

The Great Controversy

Pen Narith's heart pounded as he fled down the dirt road of the refugee camp. Behind him was the rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun fire. He could see thatched shacks on fire, the flames blazing into the skies. Missiles were being shot as the enemy angrily tried to find the men soldiers hiding in the camp that was only supposed to be for women and children.

Which way should he go? Where could he find safety? Narith decided to keep going straight when suddenly a voice in his mind said turn left. It didn't seem safe. He kept running straight, but the voice was insistent. Turn left! He did and almost immediately a missile exploded on the road just where he would have been if he hadn't turned.

What had saved him in this dangerous battle? Who had spoken to him. When the fighting was over, Narith visited a group of people who talked about the Creator of Life. They told him that this God has power to protect people and has deep compassion on those who are in need. He became a believer in this true God and would always be grateful to God for life.

Life is a Battle

Do you feel sometimes like you are in the middle of a battle? Not a battle with machine guns and missiles, but a battle between good and evil. Is your life difficult? Do you sometimes feel discouraged, sad or lonely, ready to give up on life? Are you sometimes overwhelmed by a strong temptation to do what is wrong?

Have you ever been in the midst of a decision about what is right and wrong and had two thoughts run through your mind.

One voice says, "Don't do it. It will hurt someone and bring you suffering." Another voice says, "It's okay, it's not so bad. No one will ever know and it will be fun!" It is like someone is trying to help us and someone else is trying to destroy us.

What is going on? Are we in the midst of a battle? Yes we are. The ancient scriptures say there is a fierce war going on between good and evil. We need to know clearly about the two sides and determine to be where it is safest. Our peace and joy in this life depends on it and so does our eternal destiny.

The scriptures tell of a supreme God who exists everywhere and from eternity. He is the first cause of all things and is described as perfectly holy with no evil desires. We have seen that this God is honest, trustworthy and completely just. He is also compassionate, ready to help people who have made mistakes and fallen into sin.

This God is so large and beyond our understanding that we could not know Him on our own. He has chosen to tell us about Himself and about the beginnings of our world, angels and evil spirits.

The ancient scriptures say that God created a place called heaven and made angels to live there. The angels were beautiful, perfect and holy. Their great delight was to serve others and to worship God. All was peaceful and there was no suffering.

War Begins in Heaven

One of the angels was called Lucifer. He was very talented and was highly respected as the leader of the millions of angels. As time passed something began to

change in his heart. He became jealous of the adoration that all the angels gave to God. He forgot that God had given him life and wanted the angels to worship him. Like the seed of a thistle plant, his jealousy grew underground where no one could see it. Craftily, he began to raise questions in the minds of other angels. "Why does God have so many laws? Why must we worship him instead of giving appreciation to each other?"

Slowly Lucifer's rebellion grew until one third of the angels followed him. The scriptures say, "War broke out in heaven: The One who is like God and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought." Here the scriptures describe Lucifer as a dragon, someone who was trying to destroy.

The scriptures go on to say, "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was cast to the earth and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7-9). Here Lucifer is called a snake, sneaky and able to kill. He is called Satan, which means the one who accuses and attacks. No longer was he called Lucifer. His followers had been called angels, but after the fall they were called devils or evil spirits. The scriptures show that they were once angels, but had never been people.

Satan could not overcome the God of the universe, but his war had pierced God's heart. God had created the angels and loved them as His children. To see them turn away from Him caused Him great pain. In His justice He removed them from heaven so that heaven might remain peaceful.

The War Comes to Earth

Satan's hatred toward God grew deeper. Since he could not

overcome God, he determined to hurt and destroy whatever God made. This earth had been made in perfect beauty by God's design and power. There was no suffering or death. The first people, Adam and Eve, lived in harmony and great joy. They enjoyed all the fruits and animals God had made.

Satan began his war on this new place. God did not want Satan to come near our planet. Satan complained about this. "God is not just," he said. He claimed that his kingdom was better than God's and that every person ought to have the freedom to choose Satan's way if they wanted. God allowed Satan to be in only one place and He carefully warned the humans to stay away. He told Adam and Eve that they could freely eat anything in the garden but that they were to stay away from one tree called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God very strictly forbade them to not pick from, eat of, or go near the tree because, if they did, they would surely die. Why was this? Satan was hiding there ready to tempt them. Obeying God was the only way to escape suffering. Still God gave them the freedom and did not force them to follow His way.

The scriptures tell us that one day Eve walked far away from Adam and found herself close to the tree that God had forbidden. She saw a very interesting and beautiful snake. In that instant she heard a voice from the tree asking, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The sound coming from a snake made her go even closer to the tree. It looked like a snake could talk. She answered saying, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

It was really Satan speaking through the snake to attract her. He answered, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be

like God, knowing good and evil.”

Eve had separated from her husband and now faced the temptation to eat the fruit that God had forbidden claiming that it was delicious, gave power and increased wisdom. According to the Bible, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:6). Satan was able to tempt Eve to taste the fruit because she greedily wanted wisdom and power like God. She and her husband broke God’s law through desire and plunged this world into suffering.

Today we see the same thing that happened to Satan and Adam and Eve. Greed and desire lead people to want more than what they should have. Their sin causes them pain and suffering comes to those around them too. Because of greed, people hate each other, kill each other, husbands beat their wives, and wives betray their husbands.

Satan and the evil spirits continue to try to destroy our lives through accidents, illnesses, curses and temptations. Do you feel the war? What should we do? How can we make it safely through this war? Let’s examine the story of Adam and Eve more fully to see what God did when they fell into temptation. If He warned Adam and Eve about Satan, wouldn’t He also try to help us fight against evil?

The Bible says that when Adam and Eve had sinned because of the deception of the evil spirit, God still had pity and loved them anyway. He had a plan to help them escape further suffering. He would show them the path of righteousness by teaching them His laws. He promised to answer their prayers if they would call on Him to help them change their hearts and follow what is right. He gave them a promise that

He would send Jesus into the world to overcome Satan and his evil spirits. Beyond this, God had a plan to one day make the world completely safe again, with perfect peace and no evil spirits.

God’s Commandments Protect us from Evil

One of the great things this God has done to help us is to clearly show us the laws that will bring blessings to our lives. In wars today, many soldiers plant landmines. These are very dangerous. Thousands of people have been killed by stepping on a land mine. Thousands more have lost an arm or a leg. There are organizations who work hard and with great danger to remove land mines. It takes a lot of time to remove the land mines. Once they find them they put out signs saying, “Don’t touch landmines! Be careful or you will die.” This is what God has done for us. He has given us the scriptures which tell of His commandments so that we will know what we should not do so we can avoid suffering.

The commandments of God are summarized in a special section of the Bible called the Ten Commandments. You can read them in Exodus 20. The last six commandments tell us how we should treat people. In summary, they are:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet.

Wouldn't the world be a wonderful place if nobody stole, lied, killed or broke up their family through adultery? God truly is wise in giving us such excellent commands. Those who ignore these things may have pleasure for a moment, but then they suffer perhaps in jail or with a sickness or a broken home.

We must Choose God's Side

Nobody is safe in a war if he stands in the middle of the fighting. He will surely be shot by one side or the other! In the same way, we must choose which side we will be on. Some people want the power of evil spirits and so they follow their way. Others do not think about evil spirits, but they still choose evil by following their own selfish desires.

We must take time to think about the end results of sin and selfishness. It surely leads to death, just as through Adam and Eve's sin, death first came to this world. How much smarter it would be for us to choose to be on God's side. He has the greatest power and will ultimately win this war.

The first four of the Ten Commandments talk about loyalty to the God who made us. Truly if there is such a God we owe Him our lives and our gratitude. In some Asian countries people celebrate their parents on days called Mothers Day and Fathers Day. Others visit their parents on New Years and bow before them, offering them gifts and telling them thank you for giving them life, raising them and sending them to school. This is a very important practice.

Can you imagine if a young person on his way to his parents' house met a stranger and bowed before him, giving his gift to him instead? Wouldn't that be wrong? That is why these

important commandments speak as clearly as they do. Summarized they are:

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God...For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.

God sees that we are in the midst of a war in which Satan and the evil spirits want to destroy us. He wants to protect us, to keep us safe. Sometimes evil spirits pretend to be mighty gods or powerful people who have died. They want our worship and so they do many things to trick us. This is why God gave us the Ten Commandments to warn us not to worship anything else except the eternal Creator God who is truly a compassionate Father to us.

Here is God's promise to you in Isaiah 41:10, 12b and 13. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. Those who contended with you, those who war against you shall be as nothing. For I the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"

If you want God's help in winning this battle, pray this prayer today.

Dear Mighty Father God, help me to know Your power and

Your compassion. There are many evil spirits and many temptations. Help me to escape from their power and to choose what is right. Give me strength to keep Your commandments and to remember that sin's pleasures lead to death not peace. Thank You for Your help. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Points to Remember

God does not force anyone to follow Him.

God's laws are like land mine signs that warn us of danger.

Never stand in the middle of a war. Choose a side!

Questions

1. Write true or false before the statements.

_____ The scriptures teach that God has always existed and is everywhere.

_____ The scriptures teach that this God is just and compassionate.

_____ This God is worthy of worship and obedience because He made all good things.

2. Check the true statements.

_____ Satan means the one who accuses and attacks.

_____ Satan never lived in heaven.

_____ Angels who rebelled against God are now called evil spirits.

3. Fill in the blanks.

The first man and woman were named _____ and _____.

They were told to not eat from the _____ of _____.

_____ is the source of suffering.

4. Check which of the following are in the Ten Commandments:

_____ You shall not murder.

_____ You shall not covet

_____ You shall have no other gods before Me.

_____ Honor your father and your mother.

5. If this statement is true of your choice today, check it:

_____ I will choose to trust and follow God so that I will be protected from the attacks of Satan and evil spirits. I will study the Ten Commandments and the scriptures to know God's warning signs.