusations of the devil is the intercession of Jesus on your behalf. Jesus is standing in the gap for you. Jesus said to Peter once, “Peter, the devil

has been asking for you by name. But I have prayed for you. I am interceding for you” (see Luke 22:32). The Bible tells us that Christ intercedes for us in Heaven. Romans 8:33–34, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen. It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (NIV).

DEMONS

Revelation 12:4 mentions the one-third of the angels that rebelled with Satan. These fallen angels are now demons doing his dirty work. They are Satan’s demonic forces. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” The J. B. Phillips translation puts it this way: “For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls the dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.” That helps us to grasp it a little bit easier in our mind. Just as God has His holy angels, Satan has his unholy secret agents doing his bidding from the headquarters of evil.

What is the agenda of demons? They want to hinder the purposes of God and extend the power of Satan. Whenever we engage in the work of the Lord we should expect, anticipate, and brace ourselves for demonic attack. Yes, God will allow demons to tempt us, to bother us, to harass us at times. Even the great apostle Paul had to deal with this. In fact, he talked about his thorn in the flesh. We don’t know what it was. Most commentators believe it was some kind of a physical disability that he probably acquired after one of his multiple beatings or stonings. But here is

what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:7-8: “To keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me” (NIV). And by the way, the word that Paul uses for *torment* means to strike with a fist. This is the real thing. Demons are real and are powerful.

Many times we will say things like “the devil really tempted me the other day” or “the devil is hassling me right now.” The fact of the matter is that it is highly unlikely that most of us have ever been tempted by Satan himself. You were probably tempted by one of his demons, because Satan can only be in one place at one time. He doesn’t tempt every person directly; I suppose that he would probably be after the big fish that are out there.

In John 13, we see Judas Iscariot under Satan’s direct control. Look at verse 27: “When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him” (NLT). Those are ominous words. We read in the Gospels about people being possessed by demons. But here’s Judas. He wasn’t just demon possessed; he was Satan possessed. The big guy himself. Satan entered his heart, which helps us understand that he’s on another level of evil. I bring this up because sometimes people want to paint Judas as a victim. *Poor guy was just a pawn in the hand of God, and you know God knew that Jesus would die on the cross and someone had to bring it about. So God just made Judas do this. He had no choice.* Nonsense. He had plenty of choice. And he was handpicked by Jesus and he was loved by Jesus. But he made this horrible choice. In fact, the only person who would ever equal Judas in wickedness will probably be the Antichrist.

It’s worth noting that Judas was so effective in his lying and so cunning and so skillful an actor, no one even

suspected him until Jesus made it clear that he was the one. Judas fooled everyone but Jesus. Know this: you can fool all of the people some of the time, you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool God any of the time. Jesus had Judas' number.

It's really incomprehensible that a man with such opportunity could so squander it. I mean, think about it. Judas Iscariot spent every waking hour walking and talking with God incarnate. What a privilege that was. He was one of the original Twelve. Judas Iscariot heard with his own ears the Sermon on the Mount. He saw Lazarus resurrected from the dead. He saw Jesus walking on the water. He saw the feeding of the 5,000 with the loaves and the fishes. And Judas Iscariot heard the teaching of the Lord when he talked about the wheat and the tares together—how the tares looked like the wheat but they're not and they uproot the wheat; they are imitations of the wheat. And that would certainly apply to Judas. But instead of turning to God, he allowed Satan to enter in and became filled with anger, jealousy, and bitterness.

There is an interesting parallel character to Judas in the Old Testament; it is King Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul was a man who was initially blessed and called by God to be the king. He began well. But there were some small compromises that led to larger ones and ultimately he was rejected by God. The Bible tells us an evil spirit began to torment him, but there was a young shepherd boy named David that would come in and would play a stringed instrument. So David would come in to play a song for King Saul and the demons would not torment the king for that short period of time as David would sing worship songs to the Lord. But when David left, the demon would come back and torment Saul again. Saul would call for David to come back. Then one time, Saul got angry at David and threw a javelin at him, almost killing him. So David was a little apprehensive of performing for Saul,

as you can understand. I find this interesting. You would think, *Why wouldn't Saul believe in the God that David worshipped and then he wouldn't be tormented by these demons?*

Sometimes I think nonbelievers feel like they may be in need of a little religion. They have gone through this trauma or that crisis. So they'll go to church every now and then to get a little religion—read a little bit of the Bible, sing a little bit of the worship songs. That makes them feel a little bit better. That's fine. We are glad the worship helps and the message helps, but ultimately the answer isn't found in a little religion. They need a lot of Jesus in their life. That's the answer.

Another mention of demons is found Matthew 12:43. Jesus said, “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.” Jesus is referring to demon powers in this passage. “An unclean spirit” describes the wicked, vile nature of this demon. But apparently this demon was not as evil as he could have been, for in this story he brings along other demon friends that were worse than himself. Jesus also says that this unclean spirit goes out of a man and he goes to dry places seeking rest and finds none. From this and other passages in the New Testament, it appears that demons prefer inhabiting or occupying bodily creatures—human beings and even animals.

Yes, animals can be demon possessed. A good case in point is a story of the two demon-possessed men that Jesus came to in Matthew 8. As He was preparing to cast the demons out, the demons spoke and said, “‘Have you come here to torment us before the time?’ Now a good way off from there was a herd of swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, ‘If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine’” (verses 29–31). Jesus

agreed to the request of the demons. He cast them into the pigs, and all of the pigs became demon possessed and went over the side of a cliff. The pigs committed mass suicide. It's the first case of "deviled ham" in history. But it's an interesting request that the demons brought to Jesus. Why would they not just sort of hover about? Instead, they actually asked to be cast into living creatures. It is clear that the devil is at his most effective as he works through people. It's through human beings that Satan has done his most devastating work.

But going back to the unclean spirit in Matthew 12, look what verse 44-45 says. "Then [the demon] says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

This is interesting. The demon comes back to the house that he once inhabited and found it swept. You see, Jesus is comparing the human life and heart to a house. And what this is saying is that this person who was once possessed by this unclean spirit seemed to have had a housecleaning. His house was swept and put in order to some degree. It would appear that the man that Jesus is speaking of had made some kind of a moral change. Let's understand the context. He is speaking to moral, religious people that don't really know God. The gist of what He is saying is that morality will not save you. Religion will not save you. This man had swept his house, so to speak, and had put it in order. There are people that will make changes in their lives for many reasons. People will say, "I have to change the way that I am living." Often when someone faces a crisis in life—it might be a heart attack, it might be the loss of a spouse through death or divorce, it might be some other crisis that hits them—they begin to evaluate their priorities and take stock of their life. They

determine that they need to make changes. But often these same people that make these great vows of change go back to their old ways.

We often hear of celebrities being admitted into drug rehab centers. They come on television and they tell their story. Maybe they write a book about it. We hear about the great changes that have happened to them. But then a few months later we read that they go back to their old ways. Why? Because the house is swept but it is still empty. I emphasize that word empty. We hear of people today who claim to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. It's usually politicians around election time. When they are speaking to Christians, they speak of their great faith and trust in God. And then once elected, we usually don't hear about it again. Or other people when they hit the skids, they will turn to God. But then you see them a while later going back to the old ways. You wonder what happened. I would suggest to you that many of these people have never converted. They swept their house, but it remained empty. They went through the motions, but Christ never really became a part of their life.

These people that go back to their old ways after a month or two of saying they were believers will say, "I tried Christianity, but it didn't work for me." No. That's wrong. They never really found Christ—because if they really knew Him, they would not go back to that life the way they did. I suggest to you that many of these people have never been converted at all. And often they end up worse than they were before.

There is only one hope. It's when One stronger than the strong man comes in, according to Luke 11:22. That stronger One, of course, is Jesus Christ. It's not you. You can't throw out the strong man (Satan). You can't cast out the devil by your own ability. All of the religion and rituals

and incense in the world aren't going to drive out a demon power. You need help. So that's what Jesus is talking about here. When He comes in, He takes residence. And He doesn't just do a basic housecleaning. He gets down and gets it very clean. *Dutch clean*, as they say. Clean from top to bottom. A thorough housecleaning. There has been a real change. No longer does that person have to fear the devil's intrusion into his home. The devil may knock on the doors and the windows. He may threaten to huff and puff and blow the house down. But One stronger than he is inside and he knows it. That person has come under the protection of Jesus Christ. As the Bible says, greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (see 1 John 4:4). Christ, who takes residence in the heart of the Christian, demon-proofs us and we no longer have to fear the devil coming in with his spirit friends.

There's an interesting little twist in this story. Jesus says that the demons go in and live there. The phrase that He uses is a Greek term that means that they go and dwell there and settle down. This same verb that is used by Jesus is also used by Paul as he prays for the believers in Ephesus, where he says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power . . . so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:16-17 NIV). It's that same phrase for *dwell*. That He may settle down and finally be at home.

In other words, God is saying you have a choice. You can have demons dwell in you and settle down and be at home. Or you can have Jesus Christ dwell in you and settle down and be at home. Where Jesus Christ lives, demons are not free to live. But when demons are there, you are under their control. So it's a choice that we make.

Maybe you have tried to make some moral changes. Maybe you have tried to turn over a new leaf. Maybe you have

tried to be a better person. But your problems persist because you haven't gotten to the root of them. The house can be swept clean, but it's still empty. You need Christ living in your heart. You may be a moral person. You may be a religious person. And those are good qualities. But if you trust in those things, the very things that can be good can also be damning because they deceive you as to your need for God. I hope that you will let Him be in your life and take control and change you.

The bottom line is that demon possession is real. Demons are real. Demons are powerful. But the good news is, when you become a Christian you're under divine protection and no demon can possess you. Demons can tempt you. Demons can harass you. They can attack you. But they cannot possess you. Only a nonbeliever can be possessed by a demon. And when Christ lives inside of you, there can be no demons. Jesus is not into a timeshare program. When He enters your heart, He's the sole occupant.

CONCLUSION

We can see that there is a contrast between the devil's agenda for our lives and Jesus' agenda. The devil's agenda is to steal, kill, destroy, and quite frankly to ultimately take you to Hell. Yes, Satan is going to Hell. When he gets there, he is not going to rule and reign from a throne. He will be tormented in Hell for all eternity, and all who follow him will join him in Hell. He wants to take as many people with him as possible. That is his agenda for you.

In contrast, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). You have God's offer and you have Satan's offer. Which offer are you going to take? You say, "I want to play around with sin. It is kind of fun." I will acknowledge that sin can be fun. I have had fun sinning. Payday is

going to come too. The devil will extend plenty of credit, but think of the payment that will be due. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). There will be death and judgment as a penalty for breaking God's commandments.

This is not God's plan for you. God loved you so much that 2,000 years ago He put His judgment that should have come upon you upon His Son Jesus. Christ died there in your place and mine and then rose again bodily from the dead. The same Jesus that died and rose again is saying, "I stand at the door and knock, and if you will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in" (see Revelation 3:20). Here is your choice: you can follow Satan or you can follow Christ.

You say, "I reject that premise. I don't want to follow either one of them. I am going to follow myself. I am going to do it my way." The Bible says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Let me tell you something. Your way is not your way at all. You are going the devil's way. The Bible says, "Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

You have a choice. You can get on the broad way. It is the popular way. It is the way that most people are going, but it is the wrong way and it is headed for destruction. Or you can have courage and get on the narrow road that leads to life and to Heaven and the presence of God. It is the way that Jesus offers. God says, "Behold I set before you life and death, blessings and cursings. Choose life that you might live" (see Deuteronomy 30:15). It is your choice. Heaven or Hell. Misery or fulfillment. Jesus or Satan.

Yes there is a devil. He hates you. Yes there is a God. He loves you. You decide whom you are going to follow. Jesus had to die for the sin of the world because every one of us has broken God's commandments. Every one of us has fallen short of His standards. It is because of this sin that we have a big hole in our heart—an emptiness inside of us that we can't fill with any amount of possessions. You can't fill it with any experience that this world can offer. You can't fill it with any drug. You can't fill it with any accomplishment. Even religion and moral living will not fill this void inside of you. This void has been created by sin. The only thing that is going to fill it is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God loved you so much that He sent His Son to die on that cross for you. There at Calvary, as those spikes were driven through Jesus' hands and feet, He shed His blood for you and paid the price for your sin. He took the penalty that you should have taken, that I should have taken, upon Himself. Then He rose again from the dead.

The same Jesus that died and rose again bodily on the third day is alive. He says, "I stand at the door and knock and if you will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in." Do you realize that? Wherever you are, Jesus Christ is there. Angels are around you too. The angels are glorious. They are impressive. But they are in a supporting role. Jesus Christ is the star. Jesus Christ is the Lord. He is the one who wants to come into your life and forgive you of your sin.

If you will put your faith in Him, there will be rejoicing in Heaven. Jesus says, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). That is an amazing statement. That means if you would put your faith in Jesus, and by that I mean you would say, "I am sorry for my sin, God. I want Jesus to be my Savior and Lord," there

would be a shout of joy among the angels in Heaven and Jesus would stand up before the angels and the Father and say, "This one belongs to Me. From now on they are My property. She is Mine. He belongs to Me. Devil and demons, you keep your hands off of this person. They are Mine and they are headed for Heaven." He would do that for you. Jesus said that Hell was created for the devil and his angels. Hell wasn't created for people. It was created for Satan and his demons and anyone who foolishly follows them. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." God wants you to go to Heaven. God doesn't want to send people to Hell.

Yes, the bad news is that one third of the demons followed Lucifer. But the good news is that two thirds of the angels are still on our side. We still outnumber them. More importantly than the fact that the majority of angels are on our side is the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who conquered Satan at the cross, is on our side. That is why we don't have to be afraid. The Bible says, "Greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world" (see 1 John 4:4).

If you want Him to stand up for you in Heaven, you need to stand up for Him on earth. Daniel stood up for the Lord. He wasn't afraid to pray even though the peer pressure against doing it was intense. Are you afraid to stand up for Jesus? As you say, "I want to follow Christ, I want to be a Christian, and I want my sin forgiven," Jesus says He will stand up for you before the Father and say, "That one is Mine." Would you like that to happen? The ball is in your court. It is time for you to decide.

Let me tell you one last thing about angels. They are rooting for you right now to put your faith in Jesus Christ. The reason I say that is because Jesus said when a person believes, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God

over one sinner who repents. That means when someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ, the angels break out and party. If you want to bring joy to Heaven and joy to your own life, you need to put your faith in Jesus Christ.

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