

(4a) STAR WARS ON PATMOS: Why So Much Suffering?

Star Wars, Titanic, Lord of the Rings, Braveheart, Gladiator and most other stories have a common theme: Things were once good; something awful happened; a great battle must be fought or a journey taken; at just the right moment a hero comes and sets things right; and life is found again. Why the same line? Because they all borrow from the same story – the original story found in the Bible.

Revelation reveals a cosmic war between good and evil. In the final battle for global control in Revelation 12 and 13, John saw three evil powers: a dragon; a beast from the sea; and a beast from the land. The dragon is the devil or Satan (Revelation 12:9). The Bible and Jesus are clear that the devil is alive and well. Where did the devil come from? We must go back to the beginning. The Bible says, *“And WAR BROKE OUT IN HEAVEN: Michael and his angels fought with the DRAGON; and the DRAGON and his angels fought”* (Revelation 12:7). Of all places for war to begin – in heaven! There was a real star wars in heaven!

The Bible shares two portraits of the origins of this being called Satan. The first portrait is in Ezekiel 28, where this being is described under the guise of the King of Tyre. Ezekiel reveals that the King of Tyre was a front for Satan: *“Thus says the Lord God: ‘You (King of Tyre) were the seal (model) of PERFECTION, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in EDEN, the GARDEN of God...you were CREATED...You were the anointed CHERUB who covers’”* (Ezekiel 28:12-14). Clearly this goes way beyond the King of Tyre – to someone who is behind the King, who was: 1. In the Garden of Eden; 2. Created by God; 3. “The Anointed Cherub” (a Cherub is an angel). This being was the “covering” or God’s guardian angel. Ezekiel continues: *“You were PERFECT in your ways from the day you were created, till SIN was found in you”* (Ezekiel 28:15). What sin was found in him? – *“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour”* (Ezekiel 28:17) - PRIDE or SELF-CENTREDNESS.

This brings us to the second portrait, found in Isaiah 14 – *“How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the Earth...”* (Isaiah 14:12). Lucifer is a Latin word meaning “Day STAR.” *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on...the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’”* (Isaiah 14:13,14). Notice the single letter I – I – I – self worship was the original sin. The desire to take God’s place - “To be in control,” where God should be. Self-centredness is the root of all problems on earth also – in the home; at school; among nations. Someone’s ego always causes a problem.

Lucifer began a campaign of deceit to discredit God among the angels of heaven until finally, “War broke out in heaven” and Lucifer Became SATAN. Jesus believed in the existence of Satan, calling him the author of deception and death (John 8:44). A woman doesn’t give birth to a drunkard, but to a beautiful baby, who may choose to BECOME a drunkard; just so, God did not make a devil. He made a perfect being, who by his choices BECAME Satan.

As a result, Satan and a third of God’s angels were driven from heaven to earth – *“Then another sign appeared in the sky: a huge red dragon with seven heads...Its tail swept away one-third of the STARS in the sky and threw them down to the earth. The great dragon...That ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his ANGELS were thrown down with him”* (Revelation 12:3,4,9). Notice that stars are symbols of Angels - *“And War Broke out In Heaven”* – “STAR WARS,” if you please.

Why didn’t God destroy Satan immediately? If God had “zapped” Satan, other created beings would have thought his accusations had substance to them. Also beings would have served God out of fear – “Watch God! Don’t step out of line or he’ll zap you!” No, Lucifer must be allowed to live and show his true colours. The results of rebellion must be seen in order never to occur again.

Now the focus of this cosmic conflict turned to earth, God’s most recent creation. The Bible says that God made everything beautiful, but into the garden one day slithered a snake that began to talk to Eve. We’ve met the snake before – *“The great dragon... that ANCIENT SERPENT (Snake) called the DEVIL, or Satan...”* (Revelation 12:9). The SNAKE was a medium or channel for Satan. Before continuing we must say something about genuine love - *“Love must not only give you the right to say YES, it must also allow you the right to say NO!”* Because God is love, he gave His creatures the right to say no. When God made Adam and Eve, He said they could eat from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16,17). God thus gave humans the opportunity to exercise their freedom of choice. The tree became a sort of “polling booth.” God was saying, “To vote for Satan by eating, means death, so stay away. However, to vote for me means life - stay with me.”

So one day Eve stepped up to the polling booth and was met by the snake, who asked her, *“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?’”* (Genesis 3:1) *And the snake said to her, “You will not surely die, for God knows that the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4,5). We have heard this before from the one behind the snake, *“I will make myself like the Most*

High. Notice the lies of the devil: Firstly God doesn't love you - "He's withholding something from you that He doesn't want you to have." In other words, He doesn't really care about you, or love you. Secondly breaking God's law doesn't matter - you won't Die! Those lies have been repeated down through time in one form or another - "God doesn't love you" or "It doesn't matter if you break God's laws." "Trust me, Eve," the devil was saying, "Choose your desires above God's laws." Satan deceived them and earth joined his rebellion.

Why didn't God destroy them? Firstly, He loved them, and secondly Satan must have time to show his true colours. So disease, divorce, despair, death, and destruction entered our world - all the acts of the devil. The story of Job in chapter 1 and 2 makes that very plain. Satan is the cause of all human suffering, but he blames it all on God - it's even written into our insurance policies - earthquakes, floods and fires are "Acts of God"!

What is a loving God to do with a rebel planet that believes Satan's lies? He came, calling out, "Adam where are you?" When he found them hiding, he promised to send a child to defeat and destroy Satan (Genesis 3:15). John picks up on that promise to our parents in his great cosmic conflict prophecy - *"And a great wonder was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being pregnant she cried out, labouring in birth, and in pain to be delivered. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son...and her child was caught up to God, and his throne"* (Revelation 12:1,4,5). This is the gift of Christmas - "For God so loved the world, that He GAVE His one and ONLY Son..." (John 3:16). And when He came, he fed the hungry, healed the sick, touched lepers, befriended outcasts, comforted the grieving, cast out demons, and raised the dead. How do we explain it all? There's only one explanation - He was Immanuel - God with Us. That is what the Bible that is so dependable, teaches - Jesus, the creator God became one of us: *"In the beginning was the WORD and the WORD... WAS GOD...Thru Him ALL things were made; nothing was made without him. The WORD became FLESH and lived among us"* (John 1:1-3,14).

There it is - IMMANUEL, which means, "God with us." Lucifer was wrong about God! God does care about us - He became one of us to share our suffering (Isaiah 53:3, 4). Love broke Satan's rule on Earth. God came to end human suffering. God came to give a forever hope. How? Come to the climax to the star wars, when God's "Empire Struck Back." Come to Calvary where Jesus was crucified. The Bible says, *"He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might DESTROY him who holds the power of DEATH - that is the devil - and FREE those...held in slavery by their FEAR of DEATH"* (Hebrews 2:14,15). Christ defeated Satan at the cross in the following ways: Firstly because at the death of Jesus, God's justice was demonstrated (Romans 3:25). As in Eden, disobedience to God's

commandments brings death (Romans 6:23). It was disobedience to God's commands that killed Christ. How come? In taking our sins, Jesus had to suffer the penalty of death (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18). Secondly, in taking our place at the cross, God's love was clearly demonstrated for the human race (Romans 5:8). At Calvary, Satan was seen on two counts to be a liar - God's commands are important (His Son died because His law was broken), and He does love and care for us. Here at Calvary, God's "Empire Struck Back" in the real Star Wars. Revelation reveals that soon the end of Satan and evil will take place. Hope is sure! Soon there will be no more divorce, no more disease, no more depression, no more death, and no more devil. Why not be on the winning side, by accepting God's love, and asking Him to take control of your life?

Acknowledgments - Some material was taken from Dwight Nelson's, Next Millennium Seminar, 1998