

Holy Kisses

Altar of Silence



David P. Aguilar Jr.

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Introduction

“The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Ta’anach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from Heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.” (Judges 5:19, 20)

“A train of cars was shown me, going with the speed of lightning. The angel bade me look carefully. I fixed my eyes upon the train. It seemed that the whole world was on board. Then he showed me the conductor, a fair, stately person, whom all the passengers looked up to and revered. I was perplexed and asked my attending angel who it was. He said, ‘It is Satan. He is the conductor, in the form of an angel of light. He has taken the world captive. They are given over to strong delusions, to believe a lie that they may be damned. His agent, the highest in order next to him, is the engineer, and others of his agents are employed in different offices as he may need them, and they are all going with lightning speed to perdition.’” [*Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, page 263]

Both the Scriptures, and more modern commentators on the Sacred Works, give indications of a vast, spiritual world of which the physical experience familiar to most human beings is but a section. Mankind’s battles, its personal victories and military defeats, none of these escape the attention of the Universe’s Creator and true King. At times, the Bible and other religious materials indicate that He will intervene, often by means of His servants the angels to bring about a desired result.

At the same time, there is an enemy of souls. There is a “god of this world,” (2Corinthians 4:4) a powerful force that has stolen authority over this planet from its intended regent, Adam, and exercised a tremendous power for evil against humanity.

In the series of books named *The Sar’im Chronicles*, the origin of this conflict is revealed, and the history of spiritual warfare is traced from its grand inception down to the level at which it may be understood to affect the lives of individual men and women. For the most part, this series is chronologically linear, moving down the stream of time to give insights into the development of human history in relation to the plane of spirits.

This book, the first of a companion series entitled *Holy Kisses*, seeks to bring a number of principles to light that have been made clear down through the various ages. *Altar of Silence* provides glimpses into a vast panorama which may be of benefit to those who take heed of the high and low points of our interaction with angels and demons, for “there is no new thing under the sun,” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and there is often a clear application to daily life to be found.

The short episodes presented herein are written in a variety of styles, no two exactly alike. The standard third-person perspective is present, but other literary devices include poetry, first-person narrative, a demon’s point of view and (in the chapter entitled “Ex

Machina”) an internet conversation transcript composed from several actual discussions. Despite this array of methods, however, there are only a few key themes. One of the primary ideas among these is the importance of trusting in the Creator to fulfill His promises. Understanding this aspect of His character allows us to rest, secure in this Biblical knowledge: “Because thou hast made Yahweh, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Psalm 91:9-11)

The following are a few technical notes about the manner of writing, that readers may be able to obtain the highest degree of clarity and satisfaction from this work:

1) All Bible quotations are generally from the King James Version, with the exception of the Divine names being restored to their original pronunciation and a few punctuations being clarified.

2) The word “God” in the Scriptures becomes “Almighty One” or “Elohim,” and “the LORD” becomes “Yah” or “Yahweh” in the Old Testament readings if pronounced in human language. The Hebrew characters that represent the name of the Creator are rendered IaHWeH, to emphasize the tetragrammaton, otherwise.

3) Pronouns referring to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (“He,” “Him,” “His,” “It,” etc.) are all capitalized in Bible verses. So are certain key terms referring to eternal principles or establishments.

Yahweh bless thee, and keep thee;

Yahweh make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

Yahweh lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

(Numbers 6:24-26)

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The Heart of The Earth



“He is almost certain to fall now,” whispered a voice from the shadows that had settled upon the main sail.

“Indeed,” came the reply. “He is already fighting off the sting of conscience. It does not burn so fiercely within his soul anymore, and soon he will feel nothing at all.”

The first voice continued, “I never seem to remember how enjoyable this task is – until they are right within our grasp; and we have become so efficient at what we do... for rebellion is...” “as the sin of witchcraft,” the second voice chimed in, completing the thought.

It did not matter that the two ancient beings above the ship’s mast were hovering amidst the shadows of the water’s night. Human eyes would have been unable to detect their presence in the noonday sun, and human ears would have failed to register their conversation. For these two fallen angels, however, the shadows were their home. To the eyes of other spirits Kaspriel and Zaphkiel could be seen eagerly looking downward. Their vision penetrated the wooden floor of the deck, and they beheld with crafty eyes the sleeping figure in one of the rear cabins below.

“Prophet,” uttered Zaphkiel with contempt. “We have seen their kind undone before. I wonder what the fate of this one will be, when his faith dies... do you think IaH will feed him to the lions, as He did to those who failed Him in former days?” He laughed and then continued, “No, no... It is far more likely that He will send a Dominion to simply break this ship apart...” “and send him to his end beneath the waves,” Kaspriel concluded. “What a waste it would be,” the first speaker said, and then both commented simultaneously, “Such a waste of talent.”

The demons smiled, each one thinking of something different. Kaspriel recalled with delight the images of a misled messenger of Heaven being consumed by a wild beast. He had been induced to forsake the protection of the holy angels in a way most amusing to the fallen ones – they had led him to accept the testimony of another prophet they had already turned to the service of evil. Though the memory was two centuries old, such a span of years meant little to these creatures, and their recollection did not fade with the passage of time. His fellow tempter, also belonging to the order of angels known as Powers, was already calculating the impact of the prophet’s failed ministry. He was

trying to decide whether or not it would serve their interests better if the Almighty chose to remove him entirely. Although the restless spirits found their greatest satisfaction in misrepresenting the character of IaHWeH to His created beings, they had to admit that He was a Tactician infinitely beyond their abilities, and certainly willing to sacrifice even those whom He loved for the greater good of His family. Well did they know of His promise to sacrifice even Himself for the inconstant humans one day, but most of their benighted army saw those statements as completely incomprehensible and thus, somehow, untrue.

If Jonah, who lay sleeping below, would do more damage to the cause of righteousness as a false prophet, the twin Powers knew that he would not survive for very long. If it was decided that he should live, the demons would find uses for him as long as they were permitted.

The peaceful waves continued to rock the boat gently, and if the son of Ammitai was troubled in his dreams by an offended conscience, his body was far too comfortable to know it. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft," the Powers had said, and both of these vices were well known to the pair. Thousands of years earlier, Kaspiel and Zaphkiel had begun their training in the pathways of sin, and their love for the former had led to their mastery of the latter. With the exception of the demonic archangels, these two spirits were unmatched in their ability to pervert the forces of the physical universe, and to use them unmercifully in their own favor. Because of their unique talent for duplicating even the miracles of Heaven, these two Powers were Sammael's favorite agents for the undermining of prophetic ministries and the corruption of Heaven's chosen heroes.

Kaspriel and Zaphkiel had been in the throne room of Pharaoh when Jannah and Jambrah had transformed their staffs into snakelike forms, only to watch their expensive artifacts consumed by the fierce serpent that had sprung forth from Moses' rod. Kaspiel and Zaphkiel had paved the way more than once for idolatry within the kingdom of Israel, beginning with their work on the priests and prophets of the sacred Temple. So often had they been paired against the people of the Most High that they had become inseparable, and even their fellow demons considered them almost a single entity. One was not mentioned in spiritual circles without the name of the other following close behind, and they had certainly developed a penchant for completing each others' thoughts over the years. Although unity could have scarcely been considered a virtue of the unholy angels in those days, Kaspiel and Zaphkiel somehow made it work.

Their work on Jonah was no recent undertaking either. The seeds of dissatisfaction and doubt that they were watching bloom before their glowing eyes that night were planted in the fertile soil of youth, and were nurtured in a way that would have been considered "loving," had not the ministering hands long ceased to flow with the divine principle of Love. On the very day Sammael recognized the gift of prophecy upon the young man, the demonic archangel had assigned the two unseen watchers to his case, pulling them away from less pressing matters. "Old Elisha's foolish schools can wait," Sammael had said to them. "The master believes this individual to be of far greater importance."

Indeed it was. Jonah's ministry was to be unique in a number of ways. Israel had been established as a nation at the very center of the eastern world, in the very heart of the earth, for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of IaHWeH to all humanity. Under the reign of its current king, however, this purpose was all but frustrated. Jehoash and his immediate successors were not particularly wicked rulers, but simply reflected the indifference of their age, a condition that had become endemic even in the latter years of King Solomon. Through their infrequent conversations with the holy angels, the fallen spirits learned of Heaven's purpose for the young man's gift, and they immediately set to work in the land of Zebulun, making this particular prophetic call unpleasant. Michael allowed their interference, as He always has, so that His chosen servant would be well prepared for the opposition he would face throughout his life.

When the fullness of time had come, IaHWeH had spoken to Jonah in a dream, and said to him, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me." Jonah had awakened immediately, but dismissed the instruction just as quickly.

Kaspiel was by the reclining prophet as soon as the divine Messenger left the room, whispering, "It was just a dream. Why should I be sent to Nineveh, of all places? They are wholly corrupt, beyond all hope. And they are not, after all, even Hebrew!"



Throughout the trials of his youth, Jonah had performed well. He had resisted temptation, and dedicated himself to the service of IaH. Nevertheless, the Powers assigned to him had been able to make subtle inroads into his character, and as a result his ability to clearly discern the voice of Heaven was not perfect. The demons had an easy time convincing the prophet that this particular message was a product of his own mind, for the request was an unusual one – and although Jonah had been chosen from his birth to be a messenger to the Gentiles, he had not been permitted to know his role.

El Michael watched as Jonah sighed deeply in relief, and lay back down to sleep. A faint smile crossed His lips, and as soon as the gentle snoring resumed, He passed through the walls of the house and stood once more at the human's head. Kaspiel and Zaphkiel wisely retreated at the return of the Prince, but said nothing to Him as they watched from the shadows. The tension of vast ages stood between this Messenger of Heaven and the servants of evil. The lines had been drawn millennia ago, the sides chosen and the wars fought. Michael knew what the demons were there to do, and the demons knew that Jonah's time had come to hear the call of his appointed office. There was no need for concourse between Light and Darkness. There was nothing to be said.

This did not mean that the fallen angels would let the incident pass without giving it their best attempt. They knew the time had come for Jonah to hear the call to his ministry for the heathen; that did not mean he would respond! Many times before, the demons had been able to prevent those who had been prepared with painstaking tenderness for service

from responding to the call. The greatest of the angels never truly seemed surprised on these occasions, although their sadness and disappointment were always apparent.

This call was being made by El Michael Himself, the Word of IaHWeH, and Jonah had spoken words of prophecy before. He knew the Voice that was now calling out to him even though he had, for the moment, allowed himself to be misled by his tempters. “Jonah,” the Prince said again, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.”

Again the prophet stirred in his sleep, but this time he did not fully awaken. Zaphkiel did not hesitate, however, and boldly approached the sleeper, ignoring the Majesty of Heaven standing before him. “Be still, weary one,” he commanded. “You have business to be about in the morning, and need much rest in order to perform well.”

Knowing His child perfectly, El Michael did nothing but repeat the instruction a third time, word for word. Jonah would understand that this was of IaH. He could not convince himself, despite the demons’ best efforts, that the thrice-repeated command was his own mind talking. Before Kaspriel and Zaphkiel could respond, Jonah stood on his feet and began, hesitantly, to prepare for a journey.

Even as he gathered his things, it was apparent by the expression on his face that Jonah was finding no joy in the service he was being led to perform. He could not deny the burning in his heart to do what he had been shown was his purpose, but he was unable to understand the mission on which it seemed he was being sent. “Nineveh!” The human shook his head and looked out at the night sky. It would be a few hours yet before the sun arose, and the stars twinkled in the cloudless darkness overhead. “Why should I go to Nineveh?”

The Assyrians were no friends to the chosen people in those days, and the unsteady politics of the last few generations made even the most faithful wary of the armies of the heathen. Jonah knew he would need divine assistance every step of the way, for in that strange land, the first violent person he offended could cut his mission trip short, and as a Hebrew he knew better than to expect any Ninevite to stay his hand for fear of justice. El Michael had not referred to Nineveh as “that great city” merely on account of its size – this major city of the nation was great indeed in terms of its idolatry and sin. The citizens’ god, Asshur, was a warlike deity, and although it was the proud demon known as Nisroch that was actually guiding their progress as a people, he did so using the name of their founding father, whom they had elevated in their legends to the status of divinity.

“What good would it do? What good could it possibly do?” The twin tempters had no intentions of giving up, and they attached a doubt to each of the prophet’s thoughts like a virus. The infection began to spread. “I may not be able to stay here,” the demons spoke in the voice of Jonah’s mind, “for the Voice of heaven bids me go; but the days to come will not find me in Nineveh either! Why should I go there and be slain for my kindness?”

“Why should I go there?” Jonah asked aloud, accepting the temptation. Kaspriel and Zaphkiel had succeeded in producing the reaction they were seeking. Just as the demons considered the promises of IaHWeH’s coming Sacrifice to be untrue on the grounds that they did not understand it, so Jonah was led to reject the urgent need for compliance with the call of his office because he was unable to see *why*. Heaven has never asked for blind faith. Humans are not allowed to be tested beyond what they have occasion to know and trust, but Jonah’s advantages had been great. Although he could not readily grasp the necessity of an oracle to Nineveh, he had experienced the unsearchable wisdom of the Throne for himself in the past, and was left, therefore, without excuse.

“I cannot,” he finally said, solidifying his decision. As the sun broke above the eastern horizon, Jonah had come to a crossroads both literally and figuratively. One way led to his destiny, standing alone amongst the wicked as an ambassador of grace. Another way led to freedom from his responsibilities, safety from the idolaters, and the avoidance of potential disgrace.

“I cannot,” the prophet repeated. “Even if I should go, what are the outcomes? Either they will reject the message, and I will be put to death or...” Kaspriel and Zaphkiel looked on in amusement. As the time had passed, they had long ceased to whisper doubts into the prophet’s ear. Having accepted their deception, the human proceeded to put the natural creativity of his kind to use. Demons may be clever, and intelligent beyond human knowledge, but they were not created in the image of IaH as were humans. They do not possess the degree of inventiveness so readily seen in, and so often abused by, the sons of Adam. No, the demons’ work was done; Jonah was diligently digging his own tunnel to Sheol.

“Or even should they repent,” he continued with a note of irony, “Yah, in His mercy, will probably spare them! Where will I be then? ‘A false prophet,’ they will call me... an alarmist and a fool. And when the Ninevites turn back to their foolish idols, how shall I then be remembered for my labors? No, no... I cannot!”

With a pained look on his face, Jonah turned out of the way. He set his face toward a distant land, to the city of Tarshish, and away from Assyria and the city of Nineveh. He began to walk, and his journey began to take him steadily further from his appointed place and to a distant land where he imagined safety lay; the two evil Powers turned in unison to El Michael, who stood watching His champion go. They smiled at Him with sideways glances, but El Michael said nothing to the fallen spirits – there was nothing to be said.



When the ship had departed from Joppa in the land of Dan, the sky was clear and the water was nearly smooth. On into the evening a favorable wind had sped the travelers on their way, and there was much merriment among the sailors and their passengers. The

night saw the approach of a few clouds, and under a starless patch of sky the tempters watched, having followed Jonah to see what would become of their captive.

Somewhere not too far away, even as the evil angels gloated over the sleeping prophet, a passageway to the Heavens opened above the midst of the sea and an angel appeared, standing above the waters with his eyes raised to the sky. The holy Dominion turned his face in the direction of the ship in which Jonah was traveling, and he gently began to blow. At this signal the ambient forces of nature, which had been prepared for just such an occasion, lent their power to the unspoken command. A fierce wind sprang up, and clouds began to gather rapidly under Sauariel's continuing influence. It was not long before a heavy rain began to fall on the ship, and thunder followed lightning to split the air of the once peaceful night.

Even while Jonah slept to escape the pangs of conscience and the conversation of the sailors earlier in the day, the other inhabitants of the ship began to bustle back and forth, securing the equipment and bracing for the force of the storm. "Merciless," said Kaspriel and Zaphkiel together as the Dominion increased the strength of the wind, sending the sailors into a panic. The Powers smiled at each other with knowing looks, believing that Michael had made His choice, and that Jonah was about to leave this earth.

"Bring down the sails," yelled the shipmaster. "We're going to break apart!"

Even as some of the mariners labored to lower the sails, others began to fervently pray in a multitude of languages to a multitude of gods. This was no ordinary storm, and even the most experienced of the seamen began to lose spirit. "It came on us so suddenly," some said, "It must be the work of an offended god!"

When one of the men lowering the sails almost fell overboard, the others who were handling the mast began to cry out, and to scramble even more carelessly to get the job done quickly. There were other angels about, however, and these appeared to lend their assistance to the struggling crew. No lives were lost in their frantic movements. Kaspriel and Zaphkiel eyed the divine servants warily, realizing that their presence complicated matters somewhat. If IaH had decided to slay His own messenger Jonah by destroying the vessel, why would He send angels to protect the others on board?

As one they opened their wings and descended unto the deck. "What are you doing here?" Kaspriel demanded of the closest spirit.

"Our Master's work," replied the Virtue Kuniel, barely looking up at the Power. This answer served only to produce a scowl, and a nearby Throne added, with a somewhat amused voice, "That need not even have been asked."

Kaspriel glared at the latter speaker for a moment in visible contempt, and then turned away from the four-winged angel to face Kuniel once again. Though the waves were surging up unto the deck, soaking every material being on board, the invisible speakers

were untouched by the water. “Jonah has made his choice,” the Power protested. “Why are you helping these ignorant beasts?”

One of the greatest triumphs of demonic influence has resulted in the impression among human beings that demons are ugly. While it is true that their darkened spirits render them noticeably less beautiful than they had been in their unfallen state, the caricature of misshapen, bat-winged, claw-wielding monsters has provided much excuse among the skeptical for not taking the invisible war seriously. Sin takes its toll on the mightiest of beings, and even the provisions made by IaH to keep His rebellious children intact until the judgment have not wholly immunized the evil spirits against the manifestations of their fall. Even so, the Power who stood before Kuniel had once outranked him in the hierarchy of Heaven, and he was a child of the original Creation, impressive to behold.

The Virtue barely spared him a glance, however, and went back to lending invisible strength to a mariner who was attempting to lift a heavy crate over the railing. The sailors realized that they were too heavy to withstand the furious seas, and had begun to lighten their load. Still ignoring Kaspriel’s question, he called to another angel standing nearby, and motioned him over to the shipmaster.

Only then did he turn to the fallen angel, and he said to him, “Watch and see.” Kuniel pointed to the shipmaster, who began to act on the advice given to him by the angel at his side, going below to search the ship for others to help them pray.

Though there were many people hiding from the storm below the deck, Jonah was the only one who was asleep. The captain shook him furiously and said, “What do you mean by this, you sleeper? Get up and call on your god, so that perhaps he will cause his favor to shine on us and spare us from destruction!”

As soon as Jonah regained consciousness and perceived that there was a storm, he grew fearful. “I am punished,” he thought to himself, “and all these men with me.” He said nothing, however, and hesitantly followed the shipmaster back up to the deck.

As he came above the board, Jonah saw men huddled together in fear and supplication, shouting vows to their various deities above the crashing waves and pleading for their lives. A stinging spray hit the prophet’s eyes, and the shuddering ship knocked him to his knees. Off his feet and temporarily blinded, Jonah bowed his head in shame... but he could not bring himself to pray. He could not find the penitence to open up his heart to IaHWeH, from whom he had fled. “Yah my Almighty One is just,” he said below his breath. “Let Him do with me as seems good to Him.”



The captain looked around the ship and saw that every man was praying. He took note of Jonah’s posture and imagined that the prophet was also being suppliant to whatsoever creature or force he worshipped, and was perplexed at the continuing intensity of the

storm. Everything that could have been cast overboard had been jettisoned, yet the boat continued to take on water. Bailing, he knew, was useless... the waves were simply breaking on them too quickly, and soon they would be below the surface of the deep.

Again the angel sent by Kuniel was standing by the captain, giving him an idea to which, in his desperation, he leaped. "Arise, men," he said, yelling to be heard above the noise. As they stood or turned toward him he continued, "It is doing us no good to pray to our many gods – but if there be one god we have offended, let us all pray to him." Before the men could ask him how they would determine which member of the vast pantheon they had angered, he said to them, "Let there be a casting of lots, that we may know the source of this great wrath."

The sailors agreed, and they cast lots among them to determine who was guilty of the offense. Due to the presence and influence of the angels on board, the prophet Jonah was soon singled out.

Unable to contain their amusement at what was going on before them, Kaspiel and Zaphkiel burst into cruel laughter. "He spares the ungodly," said one, "and destroys the unworthy," finished the other. The twin Powers looked on, satisfied with their corruption of Heaven's messenger, and the consequences of their victory that he was about to encounter.

"What have you done?" cried a sailor to Jonah. "What cause is there for this storm?" Another said to him, "Who are you? What do you do, and where are you from?" "Yes," said a third, "tell us where you are from, and who you are."

Jonah stood unsteadily on his feet, holding unto the mast in the center of the deck. As the waves crashed down he said to them, shouting to be heard above the noise, "I am a Hebrew!"

"I serve Yahweh," he continued, pronouncing the name of IaHWeH in his human language, "the Almighty One of Heaven is the One that I fear. It is He who made both the sea and the dry land."

When the men heard that Jonah claimed to serve the God who created the sea, they became terrified. Though not all believed in IaH, the circumstances were such that they had no courage to dispute the prophet's confident declaration. Jonah knew the One whom he had pledged to serve, and even in his cowardice, he did not doubt for an instant the power of the Elohim. Seeing the fear in the eyes of the mariners, Kaspiel, Zaphkiel and Jonah himself waited for them to rush upon the prophet and cast him into the foaming waters.

When they said nothing for a moment, Jonah continued to speak, pouring out his confession before the men and the angels present before him. Sleep had not long banished the prick of conviction, and if the messenger was going to die at the hands of these men, he decided that he would go down to silence with a heart as pure as he could

attain. "I have sinned against Yah," he said. "I was sent with a message to bring to a foreign people... a people like many of you, a message of mercy. But I turned away from my Elohim, because I was afraid of what this people would do to me, or what would happen if they repented. They are not my people. I am not their servant... but I have not obeyed the Voice of my Almighty One, and He has sent this storm to find me."

"What shall we do to you," the shipmaster asked, "to appease Yahweh? How shall we get Him to turn away His wrath from my ship and these men?"

Jonah set his face, knowing the right thing to do, and to say. "Take me and cast me into the sea and it will become calm. It is only for my sake that this great tempest has come upon you."

Without hesitation, some of the sailors rose up to grab the prophet and lift him over the side of the ship. "No," said the captain. "We do not need to cast this man overboard." The shipmaster had been impressed by Jonah's readiness to sacrifice himself for his crew, and he was determined to do what he could to spare him. Only a part of this tendency was instilled by the influence of Kuniel's angels, for the captain was an honorable man, and faithful to his convictions, although he did not know IaH. "Let us row while we can, for our mast is down, and perhaps we will be able to clear the storm." The more experienced among his crew looked at him in amazement, knowing that such an action would be to no avail. Nevertheless, every man took up his oar, and they began to paddle vigorously against the waves. Perhaps it would not do any good, some reasoned, but at least it gave them something to do besides waiting to die.

Still holding on to the mast, Jonah looked over the ship at the men rowing. He was filled with a deep remorse, seeing how hard these Gentiles were fighting to save themselves, and to avoid sending him to a watery grave. "Not all these men want to see you live," Kuniel whispered to Jonah, "but there are many who do." Some were rowing because they did not want to send a man to his death; others were simply following orders, but all were obeying the instructions of their captain. Though the situation seemed hopeless, and there was no clear victory in sight, the men rowed with all their strength. Jonah looked over at the men, and he repented.

"I have done foolishly," the prophet said, and then to the captain he declared, "You know this ship will be lost if you do not do as I have said."

Defeated by the divine storm, the shipmaster drew a heavy breath and commanded his men to stop rowing. "We have no choice," he said to them, "but to do as this prophet has said. Let us pray to his God that we should be clear of innocent blood." And so the men prayed to IaH that He would not hold them guilty of obeying the prophet's words, and they went over to Jonah. The repentant messenger did not resist when strong hands bore him to the railing of the ship's deck, and he closed his eyes as he hurtled over the deck and into the raging waves.



A whisper came from Heaven to the Dominion who had started the storm as soon as Jonah sank beneath the waves. “Peace, and be still,” came the command. Sauariel closed his mouth, and immediately the tempest began to lessen in its intensity. The angelic messenger soared over to the place at which the prophet had entered the waters and plunged in, following the human down out of sight.

Aboard the ship, the captain, the crew and the other passengers looked on in astonishment as the waves abated. The wind continued to blow, but it was no longer at a dangerous strength; it served only to clear the sky of the rain clouds, and to reveal the gentle twinkling of the stars above. Within a very short time the night became as it had been before the great storm, and the human witnesses marveled at the power of IaH. “Great is Yahweh, the God of Jonah,” they said, and one man who was familiar with the religion of the Hebrews proposed that they sacrifice one of the livestock they had been carrying in the lower depths as a thanksgiving offering. Even the most hardened idolater eagerly agreed to the ritual, for it could scarcely be denied that there was something out of the ordinary about the storm itself, and more so about the manner in which it had finally been calmed.



Beneath the waters of the sea, the Dominion Sauariel guided a large fish over to the drowning prophet, and he caused the creature to open its wide jaws and engulf the human. Kuniel entered the fish along with Jonah, revived him, and remained there with him to sustain him.

The triumphant rejoicing of Kaspriel and Zaphkiel was short lived, for as soon as they realized that Jonah was alive within the belly of the beast, they were outraged. “Why should he be spared?” Zaphkiel asked. “How can a repentance inspired by fear be genuine?” “Why should IaH preserve his worthless life?” his partner added, as they followed the prophet and Sauariel into the watery realm.

Yet Jonah’s repentance had not issued forth from his heart because of a fear of death. The prophet had resigned himself to his fate, knowing that IaH would be just to slay him for rejecting the very source of life, the mercy of the Most High. The truth is that Jonah’s heart had been touched by the efforts of the idolatrous mariners to save him, and he realized that the people in Nineveh, indeed the people of any nation, were no less deserving of Heaven’s grace than himself. In fact, he decided, after his actions of late there were a great many living in ignorance who deserved it far more.

The tempting angels regarded the scene before them, and they said, “The human’s life is ours, for we have turned him from the path of the Elohim. Let us therefore finish what the sailors above began!” Using their demonic power, Kaspriel and Zaphkiel attempted to induce the various creatures of the sea to attack Jonah’s living prison. They reasoned that if they could kill the fish, Jonah would not survive. There were other spirits nearby, however, and their influence was on the side of Heaven; none of the beasts summoned by the Powers responded to their call.

Meanwhile, within the belly of the fish, Jonah looked about but saw nothing. His eyes attempted in vain to adjust themselves to the level of darkness, but there was no light at all for them to perceive. Only by the sounds made by the fish itself, and those carried faintly to his ears by the waters outside, could the prophet tell that he was not already in the land of the dead. He knew that there was no thought in the grave to which men go, and somehow, he realized, he must still be alive. How is it that he was able to breathe? Even if some air had been swallowed with him, it should since have become unusable – yet Jonah could breathe.

“Praise be to Yahweh,” he said, realizing that if his Master had not decided to actively preserve his life, he would have perished. Jonah remembered the call he had received to speak to the people of Nineveh, and he vowed that, should he make it back to land, he would do nothing else but what IaH commanded. “Praise be to Yahweh,” he repeated, “for I yet live.” And he began to pray, the Spirit moving once again within him causing him to wax eloquent: “I cried out because of my affliction to Yahweh, and He heard me; out of the very depths of Sheol I cried, and you have heard my voice. For you had cast me into the deep, in the midst of the sea; and the flood surrounded me, all your billows and waves passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am cast out of your sight, shall I again look upon your holy Temple?’ The waters surrounded me to my very soul, the depths closed in on me and weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains, the bars of the land closed on me as if for ever... yet, you have brought up my life from corruption, Oh Yahweh my Almighty One.”

As Jonah prayed, the frustrated Powers decided that they would do their own work. “Let us make an end to this,” they said in unison, and then faint sparks began to pass between the forms of the fallen angels. With a crack, the energy passed briefly into the physical plane, and the electrical surge of a lightning bolt sent many small fishes rising to the surface. The sparkling Ko’achim approached the fish, invisible to material eyes, and they prepared to discharge their power into the watery beast.

As each of the two angels simultaneously raised a hand to attack, they froze. Sauariel and the angels that had assisted the sailors appeared between the demons and Jonah’s fish, their hands resting on the handles and the sheathes of their swords. The Dominion leading the angels said, “We have not drawn our kherevs against you two in some time, Ko’achim. Do not force us into a conflict now.”

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered Yahweh,” continued Jonah’s prayer, clearly audible to the angels without, “and my prayer came to you, into your holy

Temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy, but I will sacrifice unto you with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that which I have vowed. Yahshua is of Yahweh.” Even as he ended his prayer, the prophet Jonah spoke the word which would one day be the name of the Son of IaH. When Jonah said, “Yahshua is of Yahweh,” he was saying that *Salvation belongs to Yah*, and this has been the battle cry of the holy angels ever since the day sin entered the universe.

“Heaven has heard this prayer,” Sauariel said to Kaspiel and Zaphkiel. “His repentance is genuine, and you have no place to stand before us. Depart, vile spirits... IaHWeH rebuke you both.”

“We shall not surrender our quarry so readily,” Zaphkiel said, and his partner added, “We shall not depart for long.” They did not offer any resistance, however, and the Powers cast off the energy they had gathered, and shot out of the water to speed off into the sky.



Although Heaven had regarded the prayer of its prodigal prophet, there were still consequences to endure. Jonah had traveled far out of the way, and there would be a slow and uncomfortable journey back to the place from which he fell off the path. For three days and nights, the great fish swam slowly back to the shoreline. Several miles south of the city of Tyre, Jonah’s watery transport approached the dry land, and the Voice of IaH commanded it to release the traveler. The animal beached itself, and then with a mighty convulsion it heaved the disoriented human out onto the shore.

Even as Jonah lay on the sand in a semi-conscious state, the voice of El Michael came to him on this second, much less favorable occasion, and said to him, “Arise, go unto Nineveh, and preach unto it the thing that I have bid you preach.” Kaspiel and Zaphkiel were conspicuously absent, yet their presence would have had no effect on the one who had been raised up out of the heart of the earth.

Jonah arose, and started with stumbling steps toward his destination, resolving neither to eat nor to drink until he had accomplished his task. Nineveh lay some days’ journey away, and the prophet himself had just been through a most debilitating experience, yet IaHWeH sustained him, and strengthened him both physically and spiritually; and in the service of his Master Jonah knew no want.

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” The voice of the messenger rang in the city of idolatry for three days. Jonah traveled from one end of the habitation to the other, crying out his message of warning to all with a loud cry. The prophet was filthy, and none cared to approach him too closely, yet there was a blessing in that; none moved to hinder his ministry. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” Jonah said again, and the Spirit of the Almighty fell upon his hearers, convincing them that the

Elohim of the Hebrews had sent this message unto them. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” Jonah repeated, and the people began to fear.

“What if this thing is true?” the people began to say to one another. “Perhaps we should flee the city,” some said. Others resolved to follow the prophet through the streets (at a respectable distance) to see if he would say anything else.

Two men stood watching Jonah, and the older said unto the younger, “I knew a Hebrew; he was a priest of Yahweh, their God. He spoke to me more than once about the mercy of the one he called the Creator. If we are resolved to take this warning seriously, perhaps we may turn to this God, and ask Him for pardon.”

From that household spread the instruction to repent of the idolatry that had been practiced in Nineveh for generations on end, and to turn to the Holy One of Israel. Normal clothing was put aside, and sackcloth was worn by both great and small. Even the animals were draped in these coverings of shame, and the people began to cast out their household idols. “There is no god like the Almighty One of the Hebrews,” the people said, for the Spirit and the angels worked mightily among the hearts of the people who heard the preaching of Jonah.

On the third day of his preaching, Jonah was rejoined by his tempters. The evil Ko’achim had returned with a vengeance, and they immediately set to work stinging Jonah with the doubts he had experienced even before he had set out from his home. By that time, however, even the ruler of Nineveh had heard of the prophet’s work, and had caused a decree to go forth that all of the citizens should do as those who had first heard Jonah’s message had done. The people fasted, and they prayed. Jonah was aware of the effect his ministry was having among the heathen populace, and that which was unselfish in him compelled him to complete the journey he had begun.

Unfortunately, there was much in Jonah that had not yet become unselfish. In spite of his sincere prayer in the belly of the great fish, and in spite of the mighty emotions he had experienced when watching the heathen sailors row to save his life, Jonah thought once more about his reputation, and he began to become angry at the mission on which he had been sent. Kaspil immediately saw the weakness in his spirit exposed by their constant insinuations and, drawing his dark blade, he struck at the prophet.

On the physical plane, Jonah had encountered the far gate of Nineveh, but upon arriving there he lowered his head in exhaustion and sighed in disgust. Having once more fallen under the shadow of the demonic duo, Jonah began to feel the weight of his journey. El Michael withdrew a little of His sustaining might from the human, giving only as much support as the prophet was able to accept, and the hunger and thirst, the weariness and displeasure he had gathered to himself over the course of the last few days began to affect him. Jonah could see all around him the visible signs of the people’s repentance, and leaning against the gate of Nineveh he said, “Oh, Yahweh... did I not predict this before I left my own land? This was the reason I fled to Tarshish, because I knew that you are

gracious, Elohim, and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and ready to turn quickly from bringing misfortune.”

“I have done what you have commanded me, but I know you will now turn your wrath away from the people of this city; therefore now, Oh Yah, I beg you... take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

The demons that had been plaguing Jonah stepped back, waiting for the wrath of Heaven to descend; yet the prophet had spoken in exhaustion of spirit, and because of great physical weariness, therefore IaHWeH had pity on him. El Michael spoke directly into the soul of Jonah; he would have one more chance to fully experience the love that IaHWeH felt toward every human. “Are you doing well to be angry? What cause do you have for anger?” Jonah did not reply, but instead he departed out of the gate and climbed a nearby hill to see what would happen, and if IaHWeH would indeed spare the citizens. With what strength he had left, the prophet built himself a crude shelter of branches and leaves, and sat within it to recover from his trying experiences.



The afternoon darkened to evening, and the evening descended into night. Jonah's tired eyes drooped, and he shifted his attention from the still, quiet city before him to the little creatures playing in the dust of the earth. Two tiny ants by his feet were worrying at a large worm. The worm appeared to have broken its skin somehow, and its attackers were trying to widen its wound in an

attempt to overcome their prey. Just before the prophet drifted off to sleep, he saw the injured animal burrowing its way into the loose soil, taking refuge from its tormentors in the cool darkness under the earth's surface.



When the prophet opened his eyes the next morning, he was unsure of where he was. At first he thought he was within his house, for he knew in his body that it was morning, but it was darker than it should have been. As he looked around a little, regaining his senses more fully, he decided that it was merely overcast. Jonah sat up, rubbing his head in the place where it had rested against a large stone, and looked up.

Above his head was a knot of leaves, waving gently in the wind and springing from a thick vine that had wound its way up the side of his booth. As Jonah took note of the sunshine beating down all around him, he silently gave thanks for the shade that had protected him... he would not have been very comfortable within the meager protection his crude shelter could have afforded.

Resting in the shade of the leaves, he turned his attention back to the city of Nineveh and continued his vigil, to see if the Almighty had repented of His judgment. “Will he indeed wait here for almost forty days?” Kuniel was skeptical that even Jonah could be that stubborn, but the prophet’s primary guardian was concerned for his life.

“He may have certainly made the attempt,” said Sauariel, “but El Michael has another thing in mind.” An invisible hand pointed invisible eyes to the root of the plant, on which the worm that Jonah had noticed the night before was chewing. Kuniel smiled, beginning to understand, and the two stepped through the void between earth and Heaven to be about their labors. For all that day Jonah sat, watching Nineveh and waiting to die in spite of the shady blessing he had been granted, and he did not seek food or drink.

On the following morning, Jonah awoke earlier than he had the day before. The sun was shining with full force into his face, and it did not take him long to perceive that his leafy benefactor had been taken away as suddenly as it had been given. Just as they had on the previous day, two pairs of eyes observed the prophet sitting from some distance away. As the sun rose still higher in the sky, Saurariel said, “It is time,” and the Dominion turned from Kuniel to the place where Jonah was sitting... and gently began to blow.

The forces of the earth again lent their influence to the messenger of Heaven, and a sirocco sprang up, a fiercely hot wind, attacking Jonah. Already weakened from hunger and thirst, and already sweltering from the vehement sunlight, the prophet’s eyes rolled back in his head, and he fell backward onto the ground. A few minutes later, as his mind swam slowly back to consciousness, Jonah muttered, “How I wish you would end this... it is better for me to die than to live.” Weariness, hunger, thirst, and now a pounding headache; the twins had done their job well, and Jonah saw each of these misfortunes as a personal curse from IaHWeH to him. Although he did not blaspheme the name of his Creator, he nevertheless clung to his injuries, and with his words he gnawed on the roots – but not the fruit – of the Tree of Life.

Kuniel and Sauariel had departed by the time Jonah regained consciousness, but One remained nearby, though like the other two He could not be seen by mortal eyes. El Michael, speaking on behalf of the Throne, said unto the prophet, “You had pity on the plant, for which you had not labored, which you did not make grow. It came up in a night, and perished in a night. Should I not then spare Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people that have been living in ignorance? And what of their cattle, worth more than even this helpful plant?”

Jonah knew the Voice. It was the Voice that had called him to this place, and the Voice that had spoken to him when he had climbed up to see whether or not Nineveh would fall. It was the Voice that had called his attention to the heathen rowers who had tried to save his life, and to the expressions of sorrow on the faces of those who had heard his message in the days before. Those were real people in those walls – they may not have been Hebrew, but they were precious in the sight of his Almighty.

Jonah prayed, and confessed his hardness of heart. He repented, and wept before the city he had been sent to save. He no longer had a thought for his reputation, or for his own ambitions. He had done what his Master had commanded him, and he was content. "Sovereign Lord," he said, "who saved me out of the waters of death, and who spares men in His loving kindness, look with pity upon me. Consider me, that I have come and done as you have said, and I have sought after your righteousness."

"Preserve me from the ants," he prayed, "for I am but a wounded worm. Spare me out of the abundance of your mercy, and send me forth to do your work in whatsoever land you may choose. Send me to any people, and nation, and country, only bring me back again, when my work is done, that I may worship at your holy Temple."

As he spoke those words, heartfelt and sincere, the presence of the Most High rested on the human. A spark of the Shekinah, the Mystery of Ages, filled the air around Jonah, and Kaspriel and Zaphkiel, who had been lingering nearby, were forced backward by the intensity of the fiery light. No mortal eye could see the events taking place, but would have detected only a mournful man upon his knees in the dirt... but there in submission, there was victory.

El Michael, still unseen, leaned forward and placed a kiss on the prophet's forehead. "Arise, Jonah," He said, "and go your way. I will have need of you again."

As the penitent mortal took down his booth and began to descend the hill to return to his dwelling place in the land of Israel, two pairs of evil eyes watched from the shadows. "This is not over yet, prophet," said one. "We shall not be cheated of the reward of our labors," said the other. In one voice they said, "There *is* no escape from the temptations of the flesh."

But Jonah was not alone, and even as the twin Powers drifted up into the air to follow the prophet on his journey home, One infinitely greater than all three of them was watching from on high.

End



The Legacy of Levi

I held the burning sword in front of my face to ward off the repeated blows of the aggressive demon. The Cherub Hiel, who would later be known to occultists as “Och The Alchemist” was swatting at me with two swords that he had formed from his own original weapon.

“There will be no judge in Israel,” he hissed at me, trying to force me backwards and into the ranks of my eleven allies. “The silver was cursed, and he made a conscious decision to steal it.”

“He has repented,” I replied, “and restored that which he has stolen.”

“But for what?” Och laughed at me. “Shall it not still be a molten image? His efforts have failed, and his methods are not sanctioned among those Elohim takes unto Himself. There will be no judge in Israel!”

As much as I hated to admit it, the wicked spirit had a point. Micah’s motive had originally been praiseworthy after a fashion, to prevent his mother’s idolatry, but he had stolen the silver nonetheless, and the demons were now claiming the right to bring a great trial upon the Ephraimite. For our part, we had not heard any divine instruction to let them take him, therefore we were doing our duty to hold them off until the matter was made more clear to us.

After Joshua divided the inheritance to the various tribes following the Exodus, the people had quickly fallen into idolatrous practices, and such darkness had spread over the land that we felt great pity for the ones we had sworn to protect. Much was allowed among the people of Israel in those days that would not be permitted at any other time, yet the twelve of us remained steadfast at our post.

“Captain,” one of my angels called out, occupied with an opponent of his own.

“Speak, Verchiel,” I said, not taking my eyes off the fallen Cherub before me.

“More demons are approaching us; shall we not ask for more aid?”

I glanced about and noted that Och had indeed summoned more of our fallen brethren to contend with us. His silent whisper had drawn a number of wicked spirits from their appointed places in the land given to Israel, and it was apparent that without explicit divine sanction the twelve of us would not be able to stand against them.

“Ask it,” I said in reply, diving under my enemy’s latest attack. The Cherub who faced me had modified his weapon once again, and now I was attempting to fend off a long spear that crackled with unnatural fire.

This was the demon, we had discovered, who first suggested to Revachiel and the other Principalities that their fiery swords could be altered according to the will of their controlling spirits. Although the basic *kherv* form was still the most popular, we had to defend ourselves at times from javelins, scythes, and more esoteric weapons – usually wielded by Och himself. He was certainly the most talented at the art of transformation.

As I pulled back to avoid a direct thrust, Och swung around backward, pulling his wings in tight against his body, and delivered a blow to me against which I had no way to defend. Where he had held a spear moments before, there now flashed toward me a ridiculously long and curved sword that would have been impossible to use effectively in the physical world. Because of the curvature of the blade, long and thin like a crescent moon, he slipped easily past my guard and sheared off a portion of one of my six wings.

I quickly folded it and its twin down over my chest, forming an extra layer of protection, and also maintaining the balance of my other wings.

Och attacked again, but this time I was ready. Although we Seraphim do not carry shields as do the other angels, we can make our wings as solid as the manifestation of faith in our brothers from the various other orders. My adversary got past my attempt to parry, but his blade struck harmlessly against my feathers. Taking advantage of his frustration I flew in close and unfolded the two wings I had previously pulled in, striking him away with them.

Taking advantage of the brief reprieve, I whispered a question to Verchiel, and he replied, “Adonai Uriel has instructed us to withdraw.”

“Very well,” I whispered back, and then I said aloud, “Withdraw!”

Without a word of protest, my eleven allies disentangled themselves from their enemies and flew toward me. When we were together, we each gave a mighty flap and soared upward into the sky. Ambriel, who was just to my right side, opened a passageway through the Void, and we soared into it, returning to the Heavenly Kingdom. As we departed I heard Och’s taunting words, “Turn and run, *Lion of El*, our business is not concluded yet!” I could hear the undisguised scorn in his voice as he pronounced my name, Ariel, drawing it out for dramatic effect.

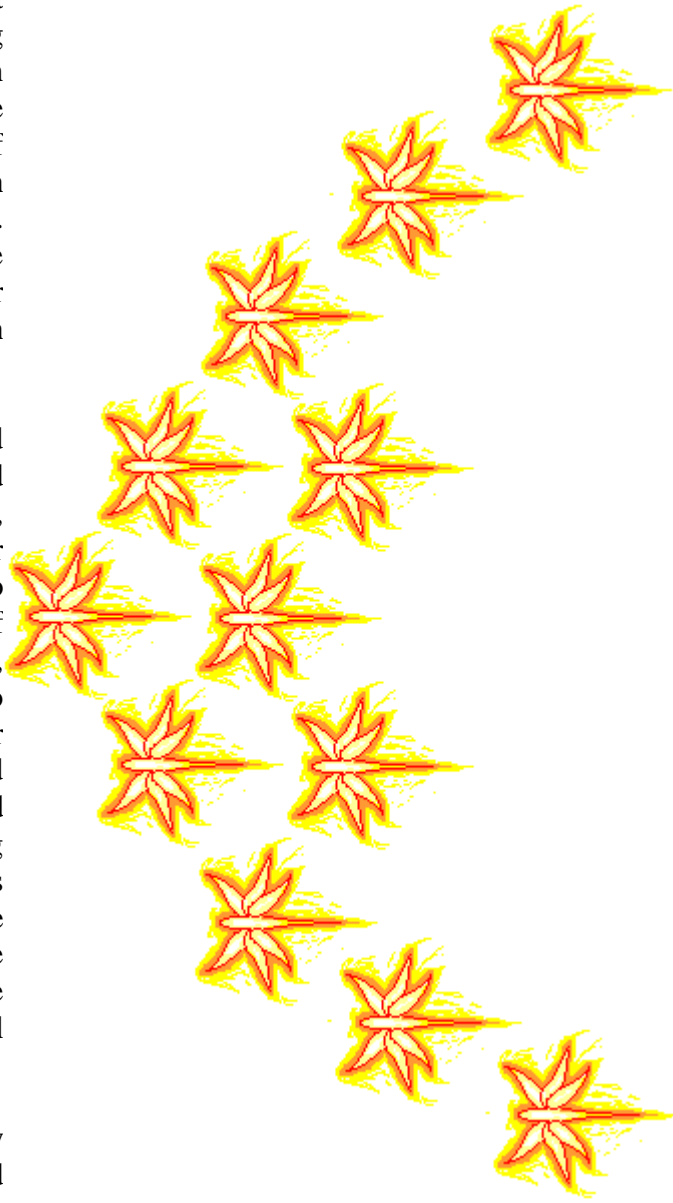


What an impressive sight we must have been. Twelve burning Seraphim appeared in the region over Heaven's plain, birds of fire sworn to protect the people of Elohim, flying in perfect formation toward the Temple of the Shekinah. Despite our visible glory, we were nevertheless feeling keen sorrow for the situation we had left behind on earth.

As we descended, the fire that trailed behind us coalesced into legs, and we landed and bowed before Uriel, who had been awaiting us. Our appearance in flight was unique to the Chalkydri, our small band of twelve that had been commissioned, ever since the time of Moses, to watch over Israel. Because of our origins, we were particularly hated by the demons residing in Egypt, and our reputation was slandered among the pagan priests. From the days before the Exodus until the Babylonian captivity, however, we "Fiery Serpents" maintained the borders of the nation from spiritual attacks.

As powerful as we were, our ability to be effective was determined largely by the condition of the people's faith. In dark times, such as that when we were standing against the forces of Och, we could do little more than watch and wait for a messenger to be raised up to revive the faith of the inconstant population. The hopes of my angels and myself had been centered on Micah, the man from Ephraim, who was certainly qualified by his wisdom and strength to judge the land. On the other hand, like Samson, the most famous of those who actually became judges, Micah's dim understanding of the faith of his fathers had led him into trouble.

Uriel said to me, "Ariel, arise," and I did so with my allies. He gave us the news that we expected, unfortunately, to hear. "With a prayer and an oath, which we are bound to honor, Micah's mother has asked for vengeance upon the one who had stolen her silver.



Though her intention for the metal is idolatrous, she nevertheless spoke (in such faith as she understood) the name of the Almighty, and her son's actions did indeed violate divine law. The demons shall be allowed to severely test one who would become a judge in Israel."

"She did bless her son when she realized who it was that had stolen her silver," Nakoniel said, "Does this not work against the oath?"

The Throne angel who had been placed as our commander turned to my fellow Seraph and said, "It does alleviate it somewhat; yet Micah's sin cannot be so easily set aside. He heard the oath with his own ears, yet remained in silence for days before confession was made. In the course of those days, his resistance to the promptings of the Spirit has made great wounds in his faith, and his accusers must therefore have their day."

"How, then, does her blessing help?" I asked.

"Conviction will be sent to him by means of another messenger," came the response. "You will have a task ahead of you to keep him safe, for he is no better or worse than any other man of Israel."



Micah did not resist the temptations that were brought to him by Och and his demons. His mother indeed had a graven image made from the silver, and used the remainder to cover over another idol. The Ephraimite allowed her to set them both up in his house, and from that day forward the wicked spirits saw to it that the family of Micah had great success in all their dealings. The hearts of the merchants were toward them, and they obtained fine goods at very low prices. The elements of nature did not trouble their harvest. Micah oversaw the marriages of a son and a daughter to influential Israelites. Disease did not come near his flocks, although they brought disaster to those of his neighbors.

"My son," his mother said to him, "you see the reward of honesty! Had you not returned to me my silver, would we have the images that now bring us such great pleasure in the land of Israel?"

My angels grimaced at these smoothly spoken statements; who could argue but that honesty was a praiseworthy virtue? But Penemuel, Och's right-hand-demon, was a transmuter in his own right: a magician with words. "Your blessing upon me has become manifest," Micah affirmed. "Yahweh and the gods of the land are indeed in harmony, therefore I will make a place of honor for your images, and obtain more from the merchants, one for each of the gods of the land."

Throughout this process my Chalkydri remained silent, and did not attempt to intervene. When Micah built his shrine to the various deities, we stood by without raising a protest. For two years, one before and one after the construction of the sinful sanctuary, we did little but observe. The scenes we witnessed distressed us, to see mother and son bowing before bits of metal and stone, therefore when the word came that the messenger was being prepared, we rejoiced.



Uriel had spoken truly; Jonathan was no better or worse than any other Israelite. Though a near descendant of Moses himself, and faithful in word and deed to IaHWeH, the Levite, whose family had also married into the tribe of Judah, cherished a number of moral flaws. He was restless of spirit, self-seeking in motive, and proud of his lineage.

Not content with the work he was given to do in Bethlehem, the young man left his home to wander the land, saying to those who asked him where he was going, “The Levites are to be teachers in Israel!”

At the command of Heaven, the twelve of us were sent to guide his footsteps although, as Uriel had warned us, it would not prove to be an easy task. We kept him from such temptations as we were permitted to, and over the course of several months we were able to provide him with several signs and experiences that led him to choose Ephraim as his destination.

As Jonathan neared the house of Micah Nakoniel, who was watching over him at the time, suggested to him that the day was drawing on, and he had best seek lodging soon.

Micah came out of his home at the call, and saw the young man standing there, weary from his journey, but standing tall in the evening’s fading light. “Peace be unto you and your home,” said Jonathan. “I am a traveling Levite, and I seek a place to tarry for the night.”

“Where are you from?” Micah asked him.

“I am from Bethlehem in Judah,” he replied, adding, “I am looking for a place in Israel, to be of service.”

“A Levite seeking employment,” Micah mused aloud. “I have need of your services here,” he said. “My son is currently consecrated as the priest of my household gods, but you know the Law, that one from the Tribe of Levi should serve as a proper priest. Be content therefore to remain with me, as a father and a priest of my home, and I will give you ten shekels of silver as an annual wage, along with your food and clothing.”

“Household gods,” the Levite said in surprise. “Have you idols in this home?”

“I know what Moses had said about such things,” Micah said, waving his hand dismissively, “yet we must see the consequences of our actions. From the day we set these images in place, Yahweh Himself has blessed our home! Behold the prosperity of this house, and in the day I will show you the harvest that even now awaits our pleasure.”

“You are a Levite,” he said, introducing an element of flattery. “You know these things; can it not be that Yahweh has made peace with the spirits of this land?”

With the setting of the sun, the weariness of his body, and the promise of steady work, the Levite needed little additional prompting from the demons that had followed him from Bethlehem. “Who is to say,” he replied to Micah, “that it cannot be so?”

“This is not what I expected,” I said, surprised at Nakoniel’s report. “I thought the Levite would have reproved him for the idols, despite his own shortcomings.”

“We have followed Uriel’s instructions,” Nakoniel reminded me. “The matter is not yet ended.”

“True enough,” I said, taking my turn at the watch.

It was not long before the entire city heard of Micah’s new Levite. Jonathan was treated as a son in the home, and he certainly got this wish – his name went out among those who lived nearby, and soon the shrine in which he worked became a place where travelers would stop by to seek his wisdom, and often to leave contributions as well. These things only served to confirm Micah in his idolatry, for he would say to his friends, “Now I know that Yahweh will do good things for me, because I have a Levite for my priest.”

“Ariel, Ariel,” Och would say whenever he saw me, “is not IaHWeH good to His servants?” I am sure he had similar words for each of my company that he encountered.



“In those days there was no king in Israel,” your record of these times states, and how apt an indictment of the land it is. IaHWeH was not King in the hearts of His people, and the alternative plan was not yet ready to be set in place. Everyone did as it best pleased him, and the history of those years is a monument to disobedience and lawlessness.



Under the guise of the Hebrew religion, the basest acts of paganism were sanctioned. The Chalkydri guardians had done great things for Israel in their journey through the wilderness; we had done wonderful works during the days of Joshua and the conquest of the land. We would again do great things when the prophets walked the earth, and our songs of

praise would rise above the noise of battle – but in the days of the judges our most common roles were those of mourners.

Because of disobedience and lawlessness, the Tribe of Dan had entirely failed to claim the part of the land that had been appointed to them under the administration of Joshua. As a result of its own faithlessness, the Canaanites had been permitted to win intermittent victories over the sons of Dan, and they had been driven up into a mountainous region that could not support the number of inhabitants adequately.

Although we would have gladly fought with them, winning their allotted region for them against even the greater forces of the heathen, the elders of Dan determined that they would find somewhere less occupied in which to settle, even if it meant taking it by force from those less powerful than themselves. How often fear of failure is failure's greatest friend.

Five men were sent from the city of Zorah to spy out a convenient and poorly guarded location that had the resources to support the Danites without the military power to resist them. As this was an internal matter, and did not involve either heathen armies or the guardianship of a potential judge, other angels than mine were sent to keep track of their movements. The Cherub Mageniel, a protector of forbidden things, was instructed to travel with the five spies, and when the course of the travelers led them near to the house of Micah, he sent a whisper to us, letting us know of their approach.

“Cause these men to turn in at the home of your charge,” Uriel instructed us. With little effort, we drove off the demons that were with the five men and, with Mageniel's help, we convinced them to seek a place for the night in Micah's home.

During the course of their stay, two of the men heard the sounds coming from Micah's shrine, and went in to see what the building was. “You are a Levite,” one of the men said to Jonathan when he had finished officiating before the images.

“That I am,” the priest replied with obvious pleasure. “One of the very few in these regions.”

“And how did you come to be here?” the other asked him. “What are you doing in Ephraim?”

Jonathan gave them a brief history of his journey from Bethlehem, and concluded with, “That was how my arrangement came about with Micah; he has hired me, and so I am his priest.” Certainly, if the Levite made no comment about the foreign gods in the shrine, the self-serving men of Dan were not about to bring it up.

They asked instead, “Seek council of the Almighty for us, that we may know if the manner of our mission will lead to success.” Jonathan did not ask them what their mission was; indeed, he felt it would seem much more “sacred” if, like the priests of the alien spirits round about, he merely pronounced a judgment on the matter.

The Levite closed his eyes for a moment, appearing to be in deep thought or prayer. The Seraph on my left glanced at me through his streaming hair, a questioning look in his eye. I only shook my head and said nothing – this performance was all for show.

“Go in peace,” the Levite intoned. “Yahweh has favored your mission, and it will meet with success.” The two men bowed and departed. As they left the shrine, one said to the other, “How fortunate that we found a priest here who can speak in the name of Yahweh!” My angels visibly winced.

In a manner of speaking, Jonathan gave them a true report. Within a valley by the region of Beth-Rehob, the men of Dan found a large settlement called Laish. It was situated near fresh waters, and the land obviously had good soil, to judge by the vegetation around it and the healthy appearance of its residents. The people who lived there spoke Aramaic, but when the spies dwelt among them for a short time, they discovered that the Laishans had little knowledge of the other Aramaic-speaking people around them.

They appeared to be entirely self-sufficient, trading little and fighting not at all with the surrounding areas. They were clearly a peaceful people, having no warriors or even judges to enforce order by means of punishment, and the spies shrewdly noticed that their nearest neighbor, Sidon, was too far away to come to their aid in cases of emergency.

The scouts returned to their point of origin, where they were questioned by the elders regarding what they had discovered. “Arise, and let us go up to Laish,” the spies said to them. “We have seen the land, and it is very good. Come, the people cannot stand against us; let us go quickly that we may possess it.”

Another, recalling the words of Jonathan, said, “When our warriors go, they will find a people living in peace and security, and the land is large and bountiful. The Almighty Himself has given it to us – and it will be a haven for our Tribe in which we will not want for anything on earth!”

When Dan’s six hundred warriors went out toward Laish, we were instructed to do nothing as the five spies led them first toward the house of Micah in Ephraim. “This is as it was ordained,” Uriel said to us. We knew what they were planning to do, and it dawned on me what Heaven’s plan had been for this unusual turn of events.

“This will be interesting,” I said to my eleven angels.

Micah greeted the five scouts before his house, casting a wary eye at the small army of men standing behind them. “Peace be unto you men of Dan,” he said cautiously.

“And peace to you and your home,” one of the spies replied. “We are passing by on business, to complete the work at which we were appointed when first we met.”

“Well,” said Micah, “But I hope you are not seeking lodging for so many here tonight!”

The spy laughed, not unpleasantly, and said in a casual manner, “We were blessed by your images and the word of Yahweh at our stay in your home. We have need of such blessings in the place to which we go.”

“What?” Micah said angrily, understanding their intentions. “Is this how you repay the kindness of a fellow Israelite?”

“Return to your affairs, good sir,” the spy replied. “It is better for you to be left without idols in your house, than without a house for your idols.”

The Ephraimite had little choice. He turned without a word and went indoors.

Jonathan had been in the shrine, and he heard nothing of the exchange between Micah and the spy. He was quite surprised, therefore, when his work was interrupted by several armed warriors, as they strode into the little building and began to cart off the various figures, along with the ephod that Micah had obtained. “What are you doing?” he demanded.

When he received no reply, he followed the men out... and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw that there were many others outside, as fierce as the few who had stolen his master’s gods. “What are you men doing?” he asked again.

One of the two spies who had spoken to him on their previous visit to mount Ephraim said to him, “Hold your peace, and do not say anything. Come with us! Be our father and priest, as you have been here in the house of Micah. We will pay you as well, and consider which is better! Are you content to be the priest of a single house, or would you not find greater satisfaction as the priest of an entire Tribe of Israel?”

Jonathan’s anger vanished like smoke. “What blessing is this?” he asked in wonder. “Little did I imagine, when I left Bethlehem, that Yahweh would have such a task for me! What a turn of events! Who is your servant, to pass this opportunity by?”

The spies smiled at their new priest, and he joined their company, leaving without saying a word to Micah. As they departed from the house one of the spies said to the captain of the six hundred, “The Levite brought this man much fortune in Ephraim. I do not believe he will let us depart without incident, and he must surely have many friends. Come, let us put our wives, and children, and cattle before us, leaving our warriors in the rear to deal with anything unpleasant that may come.” The captain agreed.



The spy was not wrong in his assessment of the matter. Soon Micah had indeed gathered many of his fellow Ephraimites, a people not known for their patience, and often jealous of the victories of the other Israelite Tribes, and they pursued the men of Dan.

When they got near, Micah cried out to the army before him, “Turn and speak with me!”

The spy that had given the advice about the march, and the captain of the host, were at the rearmost position, and they turned with those nearby to see Micah and his allies. “What has provoked you,” the captain said, “to come out against us with such a company?”

Micah flared at the pretended ignorance and said, “You have taken away the gods I have made, and my priest, leaving me with nothing, and you ask ‘*What has provoked you?*’”

“Lower your voice,” the captain said, pointing at the Ephraimite. “Be careful, or those of us who are angry men will attack you, and you will lose your life, and that of your family.” With that, to Micah’s fury, the warriors turned and continued walking. The Levite was too far ahead in the crowd to be seen, and the spy gave Micah one brief glance before he also rejoined his fellow Tribesmen.

One of the men of Ephraim that was standing there made ready to go after them, but Micah put a hand on his shoulder. “No, let them go. They are too many for us to overcome them...” With much muttering and seething bitterness, the men of the region returned to their homes.

“Shall not conviction come?” I asked myself. “He has said with his lips that these were gods which he made. Will he not turn now toward the One who made him?”

Alas, the land in those days was too evil for lasting success, although Heaven extended every opportunity toward languishing humanity. Even the testimony of Jonathan, who had perverted the legacy of Levi, could not awaken conscience enough to overcome Micah’s love for worldly success, and the raging anger he now felt at the priest and those who had induced him away.

“He was as a son to me,” the human fumed, when sleep was kept from him at night. “How he has burned me with his ingratitude, his arrogance, his... his lies!”

“The idols he served were no gods at all,” I whispered to Micah, attempting to steer his feverish thoughts in the right direction. “Behold the effects of worshipping that which is not IaHWeH.”

Micah would have none of that, though. “They have *stolen* my gods! They have stolen *my* gods!” His thoughts were clear to me... his only fixation was that he had been wronged, and that one whom he had trusted had dared to wrong him, even him. It would have been better had his thoughts been, “they have stolen my *gods!*” A god that can be

stolen is not worthy of worship, but Micah would not release his illusions, and with a heavy heart I felt the walls of darkness closing in around him.

I turned to my angels with tearful eyes and I repeated the words that had been said to me in battle many days earlier, “There will be no judge in Israel.” I looked down at my charge one last time and said, “At least, not from the house of Micah.”

I opened my six wings and, with my fellow Chalkydri, flapped up into the air as my legs vanished in a long stream of spiritual fire.



“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith Adonai IaHWeH.” So say your records of another evil time, but so it was in the settlement of Laish. The men of that valley were strangers from the covenant of the Almighty, but the cup of their iniquity was not full. Indeed, some of the individual citizens were more righteous than the marauding Tribe of Dan.

We were not to stop the destruction, or to prevent Dan from doing what it willed, but there were certain men who had work yet to do under the supervision of the angels sent among the Gentiles. The Chalkydri were sent to ensure that these individuals escaped the edge of the sword. I had a strong feeling that I would meet there an old acquaintance.

I was not disappointed. As we approached I saw Och and his demons presiding over the Danites’ attack. “Ariel,” he said to me, “have you come to witness what Micah would have prevented?”

“We have come to defend the innocent and helpless,” I replied. “The will of IaHWeH will be accomplished also among the heathen.”

The demon drew his sword and, with a bitter laugh he tore it in two, forming a pair of sharp, curved blades that flickered with dark fire. “We will prevent it,” he said.



They certainly tried. Below us we could see the demons taking physical form and, whenever one of the townspeople would attempt to escape from the burning buildings or the attacks of the armies, the spirit would raise a cry of alarm, bringing the soldiers and their swords.

“What butchery,” I cried, and swooped down to prevent one such incident from occurring. As I descended I shouted to my angels, “Ambriel, Yadiel, clear the southern exit. Nakoniel, take Verchiel and two others and go west. The rest of you, come with me!”

As I landed at the eastern gate, I found Mageniel in physical form, struggling against two of Och's most powerful allies. The Cherub had drawn together a powerfully built body from the dust of the earth, but we could see that the demons' material bodies were not less capable. Mageniel glanced over at us and said, "Make sure the refugee escapes!"

We saw an old man huddled by the side of a building with some younger people, probably his family. By Mageniel's words we realized that this was one of the individuals marked by Heaven. Two of my Seraphim took on the appearance of travelers and said to them in Aramaic, "Come with us... quickly!"

The two demons, by this time, had backed the Cherub into a corner, and both were pushing against him. Apparently they had all three lost their weapons, and now they were fighting hand-to-hand. Mageniel planted his feet and leaned forward, trying desperately to keep them from following my Seraphim and their charges. The effort proved too much, however, and I could see the angel's arms buckling under the impossible pressure being exerted on them.

With a loud groan, Mageniel dissolved his physical body. Wings burst from his back as he regained his spiritual form, and one of the demons hurtled past him, with the resistance suddenly gone. The body of the demon was suddenly thrown up into the air and against a wall, followed quickly by the other; any passer-by would have seen only the "humans" being tossed about by invisible means, but the angels saw a furious Cherub casting his enemies about.

Realizing their task had failed, Och's servants returned to their spiritual state, only to be cut down by the six of us.

"Oh, no," Mageniel said, pointing beyond the gate.

Standing over the bodies of the old man and his people was Och himself. He had dispatched both my Seraphim with his potent blades, and then brought his being into the physical realm. He had subsequently slain the Laishites with his own hands, using his unique skills to break their flesh apart. "These will not escape," he said, looking directly at us.

The evil Cherub flew up into the air, his wings restored to him as he reverted to his original form, and he dove forward, suddenly joined by several other demons.

Mageniel and the rest of us were immediately plunged into combat. Och had eyes only for me, and soon my wings were guarding against his evil blades.

Evading one of his swipes I spun backward in the air, trailing my fire at him. When I faced him again, I found that he had transformed one of his kherev's halves into a shield, mimicking the tools of faith borne by most of the holy angels. Having used it to turn my

fire aside, he threw the shield at me, changing it again into a whirling blade as it sped toward me.

I avoided the attack easily but his other blade suddenly swelled and expanded, becoming a larger, longer weapon. Och was eager to try his best tricks on me, it seemed, and was utilizing one element of his arsenal after the other.

I held my own against him, until he came up with something that caught me completely by surprise. With a flick of his wrist, the crafty demon threw his blade at me and, just before it reached my waiting defense, it split apart and wove itself into a net. It has often been said that demons are not particularly creative, but Och was quite comfortable imitating the weapons and tools of humanity with his abilities. I was pulled toward the ground by a combination of the weighted net and the uselessness of my tangled wings.

The fire of my khrev sparkled and spat against the energy rippling through the net, but I knew that by the time I was free the Cherub would have long been able to follow through with his attack.

“Chalkydri should stick to their borders,” Och said to me, “and not try to compensate for the mistakes of your failed heroes.”

Mageniel came to my aid, however, having defeated the demons that had approached him. The holy Cherub stood between us long enough for me to cut myself free. As I split the last of the net’s cords, the entire construct vanished, returning to Och’s hand as a blade once again.

Together, the Cherub and I attacked the demon and, although he had succeeded in defeating four of my angels, he was not able to stand for long against Mageniel and myself. The evil angel’s weapons went through several more transformations during the course of our fight, but in the end my ally succeeded in slashing one of his arms, and I followed it up immediately with a cut across his side.

Screaming curses, Och spiraled toward the ground, falling both literally from the air and into unconsciousness.



“Because of the death of that man,” Mageniel told us when my Seraphim were restored and regrouped, “an entire nation may be lost.”

“The demons knew they were not supposed to slay humans in this age,” I said, looking down at the slowly recovering body of the Cherub I had defeated. “What shall be done with this one? He has broken the Agreement.”

“His forces are scattered,” the holy angel said to me, “but his influence will have a lasting impact in the land of Israel, and beyond. As for the demon himself, I have been commissioned to bind him at the Euphrates until the time of the end.”

“The time of the end?” I asked in wonder. “Who knows when that will be?”

“Not I,” replied the divine Cherub. “I know this, though, it will not be soon, and Och’s fury will be great when he realizes that Heaven has declared him reserved for judgment.”

“And in the time of the end, what will happen then?” Nakoniel asked.

“He will be loosed for a time, along with the other spirits that will be placed under *charam* at the Euphrates before those days,” Mageniel replied, using the word for devoted, banned, or destroyed. “When a nation rises up that he has been appointed to influence, then will his power be felt in the world again.”

My Seraphim bowed as the messenger flew off, bearing the dark burden with him. We turned to look at Laish, which would shortly be renamed Dan, being occupied by the faithless tribe. I sighed deeply and said to my fellows, “The purposes of Heaven will always be fulfilled, ultimately, but behold how our might is bound by the decisions of men.”

As we streaked up into the air, I heard a whispered laughter in my mind. I knew the spirit who addressed me, and I said, “Penemuel, your master is defeated. Depart from this land, lest you suffer a similar fate.”

“Och was clever, and useful,” the hidden demon replied to me, speaking words that led me to question my assessment as to which of the two was really the master, “but his purpose was completed. Another will rise in his name, perhaps *bearing* his name; Prince Lucifer will see to that... there will always be demons teaching sorcery. There will always be spirits showing men how to pervert the forces of nature, and leading them to bow before the things their hands have made.”

“There will always be faithful men,” I responded, as we passed through the Void to Heaven, “who are true to their calling. There will always be men who will call on our aid, and who will stand in stark contrast to those like Micah and Jonathan, who leave behind them a legacy unworthy of the Sacrifice to come.”

If Penemuel made a reply I did not hear it, for his whisper was drowned out by the singing of my angels as the golden towers of our home came into view once again. There was some sadness in our voices for the things we had just witnessed, but Och had been bound, and many of the refugees had indeed escaped to bless the world with their presence. In the sound of our singing, therefore, there was also faith, and hope, and love. No matter what dark scenes we beheld upon the earth, these three remained.

End

Grafted In

The angel drifted up into the evening sky, moving slowly (for an angel) toward Heaven. As he flew, a trail of tears sparkled behind him, golden droplets of light that dissipated after a few moments of hanging motionlessly over the world.

Upon his arrival within the Kingdom, he was met by two of his fellow messengers, who immediately noticed his condition. “Turn aside with us,” one of them said, “and tell us what you have seen on the earth.”

As they settled upon the plain of Heaven, he who had just returned to the spiritual Kingdom began, “These are not tears of sorrow, my brethren. No, rather, they are tears of joy, for how wonderful it is to see the glory of the Almighty unfolded in the lives of those who dwell upon the earth! Consider this, my account, and see what cause there is for my happiness.”



The Virtue Vetachiel looked on in wonder at the scene he was beholding. Standing at the crossroads were two women where once had stood three. The older woman was speaking, and she said, “See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people, and to her gods. Go; follow her.”

The younger, through her tears, gave a short speech in reply. “Do not keep telling me to leave you, to turn back and cease from following! Where you go, I will go. Where you dwell, there will I dwell also. Your people will be my people and... your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die and be buried. May Yahweh visit me with great severity if anything but death should part us!”

There were many things Naomi could have said in response. She could have reasoned further with her, as she had with her other daughter-in-law, that she would have little to look forward to following her. Naomi was too old to have any other sons, thus a Levirate marriage was not something Ruth would be able to anticipate – even if she did have the patience to wait. Naomi’s husband was dead, as were her two sons, and she had no way of knowing what her life would be like upon her return to Israel. She had family with whom she could lodge, but they were relatively poor. Ruth would have to find some way to provide food, possibly for both of them, and bring it back to a household empty of children.

Naomi had never taken any particular interest in the spiritual development of her family. As far as she had been concerned, that was her husband Elimelech’s concern, and she did

not object when Chilion had taken Orpah to wife, or Mahlon had brought Ruth to their home. She had been somewhat surprised that her husband did not make any comment, but she was content to let things lie as they were. If Elimelech didn't vocalize any concerns, why should she shake things up?

Mahlon, the older son, had taken a greater interest in the writings of her people than his brother. He would speak with travelers from Israel about the state of affairs there, and was especially happy when he met one coming with news of the Shophetim, the Judges who protected and guided Israel in the days before Saul was anointed king. Although famine had led their family to flee to Moab, they were always speaking of returning some day, when the harvests would bring forth their bounty once again. The love of Israel displayed by Ruth's husband had evidently rubbed off on her, and she was choosing, even with her words that day, the service of IaHWeH over the demon Chemosh that held sway over her homeland.

All these things passed through Naomi's mind as she considered her faithful daughter-in-law. She saw the determination in her eyes as she invoked the name of the Creator, and the older woman felt she had no right to argue with that promise. "Very well, my daughter," Naomi said with a sigh, "but it is a bitter lot you have chosen for yourself. Come, let us be going."



"What of the demons?" one angel asked, his face lit up with pleasure at the report thus far.

"My sword was still," Vetachiel replied, speaking slowly for emphasis. "Chemosh was not there, but many of his court whom I recognized overheard all this. Indeed, they drew a little closer, but it was as if the Shekinah Itself rested over the women, and the dark spirits could neither approach nor intervene. I was merely a witness!"

"As Joseph in Egypt," the other listening angel mused, recalling one of the many incidents in which the messengers of Heaven were protected from the deadly influences that surrounded them. "But go on," he urged, "what happened next?"



Chemosh had not been there when Naomi and Ruth departed from Moab, but he was not idle either. The loss of one Moabite meant nothing to him of itself. To be sure, he occasionally had his people sacrifice one of their number to him – this was an effective way to both mock the promise of the Sacrifice to come and to keep the inhabitants of his country submissive to his will. What he could not abide was the idea that one of his

servants had chosen Israel, and all that it represented, over the pleasures of conquest and war. This would not do at all.

His demons had reported to him of the incident at the crossroads, and with demonic efficiency had delivered a word-for-word account of the women's conversation. "It is a *bitter lot* you have chosen for yourself," the fallen angel repeated, considering Naomi's thoughts carefully. "What weapons they give us with their words," he said, and then he sent a silent whisper out to gather a few choice fiends.



By the time the two women drew near to Bethlehem of Judah, Naomi's spirits had sunk low indeed. Anxiety, hopelessness, and bitterness attended her every thought. When her husband died she mourned, but accepted it as the will of the Almighty. When her two sons followed in rapid succession, she was cut to the heart, and did not know how she would cope with the loss... but her daughters-in-law, particularly Ruth, had been as a medicine to her flagging faith.

Ruth, a girl from Moab, had reminded her that IaHWeH was the Almighty, and that He would protect them. "How Mahlon's faith has been rewarded," Naomi thought to herself silently, even as she wept. Secretly, she had been well pleased that Ruth had chosen to remain with her (and almost happy that Orpah had gone back to her countrymen), but her love for the girl, and her confidence at the crossroads, were almost forgotten as she considered the future with despair.



Her companion had tried to keep her mind on pleasant things, but the demonic Cherub Chemosh was no fool. He may have been a warmonger, and a demon of the House of Wrath under Azrael, but he knew when subtlety was required. Anger was useful, in its right setting, but bitterness was a far more deadly, if slower, poison. He had drawn expert help from his allies in the other demonic Houses, and set them on the woman like hounds upon a rabbit.

Nearing the houses that brought back a flood of old memories, Naomi was greeted with familiar and joyful voices, "Can this be Naomi?" "Where is her husband, and where are her sons?" "Who is the young woman with her?"

When her friends and acquaintances had gathered, the older woman spoke from an aching heart, "Daughters of the land, do not call me Naomi – for there is little pleasant that remains of me. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has made my lot most bitter." The women who had come together to meet their returning friend exchanged concerned glances, but they moved forward as one to comfort her and lead her to a comfortable seat.

“I departed from you full,” she was saying, “but Yahweh has brought me back empty. No, how can you call me Naomi, when Yahweh has dealt with me harshly, when the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me?” Ruth followed behind, bringing their travel supplies. She was ignored by the women, who had eyes and ears only for Naomi; but she was glad that she was not presently the subject of their attention.

After a few days things settled a bit. Naomi and Ruth were staying with one of the older woman’s relatives, and in their sympathy they were happy to share what little they had with their loved one and the girl that had remained faithfully beside her. Despite her new outlook, Naomi had not neglected to praise her daughter-in-law in the presence of her family. She acknowledged that she would have scarcely been able to make the journey home, and less to deal with so great a loss as she now bore, had it not been for the “blessed maiden” IaHWeH had provided her.

“What a blessing that Elimelech passed into Sheol first,” she would say at times, “that he should be spared the grief I am left behind to carry.” On other occasions, she would mutter about his leaving her alone to witness their sons’ untimely deaths.

One thing that the demons had been unable to do, however, was to alienate Ruth’s affections from her mother-in-law. She would not be returning to Moab, and in fact was finding great contentment in her attempts to calm the older woman’s state of mind. She was not always successful at this, but she believed, and rightly so, that it was the will of the Almighty that she remain with her as a comfort.



There were many vital incidents occurring on the earth in those days, particularly in the land of Canaan, so all of this was coming as news to the two angels listening to Vetachiel’s story. Their attention had been on other regions. What he had said so far, however, certainly captured their interest. “So Chemosh’s demons were trying to cause problems between Ruth and Naomi... but why? Was it merely for pride’s sake?”

“That was a part of it,” Vetachiel said, “but – according to the oracles – Lucifer sanctioned his mission because of a larger concern. You know that there was an incident at the fall of Jericho not long ago, in which the foreigner Rahab was brought into covenant with IaHWeH, and her family united with the people of Israel.”

“Ah, yes,” said one of his attentive companions. “I was present at the fall of that city, and I saw the woman you have mentioned.”

“The demons are concerned now, as they were then, that the worship of IaHWeH will be successfully spread to the other nations. If Ruth can be taken in by this people, it will work powerfully against the spirit of separatism that some of Satan’s most powerful agents have been trying to foster. They have an advantage in this, as the Hebrew have

been told to keep their worship free from outside influences; and of course their warfare against the heathen round about has led them to a hostility that is easily perverted into an unhealthy kind of pride.”

The other angels indicated their agreement with what Vetachiel had said, and then he continued. “But now, what happens next involves that very Rahab; at least, one of her descendants.”

“How so?” one of the angels asked.



It was the time of the barley harvest, and only the second decent crop after nearly ten years of agricultural misfortune. Israel was celebrating the return of IaHWeH’s blessing upon the land, therefore many landowners, ordinarily too concerned with business matters to oversee their laborers, were personally attending the work in their fields. Boaz, of the family of Elimelech, was no exception.

“Yahweh be with you!” he said in his deep, pleasant voice to the men who were gathering up the life sustaining growths.

“Yahweh bless you!” came the reply. Every day Boaz walked one of his fields, and stopped to laugh, converse or speculate on the size of the harvest with his laborers. The men, far from feeling watched or distracted by their master’s presence, looked forward to his approach; and work always seemed to go more smoothly when he was around.

As he moved closer to his men and began to speak with them, a passer-by watched, unseen, and then went on unnoticed.

“My mother,” Ruth said as she returned to the house, “is it not written in the Law of Moses that the poor may glean the fields of the wealthy for the crops that are not collected by the reapers?”

“It is,” Naomi said.

“Who is more poor than we are,” Ruth asked with a smile, “and who more wealthy than the man who owns many parts of the field that I have passed today? Let me now go to the field, and glean grain behind one who may show me kindness.”

Naomi thought for a moment, but not for much longer, for she realized that here was an easy solution to the problem of food. Why had she not considered this before? “Go, daughter,” she said.

The next day, Boaz again walked along one of the fields that he owned. “Yahweh be with you!” he said in his deep, pleasant voice to the men who were gathering up the life sustaining growths.

“Yahweh bless you!” came the reply.

As he approached his men, he noticed Ruth gathering up sheaves behind the laborers, and he asked the foreman of the reapers, “Whose girl is that?” In those days, a girl was identified primarily by means of her father, her husband, or her employer.

The foreman answered, “She is a Moabitess, and she came out of Moab with Naomi your kinswoman. She asked me for permission to gather among the sheaves after the reapers passed by, and she has been here since her arrival this morning, working constantly, but for a small break in the shade of the hut.”

“I have heard of Naomi’s return,” Boaz said, “and also a little of this, her companion. Good things are said about her, and that she has adopted the worship of Yahweh.”

Ruth had been too far away to hear this exchange, but Boaz raised his arm and his voice, and said, “My daughter!” She hurried over and, with her eyes lowered she said, “My lord?”

“Listen to me, do not go to glean in any other field, but stay here with my maidens. Keep your eyes on the fields they attend, and follow them. I have ordered my men not to bother you, and when you are thirsty, you are welcome to the jars of water that the young men have drawn.”

Ruth knelt and then lay her face on the ground in a sign of deep respect, and said, “How is it that you are so kind to me, since I am from another people?”

Boaz replied, “It has been told to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and that you left your father and mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people whom you had not known. May Yahweh reward your actions, and may you have a full compensation from Yahweh, the Almighty of Israel, under whose wings you have come to trust.”

“You have shown me much favor, my lord,” Ruth replied happily, “and spoken comfort to your maidservant, though I am not one of the girls in your service.” When he turned away to continue speaking with his servants, Ruth rose up and returned to her labors.

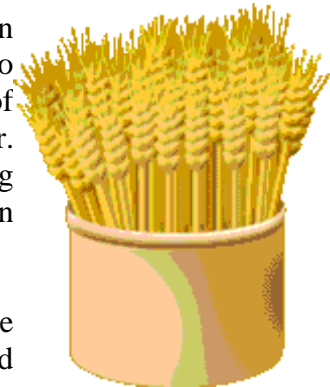
Boaz was not finished yet, however, and was in the mood to be generous. When it was mealtime, he ate with his men. Seeing Ruth still working in the field he called her over and said, “Come over to this place, and join in the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar.”

The demons that were nearby were furious. Not only was Ruth finding contentment with Naomi, she was being praised in Israel by all who had encountered her! Moreover, she was finding favor with the wealthy and influential, but none of the spirits that watched from the shadows were able to turn her mind aside to any evil. Temptations were swallowed up in thoughts of praise. Angry impulses at the looks she got at times due to her Moabite nationality did not last long in the calm, quiet stream of her thoughts. The angels who stood at their guard needed not lift a finger in her direct defense, but remained ever by her should the increasingly frustrated spirits think to set some violent course of action in motion.

When she got up and went back to work, Boaz said to the men who remained with him, “Let her glean among the sheaves; but moreover, let some of the best from that which you have gathered fall behind so she may gather them, and do not rebuke her for collecting them.” The men cast little smiles at each other, but went back to their work without further comment – at least, not in the presence of their master.

At evening, after she had beaten out much of the chaff from what she had collected, Ruth had about five gallons of Israel’s best wheat with her. She returned to the city, to the house she shared with Naomi, and arrived, exhausted but joyful, at the result of her day’s labors.

“Where have you been gathering wheat?” Naomi asked in wonder, after seeing the amount that Ruth had been able to obtain. In addition, Ruth gave to her mother-in-law a portion of the meal from earlier in the day that she had saved over. “Blessed is the man that took notice of you,” she said, knowing that it was unlikely such a large harvest could have been gathered without help from the servants.



Ruth described the location of the field to Naomi as best she could, and then said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.”

“Boaz!” Naomi exclaimed. “Blessed is he of Yahweh, for he has not neglected to show kindness to the living or the dead!” When she saw the confused look on Ruth’s face, she explained, “The man is a relative of ours through Elimelech’s family, a near kinsman.”

“Aha,” said Ruth, “he seemed concerned that I come to no harm, and seemed to know who I was. He even told me, ‘Stay close to my workers until all my harvest is ended.’” She laughed, for she had tried to imitate his deep voice.

“That is good, daughter,” Naomi said, a sparkle in her eyes. “Go out with his maidens, and don’t let them find in you another field!” Ruth did just that, and by the end of the harvest season had gathered enough to last them for many days.



“Naomi’s mood seems to have been lifted by the kindness shown to her daughter-in-law by Boaz,” one of the angels said.

“That,” Vetachiel said, “is only the beginning.”



On the last day of the harvest, when Ruth had returned from the field for what she thought was the last time, Naomi called to her and said, “My daughter, I know the promise you made to me in Moab, before we came over here to Bethlehem, but... I feel it is my duty to seek a proper home for you, and place of rest where you will be happy.”

“I am happy here, with you,” Ruth said, but Naomi waved her comments off, continuing as if she had not spoken.

“Now, there is Boaz, of our kinsman, whose serving girls you were with. Tonight, the last of the harvest, he will be there all night starting the winnowing time.” She paused for a moment and then said, looking her daughter-in-law over, “Bathe and anoint yourself; put on your good clothing, and go down to the threshing floor. But, do not let anyone see you, and do not disclose yourself to Boaz until his servants have left, and the meal is finished, and he has let himself down to sleep.”

Ruth’s eyebrows furrowed, but her mother-in-law continued, “Pay attention to where he lies down, then go over and uncover his feet, and lie down under the mantle there. When he sees you, he will tell you what you are to do.”

“A bold move,” an angel said to Vetachiel, who was standing there.

“Ordained by Heaven,” the Virtue replied, indicating the divine messenger who had been working with Naomi. The angel he had pointed out nodded to them in agreement. “And besides, they have gotten to speak a few more times over the course of the harvesting.”

Ruth was thoughtful about what she had heard. Her reply did not come quickly, but when it did, she said, “All that you’ve said to me, I will do.”

A few hours later, Boaz woke up with a start. The chill that had swept over his legs and the sounds he thought he had heard combined to make him fearful that a robber had snuck into his presence with evil intentions in mind.

He looked down and saw that a woman was lying at his feet.

His fear vanished, but it was replaced by a burning curiosity, and a hint of suspicion of another kind.

“Who are you?” he asked, when he saw the girl raising her head in the dim light.

“I am Ruth, your handmaid,” came the reply, and then an awkward pause, and then other words. “Spread your covering over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman...”

Boaz recovered from his shock surprisingly quickly. “Be blessed of Yahweh, daughter,” he said, “for you have shown more kindness in this last thing than at the beginning, seeing that you have not followed young men, neither the poor nor the rich.”

“I, my lord?” Ruth asked in genuine confusion. “What kindness can I have shown to you?”

Boaz laughed and sat up, saying, “Now, fear not, my daughter. I will do for you all that you require; for all those that sit in the gate of my city know that you are a virtuous woman...” He appeared lost in thought for a moment, and then continued, “But now; it is true that I am a near kinsman of yours, yet there is one nearer than I. Rest here tonight, and in the morning, if he will do the kinsman’s duty, that will be well.”

“But,” Boaz said, “if he will not fill the role of kinsman redeemer, then I will – as Yahweh lives, I will! Now, lie down till morning.”

Ruth had been looking at Boaz with a mixture of emotions, but as he concluded she lowered her head and stared upward. She lay there, trying to get to sleep, but the minutes passed, and then what felt like an hour, and still her eyes were open. Finally, she said in a soft voice, “My lord?”

Immediately the answer came, “What is it, Ruth?” Apparently Boaz was not able to find his way back to slumber either. Significantly, he had used her name, instead of his usual, “my daughter.”

She raised her head again and said, “Many in Bethlehem have come to treat me well, for they know I have forsaken my gods, and taken up the covenant of Yahweh. Yet, because I am a Moabite, this was not an easy friendship for some to extend, I am sure. And now, my lord considers taking me to himself, as my former husband Mahlon did, although we are not in my homeland as he was. How do the thoughts of these things come to you so easily?”

“Ah, as to that,” Boaz said, “as I have said, those of my city know you are a virtuous woman, and faithful to both Yahweh and your mother Naomi. What woman of Israel would show greater love than this? What woman of any nation could show greater kindness to a man than to give him such devotion as this?”

He stopped speaking and Ruth, thinking he was finished, lowered her head again to think about what he had said. Then he spoke again, “There is another reason also; I am surprised that my men have not told you before.”

“What reason, my lord?” she asked.

“Have you not heard of my mother?” When Ruth indicated she had not, he asked another question. “Have you heard of a city called Jericho?”



“They spoke until the sun had nearly risen,” Vetachiel said to his audience. “It was plain to every angel there gathered that the idea of playing the kinsman appealed to him and, although he had shown her genuine kindness before, he was honest enough with himself to admit that he had been drawn to her since the day he saw her in the field.”

“And this was ordained by Heaven, as Naomi’s guardian indicated?” one of the angels asked.

“It was,” Vetachiel said, “yet again, we needed not draw a sword, for Ruth’s virtue was genuine. She was protected by her own thoughts from the work of the demons, and they, like most of Heaven, were largely occupied with the situation in other parts of Israel to make a full attack on her faith. Of course, if they had known what Heaven truly intended for this union...”

The Virtue broke off for a moment, and then resumed his report.



“I cannot work with such insipid material!” fumed Hagith of the house of Petahel, storming into Chemosh’s presence. The demon lord had not roused himself from Moab, but was keeping careful watch over the agents he had sent into Israel. “Where is the ungoverned passion? Where is the pride? Where is the – the greed?” the Virtue raged, asking that last question in the manner of a human asking for a debt he was owed.

“Be calm,” Chemosh responded. “How much more effective would you demons of the House of Lust be if you could govern your own passions?” he asked rhetorically.

This did not lighten the fallen angel’s mood. He chose to ignore the latter comment, however, in the presence of the powerful Cherub. “She is surrounded by angels and light,” Hagith pressed on. “The only good thing about people such as this is that they are

rare! Already she has returned to Naomi, bearing gifts from this – man – to the delight of the old woman we have been working so hard to destroy, and you say to me, ‘Be calm?’”

The Satrap of Moab made a sound that expressed both mirth and irritation. “Do you think you are the only thread in this weaving?” he asked Hagith. “Do you believe that all my plans have come to rest on your shoulders alone? Not for idleness have I been placed over the people of Moab, but because I showed my Ba’alim that I was capable of doing what was necessary to aid in the dulling of Heaven’s swords.”

“How, then?” the fallen Virtue asked, still upset, but curious.

“You asked, ‘where is the greed?’ It lies neither in Ruth nor in Boaz, but in the heart of another.”



“It is good land, my brother,” Boaz was saying to his relative, “only with no one to work it. You have many laborers, I know... think of what a harvest it could bring forth if it is well seeded and tended!”

“It is a good land,” came the reply, “and Naomi’s price is fair.” The ten witnesses, who had been taken to assess the parcel, nodded in affirmation. “I will redeem it!”

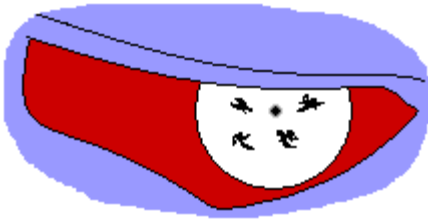
“Ah, well,” Boaz said, who had cleverly left a certain, vital, part of the arrangement until last, “yet let my brother hear a word I will speak to him. There is but one other matter. In the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth of Moab, the wife of Naomi’s deceased son, to raise up the name of the deceased into his inheritance.”

“What!” the would-be redeemer reacted just as Boaz had anticipated. “A levirate marriage! Then the land would only be mine until an heir should reach manhood. Shall I beautify a land that cannot be left to my own name?”

“Will you not have the benefit of the land until that day?” Boaz asked, but he was, to be sure, not pressing too hard. There were, however, invisible beings that were pressing very hard for Elimelech’s relative to purchase the field. They knew that Boaz was a man of integrity, but they also knew they could manipulate this individual much more easily.

The thoughts they attempted to inspire in him were grotesque indeed, but even as they did so they were cursing Boaz for leaving the information about Ruth until last. Not until the human had heard about the arrangements could their best temptations be used, prepared for just such a purpose, yet the knowledge that the field’s purchase would only be his for a time had come so suddenly that his thoughts were not even clear enough for the demons to derail!

They did make valiant attempts. “Take the field! Who is to say the woman will produce for you an heir? Who is to say she will *live* that long? What is one Moabite woman in Israel? Who will miss this stranger? Take the field, it will be yours forever, and the stranger will be cleansed from this holy people!”



The demons from the Houses of Greed, Envy and Wrath spiralled around the man’s thoughts, striking at him with images of violence, of selfish gain. Hagith stood by, watching their efforts, but realizing that none of their temptations were enough to overwhelm the one main thought rising to the surface in the human’s mind.

“I cannot redeem it for myself,” he said, now completely suspicious of the entire affair, “for I will spoil my own inheritance! You, Boaz, you redeem it for yourself, because I cannot.”

Boaz hid his relief and joy well, but the angels who looked on had no such need for diplomacy. “Such is the inertia of sin,” Vetachiel said to an angel at his left, “for his very greed has immunized him to worse temptations! We cannot praise IaHWeH for a flawed character, but I cannot fail to see the irony of this event.”

Hagith, who had overheard Vetachiel’s words, looked at his unfallen counterpart (for both were of the Order of Virtues) with smoldering hatred, and then vanished into the sky to take his report, and further complaints, to a soon-to-be-very-displeased Chemosh.

The other demons were no less angered when the deal was completed, and Boaz had officially arranged to marry Ruth before the human onlookers and various divine witnesses. By that time the day had worn on a little, and others had gathered. When they heard of what had transpired they rejoiced with Boaz, saying, “May Yahweh make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and Leah, who built the House of Israel. May you prosper in this land, and be famous in Bethlehem!”

Others said, “Let your house be like that of Pherez, born to Judah of Tamar, through the offspring that Yahweh will give you through the girl!”

The demons streaked away, repelled by the joy of the scene and the blessings that invoked the name of IaHWeH in human language. Boaz’ kinsman also left the gate early, yet his guardian said to the angels who were gathered there, even as he followed his charge, “Do not be overly concerned about this one. He is not so far from the Gates of Heaven as it would appear.”



“Thus have I returned from earth,” Vetachiel said to his listening angels. “Boaz and Ruth are to marry, and not a single divine blade was raised to accomplish this great task.”

“But this task,” one of the angels asked, “what plans does Heaven have for this pair?”

“Yes,” the other said, “You have hinted that there was a greater purpose for Ruth and Boaz, but you have not yet told us what it is.”

“Naomi will recover from her bitterness completely,” Vetachiel said, “when she holds her grandchild. The women of Israel will bless her, for into a house that lay bare will the light of life come; but more, far more than this. From this line will come kings, and priests, whose names will live on until the end of earth’s history, and beyond into eternity.”

“That is quite a blessing,” the first angel said, “yet is this all?”

“No, not all,” the Virtue said, “for from this line also will come the Vessel chosen for a very special purpose.”

“The Sacrifice?” the first angel asked again.

“The Sacrifice!” Vetachiel said triumphantly. “All men shall be redeemed, and today’s promised union, as small a thing as it appears, was ordained from the foundation of the world to build the House of Men in the Kingdom of Heaven!”

“Come, then” the angels said to the joyful messenger from earth. “Let us share these things with El Michael.”

“I come,” Vetachiel said, rising into the air, “for it is always a pleasure to speak about a swordless victory; yet I believe... no, I am certain, that what I say to Him will not come as a surprise.”

End

Out of The Whirlwind

Residing in the land of Uz, a distant, ancient land,
There dwelt a man named "Hated," prosp'ring o'er the desert sand.
Though mighty was his substance, and his children ten to count,
More than this, t'was righteousness he had in high amount.
Yes, more than this t'was righteousness that set him in esteem,
Than cattle, gold and silver, sheep and oxen, it would seem.

But high above the mountains where the goats are wont to play,
A multitude of unseen guests assembled for display.
The Sacred to the Profane said, amidst this mighty Host,
"Whence art thou, O dark Satan, and of what hast thou to boast?"
Yes, "Whence art thou, O Satan," was the question there unfurled;
"From going to and fro," he said, "and wandering the world."

"Hast thou seen my servant?" asked the High unto the Low,
And He pointed down at Hated (who was called *Job*, you should know).
"Hast thou seen a man like him, in all the lands you've soiled?
He feareth me and upright is in every way he's toiled.
Yes, he feareth me and upright walketh, perfect in his way;
Hast thou any accusation against this just man to lay?"

"Doth Job fear thee for nothing?" came the sibilant reply,
"Hast thou not blessed his substance, made his livestock multiply?
Hast thou not erected walls betwixt him and dismay?
You've given him his heart's wish both today and yesterday.
Yes, you've given him his heart's wish – vict'ries for which he's not fought;
Therefore, mighty Deity, doth Job serve thee for nought?"

"Thou holdst that he will curse me," said the Mighty to the Weak,
"If I now remove my hedges and allow you ill to wreak.
Go forth, unholy spirit; behold, he is in thine hand,
Spare his body, though, I charge – obey this one command.
Yes, spare his body, lay not on him fang nor scale nor claw."
And thus the demon sent his agents out to work the law.

Four messengers of desolation came to earth one day,
One fell upon Job's cattle, and one all his sheep did slay.
A third destroyed the camels, but the fourth was worst of all...
Not servants did he slay – but sons and daughters made he fall.
Yes, not servants did he slay, and Job with deepest anguish rose.
"Yah giveth and Yah takes away," he said, and rent his clothes.

In all this Job spoke no false words, and sinned not in his grief,
But things transpiring far above would bring no soon relief.
Again the spirits gathered in array before the Throne,
Once more the movements of the Devil would be asked and known.
Yes, once more the movements were requested and again he said,
“I have been to and fro on earth, inciting fear and dread.”

“Hast thou seen my servant?” asked the Light unto the Dim,
“He standeth fast in worship, though thou movest against him.
Without cause thou hast had me held in terror by this man,
He stands fast in integrity, he casts shame on your plan.
Yes, he stands fast in integrity, despite your bitter sin.”
But the tempter answered artfully, “Ah, wait now... *Skin for skin.*”

“Put forth thine arm and smite his flesh, yea cause his bones to fail,
See if he then lifts thee up when onlookers grow pale.”
Then Yah said unto Lucifer, “Go forth and do still worse;
Spare his life, though, this I charge – restrain thy final curse.
Yes, spare his life; do not permit thy wrath to be so rash.”
So Satan smote the mortal 'till with sores he lay in ash.

In all this Job did not transgress, though boils and wife conspired
To cause him to blaspheme Yah, for this Lucifer desired.
But greater trials than these had the archdemon in his mind,
Stirred he up then three close friends to blindly lead the blind.
Yes, stirred he up then three wise men to bring gifts to the poor,
Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz – these names the three men bore.

For seven days did silence reign with sadness unexpressed,
Then Job began to speak, and to his friends he this addressed:
“Let the days be dark in which I was conceived and born,
Let the night be bald of stars, as e'en my head is shorn.
Yes, let the night be bald of stars; O, why do I yet live?
Had I died in birth, I'd find fate easy to forgive.”

“The thing that I have greatly feared,” continued Job to say,
“Has been a door through which my troubles swipe at me this day.
My sighings come oft as my meals, my groans recur like waves,
Happy are those who find rest amidst the darkened graves!
Yes, happy are those who find rest, but why giveth Yah light
To even those He moves against in His unbounded might?”

Then Eliphaz in answer spoke, “Ah, Job, it seems to me,
Though once thou taught the wise, instruction cometh now to thee.
Listen now, and hear my words, on me is wisdom pinned:
Yah smiteth not who please Him, therefore, Job, thou must have sinned!”

Yes, Yah smiteth the wicked, even nature testifies.
And still beside this visions of the night came to mine eyes.

“An apparition visited my sleep ’ere it was day,
And though I trembled greatly I didst hear the spirit say:
Shall man be justified within the sight of One full high?
Behold: the angels mighty are not perfect in His eye.
Yes, behold: the angels bright are less by far than He;
How then can men of clay be clean compared to those like me?”

“The righteous, Job, are lifted up, the wicked trodden down,
Repent, therefore and turn away; escape the divine frown.
The crafty find their plans destroyed, as day doth follow night,
Be not like those who hide their crimes, nor wise in thine own sight.
Yes, be not like those who’ll say, ‘But I am just and true.’
Acknowledge all your failings and rest will return to you.”

Now Job, on hearing all these words, essayed then to reply:
“If all my grief were stacked up it would reach unto the sky!
Do wild beasts cry out if they’re fed? Would I mourn if content?
The things that press upon my soul are great in their extent.
Yes, the things that press upon me, though I be just, never end;
But you o’erwhelm the desolate and lay traps for your friend.

“A set of days are given men, but mine make haste to fly,
Still I await the shadows when I peacefully may lie.
My flesh is broken, garbed with worms, my soul consumed with drought,
Had I sinned, however, Yah would surely point it out.
Yes, had I sinned the Mighty One would bring it into view,
So these are words of little comfort coming forth from you.”

Now Bildad of the Shuhites spoke, and said, “What swelling wind!
Hath Yah erred in His judgment, if thou hast not surely sinned?
If thou wert pure and upright, He would surely stand for thee;
Search thyself, is it not so? Yea, truly this must be.
Yes, search thyself, for reeds do not sprout up without the swamp,
All hypocrites will perish in the dark without a lamp.”

Then Job replied, “Yea, I acknowledge what you say is right,
Yah cannot err in judgment, and He guides with truth His might.
Should I say I have no unknown fault I would transgress,
Even so, *I have not sinned*, my conscience doth confess.
Yes, even so, I have not sinned; my complaint standeth firm,
He smiteth me still with His staff, considers me a worm.

“My soul despairs of life and in my bitterness I speak,
Is it good for thee, Almighty, to oppress the poor and weak?
See'st thou as men do see? Why seekest thou my sin?
Knowest thou mine innocence, both without and within.
Yes, knowest thou my days are few, till I be naught but bone,
Cease thy charges and thy war, and leave me thus alone.”

Then Zophar spoke, the third of three, and he had this to add:
“Would not one be shamed greatly by words such as thou hast had?
Should a man so full of speeches go through wisdom's door?
All thou sayest is, ‘My doctrine is both right and pure.’
Yes, all thou sayest is that Yah afflicts thee worse by far
Than thine transgressions merit; listen now unto Zophar:

“Canst thou know perfection, seeking Heaven as a man?
Knowest thou the heights of Yah? Now, answer if you can.
Who can hinder what He does? Turn thus to Him thine heart,
Confess if thou hast turned aside and sorrow will depart.
Yes, confess thine ungodliness and thou shalt be secure,
And thou shalt lie down in repose, of hope and riches sure.

Now Job, on hearing his three friends, replied with what he knew:
“Ah, yes... thou art *The People*, wisdom perishes with you!
But I have understanding, these are common things you speak,
Who knowest not that wickedness results in fortunes bleak?
But in this life and in my case doth his'try testify,
Not all unrighteous are found out, nor all in disgrace die.
Yes, not all robbers come to shame; ask earth and sea and fish,
For nature also tells the tale: not all get what we'd wish.

“The Mighty One breaks nations, He leads princes into chains,
Who then can stand before Him, or endure His judgment pains?
I would speak to Yah, for nothing you have said can bless;
In your hearts are forged base lies, physicians valueless.
Yes, in your hearts I find no aid, in wisdom hold your peace,
Think not to speak in Yah's place, none of you hold such a lease.

“Though He should slay me, I would not my loyalty withhold,
But I am frail; hide not thy face, O King of time untold.
If I indeed transgress thy Law, I pray thee make it clear...
If thou holdest thy silence, I'll maintain my footing here.
Yes, if thou holdest me imprisoned in thy fearsome court,
Be not so narrow in thy judgment of my life's report.

“As flowers that do fade away is mankind's lot on earth,
Be merciful to one who had a mortal's lowly birth.

Seeing that his days are short, his months a paltry few,
Turn from him that he may rest in twilight's dusky hue.
Yes, turn from him till he lay down within the welcome earth,
Until the day you raise Him up to his appointed worth.

“How fleeting is this life, my sins are sealed up in a sack,
And numbered by thy angels for the day when you attack.
The mountains fall, the rocks wear down, the hope of man grows faint – ”
Eliphaz then broke in and said, “Cease this long complaint!”
Yes, Eliphaz then broke in and said, “Ease the patience of
We humans sitting here before thee, and Yahweh above.

“Why castest off thy fear of El Shaddai to speak so vain?
Dost thou know His secrets that the ancients could not gain?
Knowest thou so much more than this humble, young array?
'Tis good that Adam had thee as companion in his day!
Yes, 'tis good wisdom lives with man until this world you leave,
Now, what has led thee to these haughty fantasies believe?

“Thou aim'st thy words at Heaven; wilt thou spit upon a cloud?
If angels are not clean to Yah, what thoughts have made thee proud?
I will show thee wisdom which was passed from man to youth,
Down through the generations of our people as full truth.
Yes, down through many ages was repeated this refrain:
'Be not like base and wicked men, their lives are filled with pain.’

“He knoweth not whence comes his next meal, who resists the King,
The Ruler of the Heavens makes to that man sorrow cling.
He shall not be rich, nor have his offspring sprout up tall;
Between him and destruction standeth not the frailest wall.
Yes, between him and the dark is unity unmarred,
And he, for courting vanity, gets vanity's reward.”

Then Job replied, “O, miserable comfort are ye all;
If thy souls were in my soul's place, I also could spout gall.
However, I would strengthen you, my words would bring relief,
By you I am but wearied, I am strained beyond belief.
Yes, by you I am wearied, as by enemies o'errun,
To you am I delivered by the great Almighty One.

“His archers have me in their eyes, they gather 'round about.
He cleaves me whole asunder, and my bitterness pours out.
My face is marred with tears – (though I feel death not far away,
'Tis not for my unrighteousness) – with clean hands do I pray.
Yes, 'tis not for wicked acts that former friends speak scorn,
But Heaven is a witness to my testimony sworn.

“My spirit is corrupted, and the grave awaits my death,
Ye mockers without mercy speed the day I forsake breath.
I am made a byword by the darkness you all share;
The just astonished at this shall be, but not claim despair.
Yes, the just, astonished, finds not one wise among three;
O, the worm becomes my sister, and corruption fathers me!”

“How long before thy torrent ends?” asked Bildad in his turn.
“And why are we as beasts from which you have nothing to learn?
Consider now our counsel, be not right in thine own mind,
Yah striketh those who anger Him, leave not this word behind.
Yes, Yah striketh those who fall into the traps they themselves lay,
A snare in every corner waits for those who walk that way.

“His strength shall surely fail him, and destruction flanks his side,
Yea, torn out is each vestage of his stubbornness and pride.
A visitor within his tents is terror from the King,
His branches shall be broken off, his root a withered thing.
Yes, his branches shall be pruned, his seed shall not be grown,
All this sums up the lot of him to whom Yah is not known.”

Then Job again retorted, saying, “Yea, how long indeed?
But it is not my word that vexes one in trembling need.
If ye will stand against me now, yet mocking my reproach,
Know that it is Yah whose victim that you now approach.
Yes, know that it is Yah who took the crown off of my head,
And garbed me with dishonor where once glory shone instead.

“Destroyed am I on every side, my hope hath He removed,
His wrath is hot against me like the wicked He’s reprov’d.
My family and friends forget me, once to them so bright;
The maidens of my house think me a stranger in their sight.
Yes, the maidens of my house count me a sad affair,
And those who loved me once turn fast away when I appear.

“Have pity on me, friends, for Yah has touched me in His rage,
Why do you persecute, when mercy leads thee to assuage?
O, that my complaint could be preserved in stone or book;
I know that my Redeemer liveth, this I’ve not mistook.
Yes, I know I’ll see Him after rising from the grave,
Be ye frightened of His sword for ills you ne’er forgave.”

Then Zophar said, “My thoughts cause me to answer thee in haste,
Thy cause is justified by all these arguments unbraced.
The wicked may rejoice, ’tis true, but only for a time,
A moment’s pleasure is the only mountain that they climb.

Yes, a moment's pleasure, then in sorrow's pit they're cast,
Thus all perish they together while the righteous standeth fast.

“Though for a time he may indeed sport on his head a ‘crown,’
He shall flee both sword and bow and quickly be cut down.
In horror he discovers that his sin is far from hid
In Heaven's high expanse or under dark earth's musty lid.
Yes, in Heaven's high expanse flares up a flaming sword,
To come against his treasures in the house where they are stored.”

But Job spoke: “Now be diligent, and listen to my speech,
If thou would'st be consoled then learn the thing I have to teach.
If more besides you wish to mock, then wait till I conclude,
Now mark me, be astonished, at these things that I have viewed.
Yes, now mark me as I speak of evil men on earth,
Whose power is past question, and who revel in their worth.

“Yea, it shudders me to think of it, and though my words offend:
Not always in this life doth Heaven's judgement stroke descend.
Their seed is held in reverence, their houses are all sure,
Their cattle bring forth offspring and their substance is secure.
Yes, their cattle bring forth calves with whom their children play,
The sounds of harp and timbrel brook no shadow of dismay.

“Yet mark me well, no envy of their wicked ways have I,
How often is their candle snuffed out ere they can reply?
Their eyes shall see destruction, of that there can be no doubt,
They lie with worms, not so this with the pious and devout.
Yes, they lie with worms, but not all fast destruction meet;
Ye ask if any prosper? Ask the strangers on the street!”

Then Eliphaz of Teman answered and gave this response,
“Can a mortal profit Yah, or aid Him even once?
Would'st it please the One Almighty if thy life was just?
Doth He fear thy righteousness, and smite thee in mistrust?
Yes, Doth He fear thee? Is not thy iniquity extreme?
Thou hast, from the thirsty, withheld water's precious stream.

“You have, from the naked, kept back even their few rags,
Under thee the hope of widow and of orphan sags.
For this cause are snares nearby, thou sufferest sudden fear.
Yah is high above the stars, should'st He, to thee, appear?
Yes, Yah is high; yet asketh thou, ‘How canst He know and judge?’
Hast thou *seen* the wicked? Or the darkened path they trudge?

The righteous see their end, and all the innocent rejoice
When trouble comes as fire to consume the wicked's voice.
Acquaint thyself with Yahweh now, and thou shalt see His good,
Receive His teachings in thine heart and turn back (as you should!)
Yes, receive His teachings and thou shalt have gold as dust,
And Yah shalt hear thy prayers; heed these things I have discussed.”

But Job ignored these words, and he expounded thus his case:

“O, that I might come to where Yah sitteth in His place!

I would lay my cause before Him; heavy is my yoke,

Thus would He deliver me, on hearing what I spoke.

Yes, thus would He deliver, for my foot hath led me true,

He knoweth every secret thing in reverence I do.

“From this trial I shall come forth like thine Ophir's gold,

I have not, like others, given sin the least foothold.

Why, if Yah doth visit swift, are old landmarks moved?

Why do men steal others' flocks and profit unreprieved?

Yes, why do men steal alms, and turn the needy ones aside?

'Tis these who leave the poor unclothed on rainy mountainside.

“In darkness waits adulterers and murderers and thieves,

To them is morning like a death that righteous man relieves.

These shall be the worms' repast, forgotten by the womb,

Heat and drought the snow devour, so they shall feed the tomb.

Yes, heat and drought consume the earth, and barrenness the wife;

Death takes weak and mighty, thus none can be sure of life.

“Are these things not so? Who then shall make of this a lie?”

Then Bildad sought to interject a thought for his reply:

“Is there any numbering the armies of the Sky?

Majesty belongs to Yah, this you cannot deny.

Yes, Majesty belongs to Him who outshines stars and moon,

How can one born of woman thus say, ‘Truth and I commune.’?”

But Job blew past this little lecture quickly to restate:

“As Yah lives, whom my soul attacks, I will not this debate.

My lips shall speak no wickedness, nor my tongue dark deceit,

'Til my death my innocence will I hold and repeat.

Yes, 'till my death my heart shall to my righteousness subscribe;

And let those who oppose me meet that sad end ye describe.

“What is the hope of hypocrites, will Yahweh hear their cry?

Our parables are many for the way they live and die.

Although he heaps up silver, gold and costly robes as well,

His widow will not weep the day he bids the world farewell.

Yes, his widow will not live to see his children reach their prime,
And onlookers rejoice when Heaven works to close his time.

“Ye wish to speak of wisdom? Let the matter thus be told:
There is a vein for silver, and a place to mine for gold.
There is an end to darkness, and a border for the flood,
Out of earth comes heat and bread, and gemstones red as blood.
Yes, out of earth Yah cutteth rivers, and directs the route
Of lions and of vultures – but whence doth His wisdom sprout?

“Where is wisdom to be found, or understanding sought?
Men know not the price thereof, nor where it may be bought.
Gold and crystal cannot be exchanged for equal weight,
Wisdom is not found in caves, or sea, or in death’s gate.
Yes, wisdom is not found but in the words of Heaven’s Head,
Now interrupt me not, Zophar, for more is to be said.”

(Here Zophar would have spoken, but he chose to hold his tongue,
For he saw that naught would move Job from the post to which he’d clung.)

“O that I were yet in months past,” Job continued on,
“When Elohim preserved me as if I were His own son.
Yes, when Elohim preserved me, and my children were nearby,
When His secret lived within me... to these memories I fly.

“Young men saw me and were fearful, aged men arose,
Noblemen and princes stood in loyal, silent rows.
Ears that heard my voice would bless me, eyes would on me light,
The hearts of orphans and of widows would in me delight.
Yes, the hearts of orphans blessed me, grasping at life’s straws,
The blind had eyes, the lame could walk; I broke the wicked’s jaws.

“Then said I, ‘My life is sweet, I live my days with joy,’
They waited for my speech like rain: the old man and young boy.
My glory then was fresh in me, my roots were grounded deep,
The mourners would I comfort with my smile when they would weep.
Yes, the mourners would I comfort, breaking mis’ry’s stocks;
But mock me now whose fathers I’d not set to guard my flocks!

“Where once was strength and glory, in my old age there is want,
This famine of the spirit makes of me its favorite haunt.
The most despised of men now take me for their jeering song,
The children of the foolish mar the path I limp along.
Yes, the children of the foolish beat me like a storm,
My sinews and my bones do quake within this tortured form.

“My illness binds me as a garment, burned am I to ash,
I call out but thou turn’st away, except to aim a lash.
Upon a wind I’m borne away, dissolving in the gust,
I know that thou shalt quickly bring me to my place in dust.
Yes, I know thou shalt give evil, when I looked to thee for weal,
This ruined brother to the dragons hath no last appeal.

“My harp turns out a mournful note, my innermost parts burned,
I’d set mine eyes on purity, but what see I returned?
Why reap I the wage of sinners, punishment most strange?
Doth Yah not see my way and count the steps that I arrange?
Yes, doth Yah not consider me upon an even scale?
What weighs against me heavily that I so greatly fail?

“If I have turned aside my heart, or sought another maid,
Let my wife be another’s, let my final blessing fade.
If I despised the needy, or withheld aught from the poor,
Judgment would be justice, and great pains should I endure.
Yes, judgment would be justice had I seen one starve or thirst,
But the helpless to defend have not I ever been the first?

“If I did unto gold the faintest value once ascribe,
Or looked up to the sun in pride, or taken any bribe,
If I mocked the misfortune of a sworn and lifelong foe,
Am I not deserving of the Mighty Father’s blow?
Yes, am I not deserving of all that your heart conceives,
If Adam-like my wickedness I cover up with leaves?

“O, that Yah would hear my cry, and let me bring my suit,
Gladly would I listen if my claim He would refute.
O, that all the charges raised against me were writ down.
I would gladly bind them to me as a fitting crown.
Yes, I would gladly bind them, if I knew just what they read,
The words I speak will end here; full enough have I now said.”

Then silence once more swallowed up this scene below the sky,
But one who stood up who previously, quietly sat by.
Young Elihu had heard these speeches, and become annoyed;
Not one could answer Job, and thus he moved to fill the void.
Yes, not one could answer, thus thought Elihu within,
“Should not he justify Yah, rather than one born of sin?”

Now, Elihu had waited ’till the others had their say,
But when the moment came he made the most of their delay.
“Age should precede tender years,” began thus Elihu,
“Days should impart wisdom, therefore waited I for you,

Yes, days should impart wisdom, but there is a truth unsung,
That sometimes passes elders by to dwell within the young.

“Great men are not always wise, nor aged men astute,
So hearken unto me – hear my opinion resolute.
I have attended unto you, and heard your viewpoints framed,
I saw you leave off speaking when Job spoke on unashamed.
Yes, I saw you cease trying to convince him of his fault,
Therefore it is now on me to voice my spirit’s thought.

To Job he said, “I pray you hear my speeches and my word,
The Spirit of Yah charges me to show thy case absurd.
If you can’t answer set thy words in order and arise,
I shall speak now for Elohim, whose judgment you despise.
Yes, I shall speak – but gently – so thy soul shouldst not know fear:
Behold thou art not just in what you fervently declare.

“He is greater than a man, why then do you contend?
He speaketh once, and once again, His messages to send.
He opens up the ears of man as he lies on his cot,
He keepeth back his soul from death, and sword, and war and rot.
Yes, He keepeth back his sin, with trials He refines.
The lives of those who anger Him He to the grave consigns.

“But after He doth chasten men, He brings reprieve at last,
And those who let Him humble them escape the judgment blast.
A Ransom He for mortal men will find and surely pay,
Bringing their souls up from death, the dark pit to betray.
Yes, bringing their souls back to life, and light forever more,
This is Yahweh’s purpose, which I now will underscore.

“Hearken now, my hearers; bend your ears, O Job, to this,
If after thou hast aught to say, I will not that dismiss.
What man is there like thee, who invites scorning as a guest,
That companies with those who make of Elohim a jest?
Yes, that companies with those who walk a wicked lane?
Be it far from Yah that He should hear what you complain.

“Should’st thou curse a prince or say, ‘Ungodly,’ of the kings?
How much less He who rules all flesh and retribution brings?
His eyes are on the ways of men, He notes the way they go,
He overturns them in the night, if He desires so.
Yes, He overturns them that the hypocrite should fail,
Shouldst thou not say unto Him, ‘I’ve learned from my travail’?

“Let me be instructed if I fail to hit the mark,
It seems to me that Job hath spoken foolish things and dark.
For without understanding he hath spoken (to my pain);
My wish then is that he be chastened *more*, to knowledge gain.
Yes, my wish for Job is that he be tried further still,
Until the bonds of wickedness be fallen from his will.

“A few more things, pray suffer me, I almost reach my end,
But I have other statements on which you may fast depend.
Thou thinkest that thine righteousness exceedeth Yahweh’s own,
You ask, ‘What profit shall it be to me if I atone?’
Yes, you ask and I will answer thee and thy three friends,
Look into the Heavens, beyond where the sky extends.

“Thy sin cannot the Master harm, nor all thy good deeds heal,
The reason for oppression is that none bring their appeal.
None seek after Elohim with hearts and hands sincere,
For pride of evil men He hides His face and doth not hear.
Yes, for pride and vanity He shunneth this terrain,
Therefore Job doth open up his mouth and cry in vain.

“In this matter I have knowledge, I shall not mislead,
For Elohim is mighty in His thought, and word, and deed.
He rewardeth righteousness, this we have oft affirmed,
Those who forsake discipline shalt have their doom confirmed.
Yes, those who forsake discipline will die while they are young,
Take heed to thy life, then, thou hast not a cautious tongue.

“Who can teach like Elohim? Unto His speech hold fast,
He maketh rain and clouds, and bringeth judgment at the last.
At this my hearth doth tremble, and is moved all out of place:
He guideth all the Heavens, and He doeth all with grace.
Yes, He guideth all the Heavens, He directeth rain and snow,
He sealeth up the work of men, that men His works may know.

“One final thing have I to share, before you nobles four,
The Might of Yah is greater than all nature can endure.
Consider, Job, the wond’rous works of Him on land and sea,
Hold thy silence, it shalt be as wisdom unto thee.
Yes, hold thy silence; from all men Yah standeth far apart,
Thus fear Him, He regardeth not those wise in their own heart.”

But high above the mountains did a joyful sound ensue,
For after this had Satan no more angles to pursue.
Against the wrath of demons and the ignorance of men,
Job stood for his integrity again and yet again.

Yes, Job stood for his righteousness amidst temptations strong,
And Yah said to the council, “Now I go to right the wrong.”

Now, there were other things that Job still needed to be taught,
Thus from a mighty whirlwind spoke the One whom he had sought.
“Who hath spoken ignorance upon this miry clay?
Where wast thou that morning I the earth’s foundations lay?
Yes, where wast thou that day the planet’s waters I compelled,
When angels shouted madly for the beauty they beheld?

“Hast thou power over death, or mastery of light?
Declare to me the breadth of earth, if open to thy sight.
Hast thou seen the hailstones, reserved for earth’s final plague?
Knowest thou the secrets I have made, to others, vague?
Yes, knowest thou the stars? Do rain and ice your voice obey?
Canst thou send the lightnings, number clouds, or give beasts prey?

“Knowest thou the time the wild goat bringeth forth it’s child?
Hast thou taught the wild ass to rejoice that it is wild?
Wilt thou tame the unicorn, or hold it with a band?
Gavest thou the birds their wings from thy almighty hand?
Yes, gavest thou the measure of intelligence to each?
Or garbed the horse with fearless might, the enemy to breach?

Commandest thou the eagles? Doth the hawk fly by thy word?
Wilt thou instruct me now that I have at thy request stirred?”
Job then answered meekly, saying, “Behold, I am vile,”
Though I saw myself so true, myself did I beguile.
Yes, though I saw pure innocence in all the things I did,
Before thy mighty Presence now, my words I wish were hid.”

Then answered Yah again out of the raging, swirling breeze,
“Wilt thou count me cruel to thine own conceit appease?
Dost thou have an arm like mine, hast thou my fearsome might?
Stand forth in thine glory, and appear before my sight.
Yes, stand forth in my majesty, and lean upon thy gold,
Consider thou the mighty which the graves now deeply hold.

“Consider now *Behemoth*, who is chief of all my works,
He feedeth on the green shoots of the swamps in which he lurks.
His force is in his navel and his bones are iron beams,
His tail is like a cedar trunk, a mighty tree it seems.
Yes, his tail is powerful, and in his thirst he drinks
The waters of the Jordan up from riverbed to brinks.

“Consider now *Leviathan*, a dragon made of fear,
Canst thou with a hook or words restrain and bring him here?
Will he beg for mercy, or be forced into a pact?
Canst thou move against him and escape with life intact?
Yes, canst thou move to strike him with a barbed hook or a lance?
There is none so fierce that he would stand a fighting chance.

“Armored is his body by his tightly fitted scales,
With awful teeth like daggers he his enemy assails.
From glowing eyes and burning breath there goeth up a smoke,
His heart is hard as millstone and he terror doth evoke.
Yes, his heart is hard as millstone, and he laughs at spear and dart,
He turns aside the weapons, and he rendeth shields apart.

“In all the earth is not one creature terrible as he,
If thou concede’st *his* terror, *who then standeth before ME?*
He raiseth up himself and e’en the mighty wail aloud,
He looketh on the high things as the king of all the proud.
Yes, he looketh on the high things, and before him armies bowed;
This masterpiece of majesty... the king of all the proud.”

Then Job replied to Yah and said, “In vanity I seek
To find a thing too hard for thee, my heart hath been made bleak.
No secret can be kept from thee, of this I am full sure,
Now I see what I once heard; myself I now abhor.
Yes, now I see with mine own eyes, in ignorance I went,
And in the dust and ashes of my sorrow... I repent.”

Yet though Job had not understood Yah’s majesty entire,
He nonetheless spoke rightly of his innocent attire.
No sin had marred the garment of his spiritual state,
Against his three friends spoke Yahweh thus in a tone irate.
Yes, against his three friends spoke the One supreme in strength,
“Against my servant ye have brought a trial of great length.

“Job hath spoken rightly, but not so with your report,
Sacrifice to me, and let him pray for your support.
Him will I accept, lest I should pay thee what’s been earned,
Chastising thee most harshly for what from my foe you’ve learned.
Yes, chastising thee – for Satan hath of you made use,
Now pay thine vows in silence, and reflect on thy abuse.”

So Eliphaz and Bildad and the Naamathite Zophar,
Made peace with their friend Job and called a truce to verbal war.
And Yah restored to Job two times as much as he once owned,
And in his friends’ affections he was once again enthroned.

Yes, and in his friends' opinions he was counted blessed,
In riches, and with cattle – they were very much impressed.

And Job had seven sons thereafter, to replace the first,
And daughters three, amongst whom greatest beauty was dispersed.
And Job himself lived many decades longer after that,
He saw four generations of the offspring he begat.
Yes, he saw four generations of his clan increase,
Then finally he died, and was laid down to rest in peace.

End

The Hammer



“What an awful tragedy,” the angel said, his sad eyes scanning the destruction. The Seraph’s voice, often melodious with songs of praise, now played mournful music over the ruins of Jerusalem as he glanced this way and that.

The Virtue beside him placed an arm on the six-winged messenger’s shoulder in a gesture of comfort. “We all knew this would come to pass, Ragaziel,” he said, “but what a scene indeed.”

The armies of Antiochus had left the Sanctuary of IaHWeH defiled with the blood of the innocent. The Hebrews that survived the onslaught had fled, leaving only bodies and birds of prey in their wake, and two divine spirits that had been commanded to avoid intervening when the invaders broke through the inhabitants’ defenses.

Kasakiel was right; this destruction, terrible as it was to behold, came as no surprise to the divine watchers. Two years earlier the Greek king had stretched his hand against Jerusalem, had entered the sanctuary, and had stolen away many of the precious and sacred tools of the service. He had also slain all those who sought to oppose him, but even this attack did not satisfy him. There had been no peace from that day to this, and when he returned to finish the job, both the wise and the cowardly found other places to be. Unfortunately, there were enough who were neither of these to satisfy Antiochus’ bloodlust for the time being.

“I have seen enough,” Ragaziel said, “We should return to the Kingdom for further instructions.” Kasakiel agreed; with their assignment to guard Jerusalem officially over, or at least suspended until life should return to the city, they were in need of new labors. As they made ready to depart, however, they suddenly became aware of another angel standing near them, and they turned to greet the newcomer.

“Peace in the name of the Most High.” The Seraph Tahillael moved closer, careful to avoid the slain laying around. “There is no need for you to return to Heaven at this time, for I have been sent to bring you the order.”

As the pair he was addressing indicated their readiness to hear the decree, Tahillael continued, “Ragaziel, Seraph of the Clan Jehoel, and Kasakiel, Virtue of the Clan Camael, take note: the demon who bears the title Hismael, now claiming the name *Bethor* of the House of Greed, draws near the settlement of Modin. As the regent of Chay’il among the officers of Antiochus, he leads a force in an attempt to cut the line of priests off from before the face of IaH.

“The family of Matthias of priestly line has fled to safety, mourning the fate of the Tabernacle. It is not enough, however, for Chay’il would incite the complete destruction of the spirit of the anointed people.

“Even now, forces seek after the scattered priests and elders of Jerusalem, promising them safety and peace – if they will offer sacrifices to Bethor, whom the Greek humans are calling Zeus. The officers seek to carry out the will of their king, but the demons know that Matthias will never bow to their wishes... they seek his death, and the death of all who remain faithful to the covenant of IaHWeH.

“Go now to protect Matthias and his sons, for the Almighty has declared a purpose for these men.”



Matthias stood before the soldier with his robe torn. His five sons stood behind him in order by age: Joannan, Simon, Judah, Eleazar and Jonathan. Above them hovered the two-winged Virtue and the six-winged Seraph who were charged with their safety. The soldier was followed by several of Antiochus’ warriors; intermingled with them, invisible to the humans, were the demons led by Bethor.

The Greek soldier was addressing Matthias and his boys, though it was clear from both the distaste on his face, and the clothing torn in sorrow, that the meeting was not going well. “You are a chief, a great man of this city,” the warrior said. “Set an example for your people, and accept the king’s terms as all other nations have done. Do as even those in Judah and Jerusalem have done, and you will be counted among the king’s friends. Your family will be held in honor, and great reward shall be yours.”



Matthias the priest looked around at the expectant faces of his sons, and the residents of Modin that had gathered around, and he answered, making sure he could be heard by all who were present. “Even though all the nations under the king’s dominion obey him, and so turn away from the religion of their ancestors, giving credence to his commandment, it will not be so with us. My sons and I, and all our brethren, will walk in the covenant of our fathers. It will never come to pass that we forsake the law and ordinances; we will not heed the king’s words, to stray from the path of our religion, neither to the left nor to the right.”

Having spoken, he turned away from the Greek soldiers, and started back to his home. As he went, however, he looked back and saw that some of the Jews of Modin were nearing the soldiers with looks of resignation on their faces. Kasakiel was immediately filled with anger; his eyes fixed themselves on Bethor, and his hand went to the sword that hung at his side. “Not yet,” the Seraph counseled him. “We are here to protect, not to intervene.”

The demon that commanded the forces of Chay'il looked at the two holy angels and smiled as he caused the soldiers to make way for the approaching Jews. "This city will be as Jerusalem," he said, and a ripple of anticipation passed over the company of fallen spirits that were with him.

There was a sudden interruption, however, and the soldiers of Greece drew their swords as Matthias ran over to them. The priest had no eyes for the invaders, however, but struck with his sword at the foremost Jew who had approached the pagan altar to burn away his faith. The man fell silently to the ground.

"The zeal of Phineas," whispered an old man in the crowd, approving of what had been done. "We will not defile ourselves on that altar!" he said, speaking loudly this time.

At the cry of the elder, those who had been approaching the soldiers slunk away; but no one noticed them, for Matthias swung his sword around, slaying the chief officer with whom he had spoken. "We will not defile ourselves on this altar," he shouted, echoing the old man's words, and he kicked at the slabs of stone, causing the structure to crumble and fall apart.

"Now!" Ragaziel yelled, and drew his kherev. The blade of his weapon flashed, then a ripple of light passed from hilt to tip as it burst into flames. The two angels plunged into Bethor's forces, knocking demons back and sending confusion into the ranks of the human soldiers. As the Greeks stood around uncertainly, Matthias ran back to his sons, safely out of the range of any immediate retaliation.

"Whosoever is zealous for the law, and maintains the covenant of our fathers, let him follow me!" Matthias bellowed. With that, the family of priests raced for the gate of the city, leaving all behind but their clothing and their weapons. As the divine swordsmen held their fallen brethren and the human invaders at bay, many followed in the retreat, and went out to dwell in the wilderness.



Legion, as Chay'il had been calling himself, listened impassively to the report being brought to him.

"Their numbers continue to increase, Ba'ali," the spirit said, "The more we attack the Jews in the cities, the more powerful their bands of refugees grow in the wilderness."

"You are not suggesting I tell Prince Lucifer to call the attacks off?" the demon lord asked his underling in a sardonic voice.

"Oh, no, Ba'al," he replied quickly, "but that we do a more thorough job of annihilating those who would escape the settlements. The priests have a large number of followers

now. They are not strong enough to oppose your armies with Antioch, of course, nothing near that... but they can resist us, and they know the land well. If we wish to crush Israel quickly, we must bleed it dry of warriors.”

“Their warriors will bleed,” Legion said. “We know the caves in which they huddle, the places from which they obtain their sustenance and... their greatest weakness! The very covenant they love, the very loyalty they have for the distant King of Heaven, will be their undoing. Bethor has this situation very well in hand.”

The demon, knowing better than to ask any further questions, bowed and sped off to resume his duties.



The mighty angel Raziel, one of the two Covering Cherubim, watched as yet another sorrowful angel settled to the ground in front of him and bowed. As the guardian spirit opened his mouth to speak, the Cherub said, “I know.”

The beautiful, golden landscape of the Eternal Kingdom, spread out over the nothingness of the Void, was an unlikely setting for the pain that flowed from the kneeling angel. Over Israel the sky was dark with the early hours of the Sabbath day, but some of those who would have dedicated the time to IaHWeH were now experiencing a deeper peace than they had anticipated.

The angel had watched while the forces of Antiochus stormed the caves just at the setting of the sun, slaying those who chose not to fight during the sacred hours. “Let us die in our innocence,” the valiant Israelites said to each other as the invaders drew near. “Heaven and earth will testify for us,” they shouted at the approaching soldiers, “for you have accomplished our death without honor!”

“They were the second group to so fall,” Raziel said to his companion. “There will not be a third.”

“The armies will be prevented?” asked the kneeling angel.

“One way or another,” came a somewhat enigmatic reply. “Prince Michael has gathered enough angels to repel an attack on the settlement of Matthias, but... they will not see battle, we are told.”

“How then shall the priests be preserved?”

“There is much that is allowed to those in this dark age, and on that dark world,” Raziel replied, “and although the humans would fare better if their trust in our protection was deeper, it is not the will of Heaven that the line of Matthias perish in these attacks.”

“Praise be to IaHWeH,” the angel breathed, somewhat comforted at the loss of those whom he was overseeing.

“Go, and tell the guardians of the priests that all will be well.” The angel did not hesitate to deliver the good news to Kasakiel and Ragaziel.



Kasakiel looked at his Seraphic companion and said, “I wonder what this means.”

They had been informed by Raziel’s messenger that the men under Matthias would not be slain, and they were certain that divine protection had been ordained for the refugees, but the decision of the priests left them feeling rather confused.

“It means that the will of Heaven will be accomplished,” Ragaziel replied. “They have decided to fight the invaders, regardless of the day and hour of their attack. No doubt, IaHWeH will allow this, although it would certainly have been better if our armies had been allowed to do their work.”

To be sure, many of the humans in the settlement felt uneasy at the thought of fighting on the Sabbath day, but they could genuinely see no alternative, and due to the failings of their recent ancestors they were left without a priest who had knowledge of the Urim and Thummim, or any of the other oracles of Heaven. El Michael disbanded the angels He had gathered in the courts above, giving them instructions only to watch.

Over the course of the following week both the angels and the humans were strengthened. A band of valiant Hebrew fleeing from another region in Israel joined with Matthias’ followers, and some of the disbanded army from Heaven came to unite with the two guardian angels. Kasakiel and Ragaziel were now at the head of a small but dedicated band of spiritual warriors, who were given the task of ensuring the success of the human fighters, despite their decision to take to the sword themselves.

The demons were kept in ignorance of the humans’ plans, and of the increased number of angels, therefore a week later when the soldiers of Antiochus again attempted to make quick work of the escapees they were met with an unexpected counterattack.

Following on the heels of that success, Matthias and his men toured the region, tearing the Greeks’ altars down, restoring the covenant to those whose faith had been wavering, and driving the invaders back wherever they were found.

When they returned to Modin in triumph, the human soliders fled. The demons resisted longer, but the forces of Heaven, lead by the priests’ two guardians, sent them scurrying back to Bethor and Legion.

For a full year the warriors of Matthias kept the Greeks at bay. Those were glorious months for the men of Israel, and they sang songs in the streets of the cities, likening the priest and his sons to Joshua, to David, to the judges of the former days. Yet Heaven's plan was truly best, and the success of the Jews was not without a cost. Joannan was badly wounded in battle some months after their first victory over Antiochus, and he was not expected to live. Matthias himself was greatly affected by this turn of events.

The thought of losing his firstborn, a sorrow nearly as keen as that of Jacob over Joseph, caused him to weaken at a rapid rate, and he had also sustained many wounds during the course of his campaign. Though he was not a very old man, at the close of that year a sickness overtook him from which he knew he would not recover. Joannan, on the other hand, did survive his wounds, but his father never lived to see that day.

When he knew his hour had come, Matthias called his four able sons to his bed and said to them, "Pride and rebuke do their work well, and the time of wrath and indignation; now therefore, my sons, be zealous for the law, and guard the covenant of our fathers with your lives. Remember the acts of our ancestors, the things they did in their time, and if you do likewise you also will receive great honor, and a lasting name.

"Was not Abraham found faithful when tempted, and his faith considered righteousness? Joseph, tried in distress, kept the commandments, and was made a lord of Egypt. Phineas was our father in Levi, and by his zeal he obtained this covenant of an everlasting priesthood. Joshua was made a judge in Israel, and Caleb received an inheritance for his good witness."

With these and other examples he reminded them of the great heritage they had obtained, and as his strength faded he said to them, "Be brave, my sons, and show yourselves to be men in guarding the law, for it is your glory. And now, I know that your brother Simon is a man of wisdom; give heed to his counsel and he will be as a father to you. Judah has been mighty and strong, even from the days of his youth. Let him be before your army, and fight the battle of our people.

"Add to your number those who observe the law, and avenge your people's wrongs against the heathen. Be careful always, to heed the commandments of the law." With that he gave them a final blessing, and then his life slipped away. He was buried in the place of his sanctuary, in the city of Modin.



"Hammer! Hammer!" the people chanted as they saw him ride up. Judah "the Hammer" Maccabee raised his hand in acknowledgement of his troops' praise. He turned his horse around and rode past his front line again, the sunlight playing off his armor and giving him the appearance of a giant, a divine hero. In his hand was the sword of Apollonius, the

spoil of a recent battle, one of the many he had waged against the various heathen kings and their armies.

Raising the weapon, a symbol of victory well known to all his men, Judah began to speak. He bellowed out his words, making sure that every soldier gathered there could hear him. “Prince Seron of Syria comes against us. He has heard of the warriors of Israel, and of our victories, and of our might and our courage. He had heard of our wars against those who would come into our borders with violence, and that our God has protected us in every battle.

“And now,” he said, after a brief pause, “this Seron seeks to make a name for himself among his countrymen. It is not for land, or for spoils that he fights; it is not for need or because we have wronged him that he comes against us. No, it is for pride that our Almighty despises, this is the reason he has left his home, and his wives, and his children, to draw the sword against us this day.

“Even now you see his forces along the horizon. I know your questions. I have heard you ask, ‘How can we, who are so few, defeat an army of that size? How can we, who have marched this far without stopping for food or rest, prevail against so strong a multitude?’ This is the answer I give to you this day, with Heaven and earth to witness: It is no difficult thing for a few to triumph over many, for to Heaven it is all one and the same to deliver us with a great or small band.”

Ragazial and Kasakiel looked at each other with hopeful expressions. They had been concerned that Judah’s successes over the enemies that had come against him would lead to a trust in his own might, rather than the protection that the angels had rendered them. Indeed, he had spoken little of IaHWeH lately except for the thanksgiving offered at the end of battle... but now that the odds seemed sharply against the smaller army of Israelites, Judah was laying hold of true faith, and comforting his men with words of trust and confidence.

He continued, “Victory in battle does not depend on the size of the host, but strength comes from Heaven. They come against us in their pride and iniquity, to destroy us, and *our* wives and *our* children, to leave us desolate; but we fight for our lives, and for our laws. Because of this Yahweh Himself will overcome them before our face; and as for you, FEAR NOT!”

As he concluded his speech, he raised his sword and charged directly over to the long line of assembled Syrians. His men, many of them stunned by his sudden departure, soon rallied and raced after him with shouts of war.

Judah did not precede them by very much, and soon the noise of conflict was heard above the soldiers, rising to the Throne of the Most High. The divine angels accompanied the warriors of Israel, inspiring mental blindness in the Syrians, exalting the Jewish warriors in their sight in order to intimidate them, and interrupting the lines of communication to render the invaders much less effective than they would otherwise have been. In addition

to this, the Cherubim and Principalities that were present formed a protective ring around the other angels, keeping the Syrians' demons away from those who were influencing the progress of the battle.

Kasakiel looked at the cloud of dark spirits that surrounded them, but he could not make out which of the many evil angels was the head of the assembly. He saw a few powerful spirits among the rank and file, but none he knew to have been placed at the head of any companies. Bethor, he assumed, was still with the Greek armies, and so he was not surprised at the fallen Principality's absence.

Soon the tide of the battle turned, and the Syrians began to retreat. Not content to let them escape, the Israelites pursued them, slaying many more as they went, and driving the survivors of Seron's company into the land of the Philistines. And the end of the fighting, the men of Israel returned to their homes in triumph, and many of the angels disbanded until the need for their presence should again be made known.



“Jerusalem!” Ragaziel said, a happy smile playing across his face. “It makes the most sense, of course,” he continued, “for it is not far from Emmaus.”

The Seraph was reacting to the information brought to them by Tahillael that they were to inspire the Jews to rebuild their forsaken spiritual capital. Ragaziel's order-brother had brought them news that Antiochus had finally decided that he had let the Israelites play long enough. He had grown weary of hearing the tales of Judah's exploits, and he did not like having his authority openly questioned and his troops turned away in shame.

At Bethor's prompting he had raised a huge army, paying for the troops out of the royal treasury. Realizing the need for a higher level of revenue, the king departed to Persia for the purpose of receiving tribute from this conquered nation, but in his place he left his relative Lysias in charge of his heir and, more significantly for the moment, a half of his army.

With the other half, Antiochus crossed the Euphrates to embark upon his fundraising campaign. The instructions he left with his regent were these, “Send my forces against Israel and completely destroy their strength. Finish off those refugees from Jerusalem, and the line of priests, and moreover bring foreigners and divide the land among them, so that the Jews will never again be able to assemble their men without opposition from every side.”

Unlike Antiochus himself, Lysias did not have the physique that would suggest a powerful warlord. A “nobleman” similar to what the stereotype would become in Europe in later centuries, this regent of the Greek kingdom was tall and elegant, almost effeminate in his mannerisms. Despite his appearance, however, Lysias was an

accomplished swordsman, and a capable military strategist. The first thing he did after his king's departure was to delegate authority to others.

Ptolemy, Nicanor and Gorgias, three of the king's trusted captains, were placed in direct command of the troops. Bethor had stayed with Lysias, sending another demon from the House of Greed to accompany Antiochus, but he did not have much work to do in planning the invasion of Israel. The regent of Greece had his own ideas about that, and they were as good as anything the evil spirits could devise.

When word came to the Israelite camp that the Greeks were moving in to Emmaus, and already beginning to capture Jews for the purpose of both weakening the country and promoting a slave trade, the angels were commissioned to inspire their next movements.

"We must rebuild Jerusalem," Judah told his council. "News comes that the refugees from Seron's failed attack have brought Philistines with them to join forces with Lysias' army. Jerusalem is in the ideal place for repelling their combined forces." The idea was met with great enthusiasm. "Let us restore the decayed estate of our people," they said to one another, "and let us fight for our people and our sanctuary."

Leaving a contingent to guard Modin, Judah and his best warriors journeyed to the site of their broken temple. Though the angels who traveled with them remembered well the sight, the rubble and human remains that lay scattered about dealt a great shock to those who had fled before the destruction had been completed. "Oh, daughter of Zion," Simon said, his eyes taking in sight after horrible sight, "we have much to do to restore you to your former beauty."

The brothers, particularly Simon and Judah, directed the labor of the Israelites. After a day of formal mourning, including a fast and the wearing of ashes, they did what they could to restore the defiled book of the law.

In due time, the harvests were brought in. The dwelling places were restored, and some men chose to dedicate themselves to the work entirely until the rebuilding of the temple should be complete, letting their hair and beards grow unchecked as a sign of their consecration. Soon the men, satisfied with their efforts in reestablishing a base of operations, began to give thought to the battle ahead.

When he knew the time was right, Judah arranged his warriors and they began to plan their campaign. Captains were appointed over groups of varying sizes, and those who did not wish to participate, or who were within a year of marriage were sent back to Modin according to the law of Moses. With those they had selected, Judah and Jonathan led the men near Emmaus to set up camp, and Simon remained in Jerusalem in charge of the continuing restoration.



“Gorgias is the weakest; he shall go first,” Bethor whispered to the war council in Emmaus. All three warlords knew this to be true, yet none voiced the shared knowledge. Instead, Ptolemy and Nicanor allowed their comrade the dignity of volunteering to strike first at the approaching band of Israelites, and he did not miss the hint.

“I shall crush them quickly,” he said to his two companions, knowing that this was an opportunity to prove himself. “I will take my entire force to ensure that none escape.” The others nodded gravely, not betraying their thoughts, for each knew that Gorgias was simply not about to take any chances, given the fame of the Maccabees who were leading the Jewish fighters. “And,” he said, putting on a great show of cunning, “I will attack them by night.”



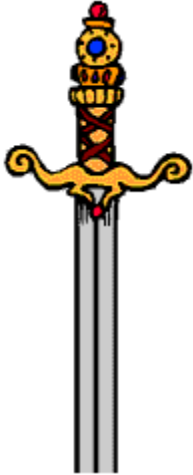
The angels guarding the Hebrews allowed the attack to take place almost entirely unannounced, as they were instructed by the watchers in Heaven. Shortly before day the forces of Israel found themselves routed from their camp without horses, largely without weapons or armor, and many without courage. Judah had received word of the assault from one of his closer spies, and he had just barely had enough time to evacuate his warriors, avoiding the confrontation with the thousand horsemen and five times as many footmen that were rushing upon their tents.

Only a few of the Israelites had managed to bring their weapons with them. Judah raised his sword, that taken from the warlord Apollonius, and addressed his men as he did before every battle. “Being outnumbered is becoming a standard event for you men! As you behold the sun rising, so will the glory return to this land when the invaders are defeated. You see them in the hills above us, six thousand to three, waiting to pour into this plain; but they will be brought lower than the valleys. Do not be afraid of their numbers, or their skill at war. Remember how our ancestors, all unarmed, were delivered at the Red Sea from the armies of Pharaoh when he pursued them. Now, therefore, let us cry to Heaven, that Yahweh will have mercy on us, and remember the covenant with our fathers, and destroy this host before us this very day. Let it be so, that all the heathen may know that there is One who delivers and saves Israel!”

Some of the men shouted their affirmation, particularly the Nazarites, whose hair had grown long with the passage of time. Like the long-haired Seraphim hovering invisibly above them, these warriors were committed, and would give their lives if need be in the cause to which they had been joined. One warrior in the front rank, a younger man, kept his eyes fixed on the blade in Judah’s hand. He saw the unflinching gaze, and walked over to the uncertain warrior.

“You think this weapon is my strength?” The soldier stepped back, unsure of how best to answer. Judah continued, “The sword of Apollonius is nothing. These arms of mine are nothing. The blades and horses that lie useless among our tents, or that have been

gathered by the Greeks, they are also nothing. If you want this weapon, take it!" He tossed it to the man, and turned toward the forces of Gorgias, who were even then poised to attack. "For our laws and for our people!" Judah roared, and ran up the hill to meet the Gentile army.



His actions inspired the Israelites. Their captain was unarmed, as were they, yet he was unafraid. The man who had received the sword from Judah dropped it to the ground, and he ran with his fellow soldiers to meet the challenge. "For our laws and for our people!" he echoed, his doubts and fear gone.

One thing that the Hebrews had been able to salvage during their escape was their collection of trumpets. The angels had seen to it that these were not forgotten in the confusion, and the army of Gorgias both saw and heard a fearsome sight. The unarmed yet valiant warriors of Israel ran full speed into the overconfident Greeks, the blasts of their victory already sounding. Although the invaders quickly prepared and went out to meet them, they had their shields and swords pulled away, and they were thrown down from their horses by the arms and zeal of those who were defending their homeland.

"They are unstoppable," some shouted. Others yelled, "They are crazy!" All fled.

Many were slain by the very weapons they thought to bear into battle, and others felt the sting of Hebrew swords as Judah's forces reclaimed the camp from which they had been driven. Down the other side of the mountains the Jews pursued the retreating Greek forces, and into Gazera, Azotus and Idumea where the descendants of Esau dwelt. When a full three thousand had been slain, a half of the invading force and the number of Israelite defenders, Judah had his trumpeters sound a call to return to their camp.

When his jubilant warriors were assembled before him, he said to them, "Do not be greedy for the spoils of war, we have another battle ahead of us. A great many of their army remains in these mountains, but let us stand now against them, and overcome them; then we will help ourselves to that which they leave behind." As he so spoke, one of his men approached him and offered him the sword of Apollonius, and he raised it above his head just as a regrouped contingent of Gorgias' army entered their view.

As the Hebrews became aware of their presence and turned toward them, the angels around them lifted their arms and bathed the Jewish forces in spiritual light. The physical eyes of the Greeks could not detect this operation, but suddenly the demons that had been accompanying them were driven back, and the humans' spirits failed. Seeing the host of Israel assembled and ready to fight, they said to themselves, "With no weapons they defeated us when we were twice as great! What shall we do now that there are swords in their hands?"

As a man the remnant of the Greek army fled from the mountains, not stopping until they were past the borders of Israel; then Judah and the warriors with him returned to their place with the spoils of war, and with songs of thanksgiving and praise.



Lysias was furious. Cursing at the news, he sent messengers to recall Ptolemy and Nicanor, telling them to return with what was left of Gorgias' forces, and the wounded warrior himself, who had escaped the conflict without mortal injury. So angry was he that he gave no heed to the whispers of Bethor's demons who sought to soothe his temper, for indeed the plan had gone as the demons wished. Bethor had sent the weakest of the captains first with his forces, in order to bring about a sense of security within the Hebrew camp; and his plan had then been to have Nicanor and Ptolemy move from Emmaus to Jerusalem and wipe the best of Israel's soldiers out at a single stroke.

"I have left him to his own devices too long," Bethor said to the messenger from Legion. "Nevertheless," he continued, "there may be some use yet in a combined attack, and if needs be we can always have this insolent regent replaced..." The demonic courier bowed and departed, leaving the evil Principality to plan his next steps.

As Bethor surveyed the combined forces of Greece, sixty-five thousand men strong, he said, "The war is just beginning."



Some months later, Bethor stared in shock as Judah's company, which had grown to ten thousand men in the interim, drove the vastly larger Greek army away. "Six and a half to one, and they still cannot gain the advantage!" he hissed.

He surveyed the destruction below him, and he scowled as he saw two divine angels approaching.

Ragaziel's melodious voice only served to make the words he was speaking more irritating to the angry demon. "Withdraw your men and your angels; IaHWeH has declared that His people will be restored in this land, and established above the forces of the Heathen forever."

"That is the declaration," Bethor acknowledged. "What shall surely be is another matter; we will see to it."

"How can you hope to prevail over the intent of the Almighty?" Kasakiel asked.

“You know well enough the weak link in the purposes of Heaven... unconsecrated men.” As he spoke, the demon indicated the forces of Israel chasing the Greek warriors away. “They are not all clean,” he said.

“Be that as it may,” Kasakiel replied, “the purposes of IaHWeH do not depend on the actions of men. They may cooperate to their blessing, or resist to their hurt, but in the end all things will be seen to have served the divine purpose.”

“So your piety compels you to speak,” Bethor muttered, “but we shall see about that.”

As the angels departed, their warning and promise delivered, the fallen angel turned to Abodael, a fallen Cherub under his command, and said, “There is, of course, a way to drive the protection of Elohim from His people. It will take time and careful planning, but it will be worth the effort, and... we have enough Gentiles to sacrifice in the process!”



In the peace that followed as Bethor forced Lysias to bide his time, the Hebrews used the opportunity wisely. They continued the restoration of their city, re-dedicating the sanctuary, rebuilding defiled altars, and reinstating the sacred services. Simon was put in charge of the priestly affairs, while Judah and Jonathan kept the borders of Israel, repelling such forces as would come up against the land, including the Ammonites and the descendants of Esau, who were made nervous for their own security when they heard that the Jews had rebuilt their temple and were strengthening their presence.

In addition, Judah and his brethren quelled the uprisings from within, removing the robbers and kidnapers from the pathways through the country. The angels assisted them in these matters, rejoicing in the continuing success of the humans, however they knew from word sent to them by Raziel that all was not as bright as it seemed.

“Lysias lies dormant,” the Covering Cherub had informed Kasakiel and Ragaziel. “This does not mean the battle is at an end. The forces that control him are working in concert with those leading the attacks of the other Gentiles. With these countries we must not yet interfere, but let things unfold as they will... but know this, that Judah and his family, for all their valor and might, will be almost as great a curse to Israel as they have been a blessing.”

When asked how this would come to pass, Raziel replied simply, “Keep your eyes open, and you will see.”



Judah and his brothers sat in a meeting, discussing how best to divide their forces. “Timotheus of Gala’ad besieges our people in Dathema, and letters from Galilee tell us that the Gentiles round about them have formed a confederacy against them. This is what we will do,” Judah said, looking over the crude map he had drawn. “Simon, leave Joseph of Zacharias’ house in your office as priest, and we will leave Azarias to guard the city. You choose out men from among our army and then go forth to Galilee. Jonathan and I will take the remaining soldiers and go after the larger threat by Timotheus.”

Simon chose three thousand warriors, including his brother Eleazar, leaving Judah and Jonathan with eight thousand. After leaving instructions with Joseph they departed northward for the region of Galilee. The two other brothers crossed the Jordan into the land of the Nabateans, where they were received peacefully, and obtained information about the movements of Timotheus’ warriors in the area.

Thus armed with an accurate assessment of the heathen forces and their distribution, Judah and his men made rapid, effective attacks on the cities that had been taken by the Gentiles, and reclaimed one settlement after another. When the men of Timotheus heard what was being done in their strongholds, the fear of Judah and his soldiers came upon them; they would flee at their approach, often learning of their peril too late to beat a casualty-free retreat.

When word reached Timotheus himself, he consolidated his remaining forces into one place, and prepared to make a calculated assault on Israel’s defenders. Judah’s spies had even more troubling news upon their return from their duties. “Their men are greater in number than we had been told by the Nabateans. They must have added more men. Beside this, they have also hired Arabian mercenaries to increase their strength. Even now they prepare to march on us, therefore let us go out quickly to meet them.”

Judah smiled as he recognized the speaker. “What a change there is in you, since the day I handed you my sword,” he said to the soldier. “But you have spoken wisely, Yahweh has surely given them into our hand.”

When Timotheus saw the Israelites approaching them from the direction of the brook, he said to his captains, “We have heard of Judah’s zeal, and Israel’s fame in battle, that even unarmed they will race into combat, and win. It is late in the day; if, therefore, they camp beyond the river tonight, we will go over and strike at them before the sun rises but, if they move quickly against us while there is yet light in the sky, we will not be able to stand against them.”

His captains looked one to another with contemptuous expressions. Timotheus was a capable commander, but such statements of doubt and uncertainty were not unknown to come from his lips. Had they the eyes to see, those under his command would have beheld a demon from the Great House of Lucifer, the House of Fear, always at their superior’s side. Yet while the demon was having sport with his victim’s emotions, he and Bethor had forged a solemn pact, and he was not about to let Timotheus’ talents go to waste. They would fight.

Of course, Kasakiel knew the state of Timotheus' mind, and when Judah and his men reached the bank of the river, he silently urged his charge forward to make the next move. Inspired by holy zeal and the words of his spy, Judah needed no convincing and, leaving a few men to set up camp, he led his warriors over the water, and into the heathen assembly at Raphon.

As Timotheus had unwittingly prophesied, his army held out for a short time and then cast their weapons away and ran. Judah and his soldiers slammed into the heathen ranks then followed the retreating army to Carnaim, destroying buildings and incinerating the temple that was there. They gathered new soldiers from the Israelites in the region and continued their pursuit unto Ephron, which closed its gate against them and blocked them off from maintaining their rout. When Judah's men were not allowed to pass through the city, they besieged it and assaulted it continually until it fell into their power.

The soldiers poured into the city like a flood, and then continued through it after Timotheus' men.

Simon and Eleazar, for their part, were having success in their battles also, taking few casualties, but inflicting great damage on the combined forces they were facing.

All was not so pleasant back in Jerusalem. Joseph and Azarias, who had been left in charge of the garrison, heard the continued reports coming back to them from both pairs of brothers, and they grew jealous of the praise being heaped upon the sons of Matthias. "Are we less Israelite than these men?" they asked. "Are we less zealous for our homeland, or less able to fight?" Joseph said to his partner, "The remnant of Gorgias' army is stationed nearby, at Jamnia. Let us go after him and finish that task, which Judah has left undone, and so make a name for ourselves."

"There will be no protection offered to these men," Tahillael said to Ragaziel, who had been left to watch over those remaining in the city.

"I did not think there would be," the Seraph said sadly, sending a whisper to Kasakiel about the events unfolding before him. Sure enough, because of the disobedience and pride of the men left in charge of the garrison, Gorgias' men, eager to exact their revenge on the Israelites, overthrew those who went up against them. Two thousand Hebrew soldiers were slain, and the ringleaders were pursued to the borders of Judea. Whether they were slain there or not, they were never again seen in Jerusalem.

Fortunately, Gorgias was not able to press his advantage and retake Israel's capital. Furthermore, Judah and Jonathan returned shortly thereafter, greeted by his people with great joy. When Simon and Eleazar joined them, they once again moved against the Idumeans, and then, achieving success there, moved northward against the Philistines.

From time to time, independent groups of Israelites would attempt to fight the battle for their homeland. The angels were given no commission to lend aid to these various contingents, however, and their defenses were often broken, their brief campaigns ending

in defeat. “Indeed,” lamented Kasakiel, “they weaken the armies of Judah by their absence, and inspire the heathen to greater courage when they see the people of IaHWeH fall before them.” Those who knew that the blessing of the Most High rested on the family of Matthias offered their men as soldiers, to join in unity with the chosen ones. In addition, those who were oppressed by the Gentiles at the borders would send word of their need, and would receive rapid and effective aid against their enemies.



The peace was not to last because Antiochus, traveling through the Persian cities, continued to get reports of the heathen falling before Israel, which he had come to despise. In addition, despite Lysias’ best efforts, news reached the king that his own forces had been repelled despite a great disparity in the number of troops. This news reached him just as he himself had been forced to flee to Babylon after a crushing defeat when his raid on Elymais was repelled. He had thought to take great spoils from this wealthy land, but the people of the city were no fools. A part of their great wealth had been spent, not in luxury, but in ensuring that they had a mighty cadre of defenders, and Antiochus’ itinerant army had proven no match for the Persians.

Antiochus flew into a rage worthy of the city in which he had found refuge and, after sickening himself by both indulgence and anxiety, he died there in Babylon. Bethor’s assisting demon had not let the event pass without careful exploitation, however. Knowing that his master was seeking a way to remove the increasingly troublesome Lysias, he inspired Antiochus to appoint, before his death, another regent to ensure his son’s success on the throne. Philip, one of the king’s most trusted advisors, was made governor of Antiochus’ forces, given all authority and the royal paraphernalia, and charged to raise Antiochus’s son (Antiochus Eupator) to the throne upon his return to the city of Antioch.



While all this was going on, Judah was dealing with some internal conflict of his own. A priest of the house of Levi, whose name was Alcimus, was among those who had attempted to make a name for himself by participating in a rebellion against the heathen during the absence of Judah and Simon.

Though he had survived where others had fallen, he remained a troublemaker in Jerusalem until, finally making his opposition to Judah known, he personally led some of the other dissatisfied Israelites in campaigns against the Gentiles. As they had so many times before, these unsanctioned conflicts ended in defeat for the Jews, and on an occasion when Judah and his brothers were away from Jerusalem the angry heathen warriors succeeded in breaking into the city’s newly reinforced defenses, and besieging

their troublers' ringleaders in the sanctuary. Alcimus, however, had slipped away, and he went into hiding along with a few of his most trusted associates to see what would happen next.

What happened next was that the returning warriors of Israel became furious when they saw Jerusalem, so newly refreshed, invaded and the very sanctuary under siege. Having no way to strike at their enemies without doing great damage themselves, they decided to set up camp around the city and prevent the invaders from leaving. It was a siege within a siege.

Some of the Gentiles escaped the outer ring of Hebrews, however, and turned toward Antioch to seek the assistance of the new king. When Alcimus saw them he approached them in friendship, concealing the fact that he had been the very one who had initially provoked them to retaliate against Jerusalem. "Men of valor," he said to them, "do not despise me, though I am a Hebrew. I and my men have no part with the "Hammer" of the Gentiles. Accept us into your company, and we will fight with you against those who have spoiled our inheritance with their pride and foolishness."

Alcimus looked the men over and said, "I ask only one thing in return... an audience with King Eupator when we arrive at Antioch."



"What are those things?" one awe-struck warrior asked his fellow, pointing to the dark shapes on the horizon.

"Those are elephants," the more experienced soldier said absently, more concerned with the size of the total force coming up against them. Each elephant bore fighters upon it but, more significantly, small armies surrounded every beast. Soon the sound of the march could be heard distinctly, as over a hundred and twenty thousand souls advanced on Israel, to crush it according to Eupator's decree.

Demons traveled with the men and their animals. Greeks and Arabians, Elephants and horses, all were raised by the funds and fear of Greece, and sent to put an end to what the son of Antiochus considered an unnecessary thorn in his newly regal side. "The time has come," the wicked spirits said to each other in excited tones, echoing the words of Bethor when he had presided over the king's meeting with the escapees.

As for Lysias, he and Eupator himself commanded the army. Bethor was still trying to decide whether the nobleman was worth the price of his trouble. The one appointed to care for Eupator until he was fit to command Greece himself was not easily manipulated by the fallen angels, and the dark Principality had an ongoing internal debate as to which would make the better puppet: Lysias, or Philip who was even now returning from Persia.

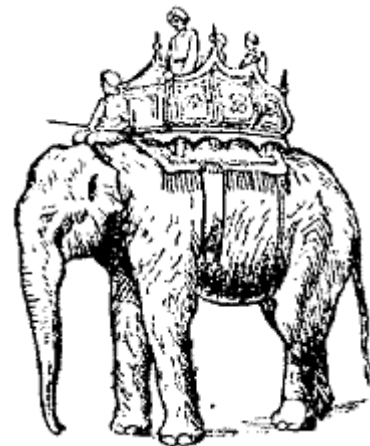
Although he had never seen these huge creatures before, Judah showed no fear. ‘For our laws and the faith of our fathers!’ he cried as he led his badly outnumbered retinue into battle. The messengers of Heaven were with them, however, and soon the advancing army began to take heavy losses.

Simon and Eleazar were on the rightmost part of Israel’s army. The younger of the brothers looked out over the valley and saw that one elephant’s decorations were more ornate than the others. The soldiers that marched around it seemed more imposing, and the wooden structure that housed the animal’s riders was higher and more fortified than all the others.

Without consulting his brother, Eleazar drew his sword and started to run toward the tremendous beast. “Where are you going?” Simon shouted after him.

“To end the war!” his brother shouted back.

“No, you fool!” Simon yelled. “That is not Eupator! That is merely the chief of the Kshatriya!” Eleazar was already out of earshot, however, and Simon had no choice but to race off after him, hoping to intercept him before he risked his life unnecessarily. The commander of the forces hired from India would undoubtedly be a worthy target to remove, but it would not end the conflict, and Simon did not consider the benefit worth his brother’s impulsive attack.



Eleazar ran directly into the myriad surrounding the elephant. His sword spun from side to side, parrying attacks and striking down the invaders. “Protect him,” Kasakiel instructed two nearby angels, and the ministering spirits were instantly at the human’s side. As they drew closer to the center of the advancing faction, however, the divine warriors found themselves suddenly blocked by a wall of spiritual darkness. “Alcimus!” one of the angels said to the other. “He must be with the riders!”

Unable to be of further service to Eleazar, the pair quickly returned to Kasakiel and reported what they had encountered. “The fallen priest,” he said. “It is not to be wondered at that he would travel with the most ornate of the beasts. Because he has rejected light so thoroughly, we cannot influence the events around him unless commissioned to do so. Go, then,” he said to the the pair of angels, “get as close as you can, and await your opportunity.”

Eleazar had succeeded in carving his way right up to the elephant’s location, leaving behind him a wake of injured or dead bodies. Having done so, he slashed at the beast’s leg, causing it to rear up, and then he ducked under the massive creature and thrust upward with his sword, penetrating the underbelly and piercing its organs.

With an echoing cry the elephant fell over, throwing its riders, including the renegade Levite, to the ground. As Alcimus' head struck the earth and he fell into unconsciousness, the holy angels were able to approach the scene. It was too late for Eleazar, however, as the massive animal had landed on the young warrior, killing him instantly.

Simon arrived in time to witness the calamity, but was unable to stop it from unfolding. When he saw his brother die, and the advance of the magnificent army on every side, his will to continue the battle departed, and he had his attendant sound a retreat.

Judah, on the left flank, heard the trumpet blasts signaling a withdrawal of the Israelite forces. He gave voice to several angry expressions, but he knew that he would not be able to stand against the thousands upon thousands of opponents with half of his men fleeing from battle. He did what he knew he had to do, and had his own men follow Simon's troops off of the battlefield.

Soon, Judah and his soldiers were trapped within Jerusalem's walls, those who had been shut in by the Israelites having long since escaped. The Greeks lost no time establishing a camp around the city, and for many days the armies of Eupator kept the Jewish warriors pinned within their sanctuary; but the providence of Heaven ensured that this siege would not last.

According to the Law of Moses, every seven years the land was to lie uncultivated. This was to be a Sabbath of rest for the fields, and the Israelites were instructed to live off of the stored food from the harvests of the previous years. It had so come to pass that this was one of those Sabbatical years, and so the majority of the food in Judea was stored in the cities, and not in the countryside surrounding them. Soon the armies of Eupator and Lysias were facing famine conditions made all the more acute by their far greater numbers than those whom they were besieging. The supplies they had obtained from their occupation of the nearby city of Bethsura were being exhausted, and the soldiers began to seriously consider forsaking the campaign and returning to their sustenance in Antioch.

"We have word that Philip, your father's friend, has returned from Persia with instructions to remove me as your guardian," Lysias said in counsel with Eupator. "I know his mind, my king, and I am certain he means to cease power for himself. He was loyal to your father as long as he sat on the throne, but his ambition will not allow him to step aside once you are of age to hold the reigns of Greece alone."

The young monarch nodded gravely knowing that, for all his faults, Lysias had no desire to be a figurehead. His relative may have desired to pull some of the kingdom's strings, but Eupator knew that he was wise enough to understand the way public loyalty worked, and he was safe as long as he gave his regent the freedom to do as he wished. "Better the guardian I know, than the one I do not," he said. "What shall we do?"

"Let my king hear this plan. Philip is now in Antioch, where we have supplies aplenty. Let us make peace with the Hebrews, for the king knows that we are at war only because we have imposed our laws on them, and forbidden them the practice of their customs. I

do not believe they will make trouble for us as long as they are left in peace.” At these words Eupator’s face darkened with anger, unwilling to so easily surrender his grudge.

“Let my lord’s servant finish,” Lysias said quickly. “We will not tell Philip that we have made peace, but send messengers to convince him that we are continuing the siege, and are in need of more troops and supplies. When he sends these, we will occupy Jerusalem for a time in friendship and rest our men, asking sustenance also from the Hebrews. Then, when we are ready, we will return to Antioch in force, and prevent those who are loyal to Philip from taking command.”

“And the Jews?” Eupator asked.

“When we have dealt with Antioch,” Lysias said, “we will have command of both our army here, and your father’s men whose loyalty we will secure after Philip’s death.”

“A wise plan,” the young king conceded.

“Too clever for his own good,” Bethor added, though he was heard only by the angels around him. “Philip, Lysias... I will get rid of them both!”



Naturally, Judah was suspicious of the messenger’s terms of peace. “It must be a trick,” he said to his brothers Joannan, Simon, and Jonathan. The eldest brother, having partially recovered from his injuries of the previous years, was unable to participate directly in combat. He was made a captain of some of the troops nonetheless, because of his ability to plan well. He now offered his thoughts on the situation facing their soldiers.

“Lysias is a violent man, from the reports I have heard of him,” he said, “but he is not known to be an oath breaker. If he wishes to offer a season of peace, I believe we can accept without danger. I do not doubt that he will make another attempt to conquer Israel, and probably a better planned one, but at least we will live to face it. If the Greek army obtains supplies they can outlast us, and that will surely be the end of us.”

The others agreed, and even Judah was eventually persuaded, but he was troubled by the decision. The invisible witnesses in the room were also troubled. “Joannan has spoken rightly of Lysias,” Ragaziel said. “Something is still not right here, though. I know he is concerned more with Philip than the Hebrews at the moment, but I cannot imagine that Bethor would let such an opportunity to destroy the sons of Matthias pass by untaken.”

“I agree it could be dangerous,” Kasakiel said. “We have assurance that the line of Matthias will not end here, at least. They will continue to fight the wars of Israel after this siege is broken.”

“So many battles!” Ragaziel lamented. “The destruction of Jerusalem has opened gate to continuous violence. Oh that the ancients had been ardent in their faith, and zealous for the covenant of IaHWeH, then there would have been less pieces to put together in these dark times.”

“Until the time of the end,” Kasakiel quoted a messenger sent to a prophet centuries before. “There is along road ahead of humanity, and the times will get darker still.”

What neither the Hebrews nor the divine angels had predicted was the depth of Eupator’s hostility toward the Jews. When the oaths had been taken and peace was about to be established, the young king looked around at the buildings and sanctuary within Jerusalem’s walls, and Bethor, quick to sense the fury that enveloped the youth, seized the stream of his thoughts.

As Judah and his brethren watched in horror, Eupator raised his voice and said, “Men, tear down the wall!” The Greek soldiers and princes moved to do the will of their king, but Lysias stood there in almost as much surprise as those whose city was being rendered defenseless.

He looked over at the princes of the Jews, and his eyes met Judah’s. He had no words to say, but only shook his head with genuine regret. He had no love for the Hebrews, and had indeed expected to lead his people’s army to victory over the upstarts, but he was a man of his word, and he was disappointed in Eupator’s treachery. Judah gave his enemy a solemn nod, acknowledging that he understood this was no part of Lysias’ plan. Then he and his brethren made good their escape, lest the Greek king decide that the walls were not enough to satisfy his vengeance.

“Come, Lysias,” the king said, walking past him. “We have affairs to attend in Antioch.” There was new authority in his voice, but the spirit within him was one that the confused regent should have recognized, for the demon possessing the young man was no stranger to his counsels. Eupator’s confidence, as it turned out, would be extremely short-lived.



The part of Lysias’ plan that was actually followed went perfectly. Philip was overthrown, and the Greek army incorporated almost the full number of Antiochus’ returning troops. Bethor’s superiors in the demonic hierarchy were not content, however, and they had been preparing another for the throne of Greece. The Principality received the news with no sorrow for the loss of Lysias; on the other hand, he was somewhat disappointed at the plot against his new host. Eupator, he believed, had potential.

Bethor was not one to go against the wishes of his Ba’alim, however, and he cooperated without complaint when Demetrius, a Seleucid nobleman trained in the expanding empire of Rome, returned to his land with a small but elite band of fighters. His second in

command, a huge warrior named Bacchides, had already distinguished himself in various conflicts, and together he and Demetrius had determined to seize power over the land of their ancestors, and to rule the country themselves. The demons sent from the wicked spirit Chay'il had been instrumental in the formulation of their plans, but in the character of Demetrius they had found plenty of raw material with which to work.

As Greeks, the band of fighters had no real problems getting past the armed guards of Eupator's palace. They told all whom they encountered that they had come forth to pledge their loyalty to the young monarch, and none had any reason to disbelieve them. Upon being admitted to an audience with the king, however, they quickly slew the royal guards, and captured the princes who stood in attendance by the throne.

Ignoring his pleas, Bacchides himself beheaded Eupator, and he had Lysias dragged away to be executed by his men. The regent of Greece, stoic to the end, gave no protest, but accepted his fate as the will of his gods.

"Swear your loyalty to me," Demetrius demanded of the princes, entering the throne room after Eupator had been slain and his body removed. "My men are scattered throughout Antioch, and at a word from me they will slaughter your families, for we know every one of you by name."



Alcimus lost no time in ingratiating himself with the new king of Greece. He had gone back to Antioch with the host of Eupator, and he with the other renegades was awaiting the opportunity to return to their homeland with power. "This will not do," the evil Levite said to his men. "We must ensure that Demetrius will continue the Greek campaign against Judah's men, or we will never have power in Israel." The first part of that plan was precisely what Bethor had in mind.

"My king," Alcimus said to Demetrius, "we are Hebrews from the land of Israel. We have been driven out of our country by some of our own brethren, who are desiring to make uprisings against the rule of your people. My men and I, for our part, have accepted your dominion over the land of our inheritance as the will of our God, but Judah whom they call Maccabee has slain all those of your countrymen sent against him, and we ourselves were made exiles by our resistance to his ways.

"Let my lord now send a trusted soldier back with us, and we will show him the havok this Judah has made among your servants in the king's land, and let him punish them and all those who are allied with them."

Bethor's carefully orchestrated meeting went as he had determined, and soon the king sent Bacchides himself to deal with the potential rebellion of which Alcimus had warned him.

This time, Judah and his brethren paid no attention to the promises of peace the Greeks now presented. “We have learned our lesson the last time,” Simon wrote back, sending the message with the courier. “Withdraw your army from within our borders, and we will have peace.”

Some men from other regions in Israel, however, who did not know the part that Alcimus had with the Greeks, believed the words of the man from the respected tribe of Levi. “He is one of us,” they said, “He will keep his word.” In one day, all those who received Alcimus and the Greeks in peace were slain.

“The men of Judah should not trouble you further,” Bacchides said, when they had slain many of the warriors who were aiding the Israelites. “Go up to Jerusalem and receive there the high priesthood. I will leave with you warriors to ensure that you are not troubled by insurgencies, but I myself will return to Demetrius in Antioch.”

Bacchides had underestimated Judah’s determination, however. Although cast out from Jerusalem, he and his men were more committed than ever to wiping their land clean of foreigners, and destroying those from within their own country who had betrayed the covenant of the Almighty. The angels were sent to aid them and, taking an active role in the battles being fought, ensured that Judah and his brethren had a season of success in destroying Alcimus’ followers from the various cities.

Jerusalem itself was still out of their reach, but Alcimus was not blind to the increasing power that his enemies were obtaining. Judah stirred the population with powerful speeches, and inspired the loyalty of ever increasing numbers of troops. “They will soon be able to overrun the city,” Alcimus said to the Greek warriors who were stationed to guard him. “Send messengers to Demetrius, and let him know that the rebellion of which I warned him is about to begin, and Jerusalem will be the first of the king’s strongholds in Israel to fall, if this is allowed to continue a moment longer!”

Gorgias’ former confederate Nicanor had easily transferred his loyalty to the new king. He had not forgotten his experiences in Israel either, and when he heard of Alcimus’ request, he volunteered to personally lead the assault on Judah’s forces. “This has gone on long enough,” he said to the king. “My men and I know these rebels, and we will make them sorry they ever thought to stand against the dominance of the Greek kingdom.”

Bethor’s thoughts echoed Nicanor’s – this battle for Israel had taken far too much of the demon’s time. The priestly line, he thought to himself, should have been vanquished long ago, leaving the people of IaHWeH without arbiters of the Covenant. “You will go with them,” he said to Abodael, “and make sure that there are no more mistakes made.” The Cherub bowed and departed with Nicanor’s forces.

Tahillael said to the two angels in his presence, “The demons and humans are not the only ones who wish these conflicts to end. Be on your watch, the next two battles will be key to much. We are sending a larger host to stand with you for Israel against the fallen

spirits' plans. Bethor had sent Abodael and his underlings to ensure Nicanor's success. You will see to it that this attempt fails."



When Nicanor entered into Israel, he quickly made his true policy known. His first stop was Jerusalem, where Alcimus attempted to win his favor by showing him that pagan sacrifices were being offered up in tandem with the sacrifices for IaHWeH. The Greek warlord responded with scorn.

"You men of Israel have no courage," he said to a surprised Alcimus. "Had you fought against us, you would have been slain, but at least you would have died as men, and not as cowering animals." With that he grabbed the high priest, who was too stunned to resist, and turned him about to face his people. "This is your spiritual leader!" Nicanor said with a laugh. "See how he offers up praise to Zeus and your own God on parallel altars. Is this the faith of Israel? Is this the strength of Abraham your father?"

Abodael was thoroughly enjoying taunting Israel and its angels by means of his human associate. The guardian spirits of Jerusalem said nothing as the shamed Alcimus fled the city to make his complaint known to Bacchides and Demetrius. Nicanor watched him go with contempt. "The king knows I have no love for Jews," he said to the fearful priests who remained. "Let him tell them what I have done; when they see my success, they will know that they need not have formed any alliance with Israel, and this city will fall again before the power of Greece."

The warlord marched his troops out of Jerusalem, and onward to put an end to the sons of Matthias.

Ragaziel and Kasakiel did as they were instructed, however, alerting Judah to yet another false plea for peace. The Israelites entered into open conflict with Nicanor when he approached them, offering up prayers for deliverance from their foes. Their prayers were heard and, although faced once again with greater numbers, the Hebrews prevailed over the Greeks and Nicanor himself was slain in battle. Abodael was defeated by Kasakiel above the fighting humans, and when he was able he returned to Bethor in disgrace, only to be sent by the livid Principality back to Chay'il for further reward.



Judah looked at his brothers and noted the concern on their faces. "I know you have your reservations," he said, addressing Simon specifically, "but the defeat of Nicanor is only going to stir their anger further, and you saw what happens when the army of Greece marches on us with intent... you, Simon, were there when our brother Eleazar fell."

“I still do not like it,” Simon replied. “We have trusted in Yahweh from the beginning of our conflicts, and He has not failed us. I know the death of our brother was a hard blow, and not the least to myself, but seeking the aid of Rome for protection and vengeance goes against everything our father would have wanted!”

Joannan agreed with Simon. “When our ancestors made leagues with the nations round about, did it not always end in disaster? You are impulsive, Judah; Simon was given to you as a counselor, and I advise you also to listen to what he has said.”

Jonathan, however, sided with Judah. “We sounded a retreat before the forces of Lysias and Eupator. This was even before Demetrius took over Greece, and he is no boy king. If the God of our fathers wanted us to stand alone against the invaders, why did He not give us victory over Eupator?”

“That was my fault,” Simon said sharply, standing up. “I sounded the retreat when Eleazar fell. I feared destruction when I saw the vast armies of the heathen. Do not blame the Almighty of Israel for the weakness of this servant.”

“Be that as it may,” Judah said, asserting himself, “our father placed me at the head of our military decisions. The people are loyal to my word, and Yahweh has made it so. John of the house of Accos and Jason, the son of our brother Eleazar, are prepared to take letters of alliance to the Roman senate, and with their aid we can finally put an end to all this fighting.”

Simon sighed and sat back down. “Brother, you decided to do this long before you called this meeting. I cannot dissuade you. But I tell you this, when I saw Eleazar streaking off so merrily to ‘end the war’ by striking down that elephant, I shouted for him to stop. I fear my words would echo as empty now as they did then.”

“Your concerns have been noted,” Judah said, betraying some impatience with his tone. “I will send the message.”

The angels, of course, were horrified. “What shall be the end of this?” Ragaziel asked, his words falling as mournful notes, as they did the day he beheld the ruins of Jerusalem. “How our hands shall be tied to protect them.”

He and Kasakiel followed the two messengers sent from Israel as they embarked upon their journey to Rome. “This is not the end of all things,” Kasakiel assured his fellow angel. “There are many among the Hebrews who resist this idea. To be sure, they are happy for the protection this will bring, but I am certain IaHWeH will have us preserve them until the time is right.”

“We will certainly be able to stand guard over Simon and Joannan for now,” the Seraph said, “but calling on the heathen for defense is but a step away from full apostasy. How can these men avoid the calamity that comes even now?”

“IaHWeH will not let His nation go so easily,” Kasakiel said, and then he reminded the Seraph, “El Michael has promised that the Sacrifice will be sent to these people in due time. Calamity is sure to follow these actions, but the stroke will not be deadly.”

“It will be as you say,” Ragaziel said thoughtfully, “but what a mess to behold.”

Upon the return of the messengers to Israel, Jason opened the scroll that the senate had drafted, and he read in the hearing of all of Israel’s leaders.

Good success be to the Romans, and to the people of the Jews, by sea and by land for ever; the sword also and enemy be far from them.

If there come first any war upon the Romans or any of their confederates throughout all their dominion, the people of the Jews shall help them, as the time shall be appointed, with all their heart; neither shall they give any thing unto them that make war upon them, or aid them with victuals, weapons, money or ships, as it hath seemed good unto the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants without taking anything therefore.

In the same manner also, if war come first upon the nation of the Jews, the Romans shall help them with all their heart, according as the time shall be appointed them; neither shall victuals be given to them that take part against them, or weapons, or money, or ships, as it hath seemed good to the Romans; but they shall keep their covenants, and that without deceit.

Howbeit if hereafter the one party or the other shall think meet to add or diminish anything, they may do it at their pleasures, and whatsoever they shall add or take away shall be ratified.

And as touching the evils that king Demetrius doeth to the Jews, we have written unto him, saying, ‘Wherefore has thou made thy yoke heavy upon our friends and confederates the Jews? If therefore they complain any more against thee, we will do them justice, and fight with thee by sea and land.’”

Demetrius did indeed receive this warning yet, still smarting from the destruction of Nicanor’s forces, he decided instead (at the inspiration of Bethor) to quickly move against the Jews with all his might, to destroy them before the Romans would be able to come to their aid.

Bethor turned to his demons after moving Demetrius’ heart against the Jews, and said, “The time of the dominion of Greece draws to a close. Our own oracles have seen it, and Rome is a much more useful tool in any case. To be sure, when Rome rises against the Greeks we will not take any pains to preserve them, but Demetrius will do us one last favor before the sun sets on his kingdom. The line of priests must fall!”



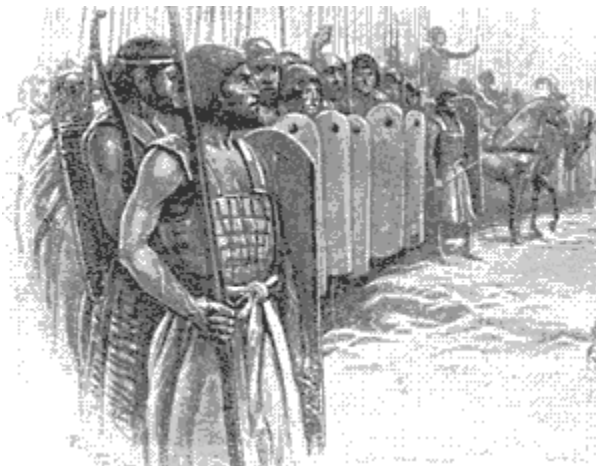
Alcimus was there with Bacchides at the head of the marching army. The elephants were back, and with them traveled more warriors than there had been the last time. These encamped on the borders of Israel, while twenty thousand of Greece's elite warriors, along with two thousand of its finest horsemen, formed the initial strike force. Above them, Bethor literally sparkled with rage, the spiritual lightning commanded by the fallen Principality creating an impressive display at the head of his ranks.

"There shall be no more jesting," he said, loudly enough to be heard by the angels with Israel. "There shall be no more victories for Judah of the house of Matthias! We know the league he has made with our vessels in Rome, and the shadow of your wings will fail him! You, shamed angels, will not interfere; if any approach me they will know why men offer sacrifices to me as *Zeus Astrapaios!*"

Zeus of the Lightning, as he had named himself, surged forward to pave the way for his human warriors. The soldiers of Israel were immediately struck with a great fear, an emotion rarely felt among them at the onset of a battle. "Men of Israel!" Judah cried to them, "We have faced greater armies before. Stand your ground for our laws, and for the covenant of our fathers!"

Many would not hear him, however, and the angels stood by, unable to reach their hearts. Soon, of the three thousand men that had pitched camp with Judah in Elesia, only eight hundred remained, and these were sorely pressed to join their fleeing comrades.

The three sons of Matthias who were present at the battle regarded each other with anxiety, but Judah turned to his men and said, "Let us arise and go up against our enemies, so that we can give them battle."



"Let us save ourselves," came back an answering cry. "We will never be able to stand against them. Let us gather our brethren, and return with our full number."

"Cowards!" Judah roared. "Has Yahweh need of numbers to give His people victory?"

Simon grimaced at these words, for had Judah consistently held to this belief they would not now be allied to a Roman army, much too far away to lend them any aid.

Exhaling in fearful reservation Simon mounted his horse, and he and Jonathan rode to separate flanks to prepare the attack.

“The Almighty forbid me that I should flee this battle. If our time has come to fall, let us die manfully for our brethren, and not stain our honor with treacherous fear.” As Judah said those words, the army of Bacchides began to advance. “To battle!” shouted the Hammer, and rode forward as he had so many times before.

In the air above, Kasakiel and Ragaziel soared toward Bethor. They knew they could not directly protect the humans below them, due to the alliance they had forged with Rome, but they believed that if they could prevent the demons from having too much influence on the course of the battle, they could minimize the damage sustained by the Israelites.

As the other angels kept the fallen spirits occupied, the Seraph and the Virtue approached the Principality, whose smile betrayed no fear of their aggression. “You two have annoyed me long enough,” he said to them, drawing his sword.

As Bethor’s blade cleared its sheath, the air itself seemed to bend and darken as black and purple flames began to pulse from hilt to tip like an evil heartbeat. Kasakiel was the first to test his skill, and swung his own burning kherev forward in a powerful two-handed stroke.

The dark angel slipped below the swing, and responded with a swipe of his own. Kasakiel’s long veil vanished, however, and a shield appeared in his left hand which he used to turn the blow aside. Bethor’s next attack he blocked with his blade, and used his shield to push him back, toward the Seraph behind him.

Bethor turned and met Ragaziel’s sword with his own, but he was unable to press any kind of advantage, for the Seraph’s six wings formed a moving shield around his body, preventing the demon from making any hits. “You cannot stand against me,” the divine angel said confidently, his voice like the sound of a trumpet. “Retreat with your demons, and leave the battle to the men.”

Bethor gave his wings a powerful flap, and rose quickly above his opponents. “Not after waiting all this time!” he said, and discharged a blast of lightning at the Seraph.

Ragaziel evaded the attack, but Bethor whirled around and headed back to his demonic host. As the two holy warriors watched, several of the demons that Bethor flew past stopped fighting, and began to follow him.

“Hashmallim,” Kasakiel said thoughtfully. The Dominions formed a circle around Bethor, and they themselves were surrounded by the host of demons that were not actively engaged in combat. Soon it became apparent what the fallen angels were up to.

The Hashmallim began to gather moisture from the air, and to draw clouds from other regions. Soon, although the battle had begun on a clear day, the sky became overcast, and thunder was heard above the clash of swords. Bethor gave a hearty laugh and flew up into the clouds. Although only spiritual lightning had thus far attended the angel, the Principality began to manifest his power in a way that the humans below could see.

Within a few moments of Bethor's departure bolt after bolt of lightning began to fall, most of them striking the ground within the Israelite ranks. "Praise be to Zeus!" yelled the Greeks who were aware of the effect of the lightning, banging their swords against their shields.

"We have to get through those Hashmallim," Kasakiel said to his partner, and they silently summoned more angels to assist them.

On the ground, Judah was too far forward to pay much heed to the electrical attacks. He surveyed the enemy forces and saw that Bacchides their leader was on the right side of the invading force. "Men, to me!" he shouted, and went forward to confront him. He never got there.

The left side of the Greek army saw that Judah has overextended himself, separating too far from his troops, and they swung around to cut his retreat off. Soon Judah and a few of his soldiers were pinned between two walls of Gentile warriors; and Bacchides, seeing his enemy's peril, made no move to engage the captain of the Jewish host himself. He would let his men have some sport.

Sport they had, but it was a dangerous game. Judah realized that he had no way to get back to his main force, and he determined that, if he was to die, he would take as many of his homeland's invaders with him. He fought like a lion, and he took more men to the ground after he was stripped of his horse and shield.

One by one the Hashmallim fell to the angels assembled by Kasakiel and Ragaziel. Soon Bethor was left without protectors, and he slipped out of his cloud, discontinuing the lightning assault. "Let it end, then," he said, drawing his sword again.

As the battle on the ground raged on, so did that in the sky. The angels kept the demons from communicating well with the Greek soldiers, and from driving them into a frenzy. The distracted spirits were doing all they could to resist the divine attacks, but they were losing fighters at a faster rate than they were causing casualties.

After an incredibly long time of fighting alone in the midst of fierce opponents, Judah grunted as his sword arm was wounded by a chance attack. Seeing his injury, the warriors closest to him practically climbed over each other to deliver the fatal thrust. Who actually slew the valiant soldier was never made clear, but at the cry of joy from the surrounding Greeks, the remnant of Israel's forces felt their courage slipping away. For the second time in his military career, Simon commanded a retreat, and the Israelites fled from the battle.

Bethor laughed with glee as he saw the Jews fleeing, taking the time to gloat between swings of his sword.

"You do not get to retreat so easily," Kasakiel said, spurred on to more fierce combat by the knowledge that Judah had fallen.

Bethor hurled a bolt of energy at the Virtue, holding him fast with his lightning, but Ragaziel soon stepped in to put an end to that. He made two attacks in rapid succession, forcing the Principality to parry both, and then he ducked at a silent whisper from Kasakiel, who had just thrown his sword at the duelists. The whirling disk of burning power fluttered between the Seraph's two uppermost wings, and struck Bethor across the shoulder.

The false god roared in anger, but realized that he could not continue the fight. He turned to flee, but he stopped short as Ragaziel exploded in front of him, extending his six wings to the fullest and blocking off his retreat. "For the glory of IaHWeH," Kasakiel shouted as he sped forward and struck at the evil angel with a mighty downward stroke.

The blade cut cleanly through Bethor's being, cleaving him in two. With such a large amount of damage done to his consistency, the two halves of the demon boiled away into thick, black smoke. The two angels looked at the fleeing demonic forces, who had fared much worse than their human counterparts. There would be no pursuit of the remaining Israelites that day. The angels knew that Bethor would soon be able to pull himself together, but he had been humbled before them, and it would be some time before Chay'il placed him in charge of another campaign.

"We shall call him *Bathar*," the Virtue said, using the word that means, "To cut in two."

"We should see to the Israelites," Ragaziel said.



Due to the defeat of the demons by the divine host, the Greeks felt no drive to continue the pursuit of the fleeing Israelites. They withdrew quickly from the scene, responding to Bacchides' signal. The warlord was eager to report his success to Demetrius, and he knew that the army he was leading should return to Antioch quickly, should the Romans indeed decide to retaliate at their attack on the Jews.

The body of Judah himself was left on the field intact, and when his brothers returned to the battlefield later that day, they found him there, and took him back to Modin to be buried with Eleazar and his father. All of Israel mourned for his loss, and Jonathan in particular felt keen anguish for his brother's passing.

"I have erred," he told his brothers when they had a chance to speak in private. "We should have heeded your counsel, Simon. Had the men not known of Judah's pact with the Romans, would not their courage have held in battle? And Yahweh would have surely blessed our swords, as He has in the past."

Joannan comforted him, saying, "The men will look to you for leadership now. I cannot lead our armies, and Simon will continue to serve us best as an advisor and tactician. For

now, I believe he should return to Jerusalem and rededicate the Temple, if we can retake it from the forces Bacchides has left there. Have courage, the Almighty will not forsake the covenant He has with His people.”

“The wicked will surely have a nail in Israel, at least for a time,” Simon added. “Let us mourn, yes, but let us prepare for the struggles ahead. I do not know what will become of us with Rome now a factor, but we will fight, and give our lives if we must, to continue the work that our father and brothers have done in Israel.”

The two guardians of IaHWeH’s people ascended to the divine courts, and found the Covering Cherub Raziel waiting for them. “Bethor and his forces are defeated,” he said to them. “There will be a season of war, and then a season of peace for Israel.”

“And what of Rome?” Kasakiel asked.

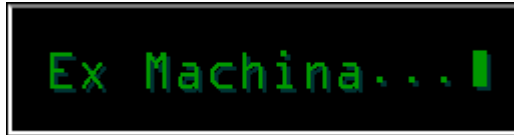
“Rome...” Raziel said thoughtfully. “El Michael has told us that when the Sacrifice is sent, He will come to a people under the authority of the heathen. Many things will change, many minds will be confused, but the wise in Israel will understand at the appointed time, as it was told to Daniel the prophet. As for you two,” Raziel continued, “your commission has not changed. See to the battles of Israel, for they will be in need of much aid. Jonathan has repented of his part in the alliance with Rome, therefore you may stand with him against the Greeks. Many minds are still darkened by the stain of this age, but the sons of Matthias have yet the potential to be a light in their embattled homeland.”

Looking at Ragaziel, whom the Cherub knew did not like the thought of continued warfare, he added, “You must be strong in your post. The Almighty has chosen you with purpose.”

Ragaziel bowed before Raziel and said, “It will be as you say. Whatsoever IaHWeH has provided for His servant, I am content.”

Exchanging a last set of reassuring glances, Kasakiel opened a passageway through the void, and the two angels returned to their labors on earth.

End



The charge looked thoughtfully at the monitor as the program loaded and gave him the welcome prompt. He moved the mouse pointer over to the now- familiar little textbox and entered his name and identification code:

Login name: Kenosiel
Password: CRU\$4D3R

He hit [Enter] and waited as his signal was confirmed; and he was instantly connected to the vast network of minds and machines that spanned the planet. It was late, and he had things to do the following day, but the charge was looking for something, and it was definitely worth his time.

Three pairs of eyes watched as the contact list appeared on the screen, and the user calling himself “Kenosiel” scanned over the names, most of which had the status messages **Offline** or **Away** beside them. Two pairs of eyes turned to each other in uneasy acknowledgment. One pair of eyes flashed in undisguised mirth that shot across the room, confident and cruel.

The demon had been working with this charge for some time. His face, when transformed to fully reflect his character, could appear twisted and bat-like due to the passage of time, the animal association the demon had chosen, and the weight of condemnation. That face had often smiled in its feral way at the slip-ups and outright transgressions of the one that had been placed under his devoted “care.” All that had changed a few years ago, however, when the flightless little earthling had been awakened by a flash of light, a week of soul-searching, and a life-changing decision.

The demon looked around the room, following the finger of the other spirit as it pointed out a few key locations. The boastful grin of a few moments before faded quickly away. Gone were the images and idols that had marked a life of involvement in the occult, self-indulgence and restless searching. Gone were the books, modern equivalents of those valuable and wicked scrolls that were burned in Ephesus two millennia ago. In their place stood a library of sacred texts, volumes on health, medicine, languages, history; and such books as had been deemed worthwhile from the “old life” of his charge were there for reference on a shelf of their own, and seldom used.

The human opened an interface and typed.

Kenosiel: Hello there :) Anything new?

A few moments later the reply came.

Phosphor: Hi. No, not tonight. Slow evening.
Kenosiel: <nods.>

Phosphor: What are you doing?

Kenosiel: The usual.

Phosphor: Ah, of course.

Though hundreds of miles apart, they shared a smile. The last couple of lines were a fairly common routine for these two, and it essentially meant “nothing of particular note is happening.” Though the demon’s charge was relatively new to the work of the Most High, the one with whom he was speaking was even younger; the two worked together very well, however, having both learned a great deal from their common pastor.

Kenosiel opened another screen and loaded a web page, then began to read it while he waited to see if anything interesting would happen that night. A few minutes later, something did.

CuteAngel09353: Hi!! Want to view my webcam??

The user smirked. That was certainly “interesting,” he thought as he read the message that had popped up, but not exactly what he had in mind.

“Old tricks,” said an unheard voice from behind the charge’s head. But the words were not directed at the human.

“Who, me?” the demon replied, his expression carefully controlled. “You know I’m a bit more practiced at this than to try that with this one!”

“Even so,” said the angelic speaker, “your kind is not well known for its wise decisions.”

The demon did not respond, except to fold his arms as his charge tapped at the keyboard.

Kenosiel: No thanks.

He closed the panel, not even waiting for a reply. The internet “bot” that had sent the automated message would simply move on to another victim.

Though he was getting tired, the human decided to read one more passage before turning in for the night. Ironically, the online Bible was set at Psalm 132, verses 4 and 5: “I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” Though the words were written generations ago by King David, who had desired to build a temple on earth for his Creator, Kenosiel considered the spiritual application, and he began to suspect that there may be something worthwhile doing on the internet tonight after all.

“Soon, soon,” whispered the angel to his mind. “Almost here.”



Fragment: There just isn't anything going on tonight!

Sparkly: lol yeah. I've started to look through internet user profiles just to survive the boredom.

Fragment: Hmm.. not a bad idea. There has to be somebody out there with something interesting to say.

Sparkly: Hey!

Fragment: lol



“Just a little longer,” the angel said, this time aloud. He saw the human sitting at the computer beginning to yawn and to think longingly of his comfortable bed. Despite his encouraging statement, only one other being in the room heard the words directly, and the demon frowned thoughtfully. He knew that this human, like a growing number on earth, was truly awakened, and was now a part of the vast spiritual network that he could only remember from the distant past. Even now, he knew the angel beside him was participating in silent communication with... however many other divine messengers were involved in their latest plot.

“What are you up to this time?” he asked, not really expecting an answer. While it was certainly easier to keep humans in these troubled days from taking people like Kenosiel seriously, this was certainly no time to let down one's guard. Any soul truly lost to the Kingdom could bring on a whole slew of problems, for the Image of the Divine imprinted unto every human was a powerful weapon against them, waiting merely to be unlocked. The shadowy spirit got exactly what he expected: the angel simply turned to him and smiled.

Fragment: Hi.

At the sound of the message alert, the charge looked up and saw a greeting from an unfamiliar username.

Kenosiel: Hello.

Fragment: What's a CSDA?

The human smiled; that was his favorite question. Before he could respond, Fragment had added more to the screen.

Fragment: I saw your profile, but I don't think I have heard of your church before.

Fragment: I have heard of SDAs... is it anything like that?

He wasn't feeling so sleepy any more, for questions of this nature always got his attention.

Kenosiel: Well, it is sort of like SDA... it stands for Creation Seventh Day Adventist.

Fragment: Oh, what's the difference?

Now, that was his second-favorite question, and he left the online Bible open – that would be useful, he imagined – and he turned his full attention to the conversation screen.

Kenosiel: Well, there are a couple of major differences between ourselves and regular Adventists. We essentially believe what the pioneers of that faith believed, and even most Adventist scholars admit their beliefs have changed over the years... but the most important is probably the concept of Victory over sin.

Fragment: Hmm... you mean that Jesus forgives people's sins? Yeah, I'm a Christian, I believe that.

Fragment: I thought most denominations did, even SDAs.

Kenosiel: Well, yes, but it goes a little deeper than that, even. We believe that people who are "born again" in the Biblical sense do not commit willful (that is, deliberate) sin anymore.

Fragment: Uh. Are you serious?

Kenosiel: Yeah. Lots of people teach that in Christ our sins are forgiven, but they don't take the next step. Now He lives in the ones He forgives, by His Spirit, and keeps them from falling into known wrongdoing after that. Some teach that this isn't even possible, but a lot of churches do teach that it's possible. The difference between them and us is that they say it's going to happen "someday," or that it can happen in theory... but they don't claim the promise as their own, as happening today.

Fragment: Yeah, but I mean the Bible says everyone sins. I'm not a Bible expert or anything, but I know that much.

The user switched over to the other screen he had open, typed in a reference and copied a block of text. He went back to the conversation and replied.

Kenosiel: Actually, that's a common misconception. What the Bible actually says is... here, I'll paste it: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Kenosiel: You mean that place, right?

Fragment: Well, that's one verse.

Kenosiel: But you see the "have sinned," right? That's past tense. Actually, it's "past perfect" tense, meaning that it's not only past, but it's past and completed, finished, done. That's actually a frequent response I get when I tell people about the Victory :)

Fragment: So you're saying you're perfect.

Kenosiel: <smiles.> That's also a popular reaction I get when I tell them. Not exactly. I don't know everything, and I'm not perfect in the sense of nothing to learn, no growing to do. No :) But it means that if I already know something is a sin, I won't do it.

Fragment: I don't see how that is possible.

The demon watched as his charge grabbed another familiar verse from the Scripture website, but he wasn't worried. "What good does he expect to do here?" he asked the other watcher. "He's had this conversation a great many times before. We've done our job well – the whole Christian world "believes" the truth already."

“The devils also believe, and tremble,” the angel quoted perfectly. “When we get a Remnant who actually believes this next verse to the degree that they apply it in the way it was intended, then you will see the dawn breaking.” The divine messenger smiled at the thought and watched his charge (for the human was *his* charge as well as the demon’s) post in the anticipated Scripture.

Kenosiel: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”
(Philippians 4:3)

Kenosiel: You said you were a Christian. You must know that verse. Do you believe it? If you do, you cannot really stand by what you have just said.

There was a pause, and then a response.

Fragment: Well, sure... we can do anything if He wants us to. It’s just that we’re still sinners, even if we get saved.

Kenosiel: Well, I believe “all things” includes what I’m talking about :) And sure, we all make “mistakes,” but that isn’t the same thing as deliberate sin.

Kenosiel: But how about this? You show me a verse that says we’re all still sinners after giving our lives to Christ, and we can talk about it.

Fragment: Um... sure. Hang on a second, I have a friend I’m talking to here as well, and she knows the Bible better than I do.



Fragment: Well, I found that interesting conversation I was looking for.

Sparkly: Lucky you :)

Fragment: Yeah, but it’s a weird one!

Sparkly: How’s that?

Fragment: Well, there’s this guy who says that the Bible teaches we can live without sinning.

Sparkly: I guess I can see that. It says we can do anything in Christ, after all. But of course it never really happens in practice lol

Fragment: Well, I think this guy says he does it. Here, I’ll paste you something he said: The difference between them and us is that they say it’s going to happen “someday,” or that it can happen in theory... but they don’t claim the promise as their own, as happening today.

Sparkly: Well, of course we don’t. Nobody ever has, except Jesus, and He wasn’t exactly normal.

Sparkly: Look at Paul, for example.

Fragment: Well, actually... he said that if I can find a verse that says people are still sinners after being born again, we’d talk about it.

Sparkly: Oh, there are lots of those! It sounds like he’s shaken something loose lol

Fragment: Do you have any in mind?

Sparkly: Yeah, I can dig up a few thousand :) Give me a minute.

Fragment: Sure.



Fragment: One minute, my friend is looking.

Kenosiel: No problem.

Fragment: Oh, what does your name mean, anyway? Sounds kind of angel-like.

Kenosiel: <smiles.> Well, it's Hebrew. It means "Assembly of God," like a call to assemble, or to gather.

Fragment: Oh, that's nice :)

Kenosiel: I've always liked it.

Kenosiel: What about your name? Sounds like there is a story behind it.

Fragment: Oh... it's just a name.

Kenosiel: Ah, okay.

The demon looked over the conversation. He'd seen dozens like it before. They'd talk for a while, they'd look over the verses... and then the person with whom his charge was speaking would get upset, angry, self-pitying, or into some other such emotional state, and leave. The demons in charge of the people with whom Kenosiel spoke generally managed to find some way to break the flow of the conversation before it got too far, but what was less successful was getting the messenger to feel guilty for the effect he often had on his recipients.

"Just remember," the voice on the other end of the phone line had said some years ago. "the Savior never let the reaction of His audience affect His ministry. Yes, He felt sad if they wouldn't listen, or rejected Him. He often spent hours in prayer, giving the grief He experienced to His Father; but in spite of the fact that most who heard Him, the vast majority, turned away from His message, *He did not fail*. Remember the Scripture in Isaiah, 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law.' He did that, and we walk as He walked."

The messenger, young in his faith at the time, thought about what he was hearing from his pastor, and drew comfort.

"Yes, you will feel sad," the voice concluded. "We believe that when the Messiah had to tell people painful truths He had tears in His eyes, but when the Spirit moves you to speak... you must speak."



Sparkly: I found some :)

Fragment: Great. Let's have them.

Sparkly: Do you have that Bible on your computer loaded? I can just give you the references, and you can get them from there.

Fragment: Yeah, let me open it.

Fragment: Okay, got it.

Sparkly: Great. Here's the first:



Fragment: Anyway, my friend found those verses.

Kenosiel: All right :) Go ahead.

Fragment: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15) See, there Paul says he is a sinner.

Kenosiel: Hmm... yes, but did your friend ask you to read verses 12 and 13 that Paul wrote leading up to that statement?

Fragment: Um... no. I don't see how that would contradict what he plainly says there, though.

Kenosiel: Well, let's read it and see - "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Fragment: Hmm...

Kenosiel: You see there what Paul is saying :) He is a "sinner" because of what he's already done "before," not because of anything he is currently doing. In the following verse he confirms the idea, saying that he was shown mercy "for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." As an example to others, he was changed from a sinner to something else. A saint.

Fragment: That makes sense, I guess. Well, how about this one...

Kenosiel: Sure, oh... but one thing first. Did you notice the reason Paul said he obtained forgiveness for his sins? Because he did it "ignorantly in unbelief." These kinds of sins are not willful - and they are forgiven.

Fragment: I'm not sure I understand.

Kenosiel: It's basically this... you remember I was saying that having Victory over sin does not mean I am "perfect" in the way you seemed to be using the word?

Fragment: Yeah...

Kenosiel: Well, this is why. The Bible says there are two kinds of "sins." You can read about them here: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." (1 John 5:16)

Kenosiel: I do not do a "sin unto death." Those are known, deliberate sins, and in Paul's case he did all those things thinking he was actually right to do them. You can read the pattern of it in the Old Testament... the sins that were forgiven by sacrifice were done in ignorance, or as a result of the person being misled or deceived. Some places you can check that are... Um... Leviticus 4:13, 5:5, Numbers 15:27... lots of places.

Fragment: I don't think I have ever studied those verses before, or seen that one you posted...

Kenosiel: Yes, it's not commonly preached. All of 1 John is a good book to read for understanding the Victory... and in fact I think if your friend is thorough in her work of coming up with Scriptures to use

against it, she will probably come up with a verse from this book :)

Fragment: Um... actually... the next one she gave me is from 1 John lol

The charge laughed in genuine pleasure as this statement appeared on his screen. The angel looked across the room at his counterpart. "You and I both know how often he's dealt with that passage."

The demon replied coldly, "Yes... but his explanation has not managed to convince many hearers."

"If your comrades would allow those with whom he speaks some space to breathe, and not be choked by their own fears of actual success..."

"Words, words," said the dark spirit dismissively, waving his hand at the angel. "You simply have a funny idea of 'success.' Let's talk about a real measure, like... *numbers*."

The angel and the demon had not been assigned to this individual for an extremely long time, yet they had subjected each other to this discussion before. The angel simply turned back to the screen without another word.

Fragment: But I have a question, before I post it?

Kenosiel: Sure.

Fragment: Well, if the Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death, and I guess I'd see that as being all sin, but then John says there are two kinds of sin, and one isn't unto death... how do you resolve that?

Kenosiel: Ah, a good question :) The answer is that the wages of all sin is death, of course, but not all sins are "imputed" to the person, that is, it isn't counted against them if they aren't aware that they're breaking the law of love.

Fragment: Oh.

Kenosiel: The Scriptures tell us, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:8) Another places reads, "until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law." (Romans 5:13)

Kenosiel: In that place Paul was talking about the purpose for the law. It was given to mankind to tell us what "sin" is... and although there's been sin in the world since the fall, individuals are not born knowing the law in any kind of concrete way, so they are not accountable until they know. That can get into a lot of other topics, like how the law was given to be a "schoolteacher" to lead individuals to Christ, but I think you get the idea.

Fragment: Okay, yeah. I understand :)

Kenosiel: Great. Now... that verse from 1 John. It's not verse 1:8, is it? "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Fragment: Yep, that's the one.

Kenosiel: Just about kills my argument, doesn't it?

Fragment: Sure does. Well, it's been nice talking to you... :)

Kenosiel: <laughs.> You don't get off that easy.

Fragment: I didn't think so :) You seem to know that verse pretty well.

Kenosiel: Intimately.



Sparkly: What's he saying now?

Fragment: Well... hmm... I think it's not as obvious as I thought.

Sparkly: What do you mean?

Fragment: He's giving some pretty good answers, really. Seems to know the Bible okay too. It may not be true, but at least it doesn't sound dumb, you know?

Sparkly: No. Paste what he's said so far to me... and then keep doing it. I'll tell you what to say to show you where he's going wrong.

Fragment: How do you know he's wrong?

Sparkly: He's telling you he doesn't sin, isn't he?

Fragment: Yeah...

Sparkly: ...

Fragment: lol okay, okay. I'll let you know what he's said.



Kenosiel: Well, there are two things you should probably know about that verse. First, you need to understand that John was writing to a group of Christians who were in danger of being misled.

Kenosiel: You ever hear about a group of people called the "Gnostics?"

Fragment: Hm... I think I heard them mentioned a couple times, but I don't know much about them.

Kenosiel: Ah, well they were a pretty serious threat to early Christianity, it seems, because a lot of the beliefs were similar. It looks like John specifically wrote a lot in an attempt to correct the potential compromises. You can sort of get hints when you read places like here: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." (1 John 4:2) You've read that before, right?

Fragment: Yeah. That is how you can tell if someone's teaching things that are wrong, it says.

Kenosiel: Well, it's one way; but of course you know a lot of wrong was done by people who said that Christ came in the flesh :) This "test" was against a very specific kind of error, back when it was probably the primary danger.

Fragment: What error?

Kenosiel: Well, what the Gnostics were teaching. Some forms of that belief were that everything that was flesh was automatically evil. So all humans were evil, no matter what. This sounds very similar to the correct Christian belief that "all have sinned."

Fragment: Yeah.

Kenosiel: But now the Gnostics taught that what was flesh, what was physical, would always BE evil, and nothing could change that, and there's the difference. Christians teach that humans can be "born again," and while the flesh remains sinful, and would tend to do evil if it were not for the Holy Spirit, that Spirit lives in us after conversion, and keeps us from committing sin. That's just another way of saying that we have victory over sin.

Kenosiel: "Salvation" for the Gnostics meant that once you were converted your soul was saved, and it didn't really matter what your body did, since it was just helplessly evil anyway.

Fragment: Oh. Hmm.

Kenosiel: But here's the real problem with that... Christians were saying that Christ, in whom the "fullness of the Godhead" lived, and who was spiritual perfection personified, became flesh and dwelt among us. You can see how that would not fit very well into their mindset.

Fragment: Yeah, they would say that Christ was evil too.

Kenosiel: Well, they found what they thought was a clever way to get around that, actually :) They said that Christ didn't really come in the flesh, but was a spirit - like a ghost - and that He gave people around Him the illusion that He was an actual person walking around with them. Basically, that makes the entire crucifixion thing... just a "show" to try and teach us a spiritual lesson, and not an actual death on our behalf.

Fragment: Wow, really?

Kenosiel: Yeah, and THAT is why John said basically, if you find someone who's teaching a message like ours, here's how you test him... if he can say that Christ actually came in the flesh, he's one of the "good guys," at least in terms of the Gnostic beliefs. It also explains a lot of other things John says, like 1 John 1:8.

Fragment: How does that tie in?

Kenosiel: Because John was rebuking the idea that if people DID have sin in them, but said they didn't, they were lying. If their actions were evil, but they said they had no sin, because their "spirits" were saved, they were being misled.

Fragment: How do you get that from that verse? It sounds like you are adding a lot of stuff to it.



Sparkly: He sure is!



"Our first obstacle."

"And you've seen him explain this before," the angel replied.

"Yes," came the response, "And I've seen most people reject it. So will this one."

"Maybe not. Fragment's guardian informs me that there's been a growing dissatisfaction with complacency recently. This human wants more."

The demon said nothing in reply, but he began to think that if the angels were communicating with each other concerning this latest conversation, it would only be fair if he leveled the playing field a little.

Fragment: I mean, what you've said so far makes sense, but John doesn't say anything about "If you say you have no sin AND you're sinning then you're deceiving yourself."

Kenosiel: That's true, for that verse, but that statement wasn't just said out of the blue :)

Fragment: What do you mean?

Kenosiel: Well, it's like the verse before that your friend gave you. In order to understand what's really going on, you just have to look at the things the writer says before, and sometimes after.

Fragment: So does John say, "IF you have sin in your life..." before that sentence?

Kenosiel: Well, yes :) More than once, actually... just to make sure we don't have any misunderstandings. Of course, John didn't know what he'd be up against these days, with the very people claiming to have his message messing things up!

Fragment: So... where does he say that?

Kenosiel: Two verses up. And again in the next chapter... twice there. And maybe a couple other places too, if I spend some time to think about it.

Kenosiel: Here are those verses: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." (1 John 1:6) "He that saith, 'I know Him,' and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:4) "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." (1 John 2:9)

Kenosiel: Fit 1 John 1:8 right in there, where it's found, and see how John's really just saying the same thing in every case. And as you read his other books, you find that John always does this - he says the same thing in a number of ways, to make sure that he's left no way of understanding it out. Look at the Gospel of John 1:1-3, for example.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." He says everything there at least twice, and in different ways. It's just his style. Not a bad style, of course... but something we should be aware of as we read the things he wrote :)

Kenosiel: See how it works?

Fragment: Sorta. I mean I definitely see that John repeats himself a lot. But how do I know if that really fits with that specific verse?

Kenosiel: Well, seeing the pattern definitely helps, and letting "Scripture interpret Scripture." But I'll tell you this much: if people are looking for a way to excuse sin, they're going to ignore what was meant every time. That I've seen a whole lot.

Fragment: Yeah, me too.

Kenosiel: <nods.>



Sparkly: Just like that, huh?

Fragment: What do you mean?

Sparkly: Well, you're agreeing with this guy awfully quickly.

Fragment: When we first met I agreed with you pretty quickly too :) What you said back then was true, and I knew it.

Sparkly: And what I'm saying now isn't true?

Fragment: I don't know which of you is right about this thing... but what he said about John makes sense. We were just looking at the Gospel of John in a Bible study last week, and we talked about the same thing.

Fragment: They had us underline repeated words and ideas in the passages they handed out, and then we discussed recurring themes.

Sparkly: Whatever. Anyway, the verse SAYS that if you say you have no sin, you are deceiving yourself, and that's what he's saying, and that's what he's doing.



Kenosiel: Are you still there?

Fragment: Yeah, sorry... I was talking to my friend, the one who gave me the verses.

Kenosiel: Ah, does she have more?

Fragment: Yes, but um... suppose you had to convince someone just based on this verse alone that what you were saying was right? I mean I understand what you're saying, but it looks sort of final there, you know?

Kenosiel: Sure, I understand. Well, it might help you to know that I don't say, "I have no sin." :)

Fragment: But you said you don't commit sin... right?

Kenosiel: Yeah, I don't do anything I know is "sin," and so it's not imputed, remember... but that doesn't mean I am "perfect" in the way you'd apply it to being completely "without sin."

Fragment: So, you're perfect with everything you know?

Kenosiel: That's how the Bible explains it, yeah. David said in the Psalms... hold on a second and let me get this one.

Fragment: Ok.

Kenosiel: Actually it's Solomon in the Proverbs... oops :) Anyway, here it is: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." (Proverbs 11:3)

Fragment: A nice thought!

Kenosiel: Yeah, and one that needs to be remembered these days. But the key here is the word "integrity." If you have like a commentary or something you can check this, but that word means that the expected development at a given stage has been perfectly met.

Fragment: Oh, really?

Kenosiel: Yeah. I like to give the example Christ did about true Christian "growth." He said, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." (Mark 4:28, 29)

Kenosiel: See, the corn has to grow, but it's not "imperfect" as a blade or an ear. It started as a perfect seed, and so do Christians :) And if you want a third witness, Paul teaches the same thing. He says of himself that he doesn't act, "as though I had already attained,

either were already perfect," in one verse, but then a few lines later he says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded..." That's Philippians 3:12 and then 15.

Fragment: I don't think I've ever noticed that before!

Kenosiel: Well, don't burn the Book yet :) It's not a contradiction.

Fragment: lol wasn't planning to.

Kenosiel: Paul's using two different words for perfect. The first one means complete, done, nothing to learn...and you can use that in the sense of being perfectly without sin too. The second one is just like the word "integrity" in the Proverb - it means not lacking anything that it's supposed to have.

Fragment: Oh...

Kenosiel: So back to where we were: John is telling people that if they say they have no sin in them, and they're sinning, they are only lying to themselves (and that's a pretty logical statement), but also, those who are converted don't even say they are "without" sin anyway. We say we don't "commit" it, by which we mean we don't deliberately perform it, but like Paul we don't say "I've arrived."

Kenosiel: The verse in 1 John doesn't contrast at all with the Gospel - and this message of victory IS the Gospel as the apostles taught it.

Fragment: Well, that's kind of a relief that you don't say that, huh? lol

Kenosiel: Yeah, but at the same time we're confident that, like the parable in Mark, we are still growing (never sinking backward), and we'll be ripe for the Harvest when Christ does return.

Fragment: I can "Amen" that :)



"Well, there's nothing new here tonight," the demon said, looking at the glowing, colored words in visible disgust. "Let me know how she turns away from life." With that, the fallen angel vanished, apparently unwilling to read the rest of the developing transcript.

"You weren't going to get very much done here tonight anyway," the angel whispered after the departing spirit. "Not even the worst temptations can trouble him very much when he's talking about *this* topic."

There was no whisper, the transmitted thought of spirit beings, in reply.



Sparkly: You know, I'm getting really tired of him using Paul as an example of his way-out beliefs. Go ahead and show him that verse from Romans I gave you.

Fragment: What about the other verse from 1 John?

Sparkly: Not yet. Use the Romans 7 passage, and you won't need anything else.

Fragment: Yeah. I guess I'm curious as to what he'll say about that one

at this point.

Sparkly: Uh huh...



Fragment: Okay, here's another one.

Kenosiel: All right :)

Fragment: This one's kinda long...

Fragment: "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." (Romans 7:14 - 23)

Kenosiel: <smiles.> I actually thought you might have started with that one. This is probably THE most used passage when we talk to people about victory. It was certainly the one I brought up when I first heard about it.

Fragment: And someone convinced you that it wasn't saying what it's saying? Paul pretty much says there that he still sins, even though he doesn't want to.

Kenosiel: Well, someone showed me what I've been showing you all night. That the verses before and after a passage make a difference, and are the only way we can really know what is being said. For example, you stopped three verses too soon.

Fragment: What do those say?

Kenosiel: Well, remember that the epistles were written as letters, and not as chapters... so although there are only two verses left in Romans 7, you have to keep going into Romans 8. And in fact, you really should have started with Romans 6... but let's deal with that one at a time :)

Fragment: Okay..?

Kenosiel: All right, so after that, Paul concludes with: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 7:24, 5; 8:1)

Fragment: Perfectly clear now.

Kenosiel: What?

Fragment: lol I'm being sarcastic.

Kenosiel: Oh... yeah, that would have been a surprise. But it really does make sense. After Paul talks about all that, that the sin in his flesh is what makes him do bad things, he says, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" The he immediately answers the question saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And now, though he

serves the sin with his flesh and serves the law with his mind, we find in Romans 8:1 that the plan is to not walk in the flesh at all, but only in the Spirit because, as he says a few verses later, "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (8:4)

Fragment: I'm still pretty confused. Paul says in Romans 7 that he does not do the things he wants to, and you just showed me here where he says he doesn't walk after the flesh but after the spirit.

Kenosiel: Yeah, you caught that, huh? :) Well, Paul was pretty much saying what he said in Philippians 3 - we're not "perfect" and this is the reason why - because sin continues to dwell in the flesh. Some sects teach a doctrine that some people call "holy flesh," meaning that once you get saved, you can't even really be tempted anymore. That you become "holy" in an absolute sense. But this isn't true... the purpose of Romans 7 is to explain to the believers in Rome that sin dwells in the flesh, it always has, and it always will until the resurrection, or till Christ comes again.

Kenosiel: Paul even says that outright in another place... hang on.

Kenosiel: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:42 - 44) He's talking about believers, now :) Even the bodies of the saints can be said to be "sown in dishonor," because flesh is in the sin.

Fragment: But what about the places Paul says he doesn't do the things he wants to. That's not just about where sin is, that's talking about his actions.

Kenosiel: That's true, he was using his own experience before conversion to describe the effect that sin in the flesh has on the actions if one does not do what is described in chapter 8 - walk in the flesh.

Fragment: That can't be right. Paul says I DO the evil I don't want to do. He didn't say, "I did."

Kenosiel: Yes, a good observation. Yet yesterday, I had an interesting thing happen to me. So it's like this: I get up, I leave my house and walk around a bit. I don't see anyone important, so I go back home and check my email.

Fragment: Um... a) so what? and b) that doesn't seem like a particularly interesting thing.

Kenosiel: <laughs.> The interesting thing is that you saw nothing wrong with the way I switched tenses.

Fragment: Oh.

Fragment: Yeah, well, you're going to have to do a lot of convincing to get me to believe that Paul did that in this passage!

Kenosiel: Not a problem :) First of all, let's establish that Paul does this a lot... because if you don't see that it's his habit to do it, to switch tenses, then it doesn't matter how much evidence I give that it was done in Romans 7 - it just wouldn't be his style.

Fragment: You have your rope... let's see if you hang lol

Kenosiel: Here's a passage for you. Paul (who I believe wrote the book of Hebrews) said this when he was speaking about the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai when the Commandments were being given: "For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart." (Hebrews 12:20) This wasn't a quote from Exodus :) This was the writer describing the events as they took place, but he was using

almost future tense to explain what had happened in the past.

Kenosiel: "It shall be stoned." And of course there's the passage we already saw, undoubtedly Paul, where he says that when Christ returns the body "is raised incorruptible." That is future tense, but he uses present.

Kenosiel: Paul's use of the tenses, and really every New Testament author's, is something that can really reveal a lot about the Scriptures if it's studied.

Fragment: Well, okay, but what about Romans 7?

Kenosiel: Well, how do we know he was talking about the past in Hebrews, or about the future in 1 Corinthians?

Fragment: Because he told us when he was talking about.

Kenosiel: Right. And he does the same thing in Romans :) Check out verses 5 and 6: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

Kenosiel: He then starts telling us what the "oldness of the letter" was like starting with verse 7: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" Then he takes it from there.

Fragment: I'll have to read that chapter.

Kenosiel: Yeah, and start with Chapter 6, where Paul says very clearly: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" That's verse 2. Paul uses marriage symbolism in the early verses of chapter 7... as long as we're under the law it's like we are "married" to it, and we can't be joined to Christ until that husband is dead. Until we see that because of the law we are "dead" in sin, we are joined to a body of death... see, all of this is past tense, though he uses words in the present; and so I did I, if you caught it :) But verse 5 says that "when" we were in the flesh, the motion or actions of the sins, which he tells us is in our flesh, "bring forth fruit."

Kenosiel: But NOW, a specific word in Romans 8:1 that means precisely "at this present time," there isn't any condemnation, because we don't walk after the flesh anymore. In fact, in verse 9 he writes, "But ye are not IN the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." If you're born again, you aren't following the flesh, and the flesh is where the sin lives.

Kenosiel: Can a born-again Christian, who has actually understood this, deliberately sin, deliberately follow the flesh? "God forbid," as Paul said of it :) As John said - it "cannot" be.

Fragment: Yeah, I'll definitely have to read that over. Some of this can get pretty complicated.

Kenosiel: That's true. Even Peter said this once, "our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood..."

Fragment: Whoa! Where is that?

Kenosiel: 2 Peter 3:15, 16. Someone once told me that that was her new favorite verse, when I showed it to her. The Bible can be simple :) But it does take more than just a causal reading... you have to grab the Spirit of it.

Fragment: Well, that verse does take some of the pressure off. Oh, but you said something about what _John_ said?

Kenosiel: Yeah, John says that someone who is born again doesn't

deliberately sin. Didn't I show you that verse?

Fragment: I don't think so. We looked at some verses from that book, but it was just my friend's verse and some you showed me about how John says IF you are sinning and say you aren't, you're wrong.

Kenosiel: Oh, wow... I thought I'd already given you this one... here, then :) "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His Seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." And there's another one, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him." That's 1 John 3:6, 9.

Fragment: Oh... Pretty serious sounding.

Kenosiel: Now, either my reading of 1:8 was the right one, and my reading of Romans 7 is correct, or we've got a problem :)

Fragment: Well, how do I know you aren't just misreading those two verses from 1 John? After all, Romans 7 and those other things seemed pretty solid before you looked around them.

Kenosiel: Well, they're still "solid." I haven't taken anything away from what any verse has said, I'm just making sure we are getting the whole picture in all those cases. If you want to be sure about 1 John 3, read all of it. Read the whole book, including those verses your friend gave you. Put them all together and see what happens.

Fragment: More work...

Kenosiel: Yeah, more work :) But this is worth it!



Sparkly: Well, that's a lot of baloney!

Fragment: Bologna.

Sparkly: What?

Fragment: That's how you spell... never mind. What is?

Sparkly: All of that!

Sparkly: I've been doing more searches, and the Bible sure does say that everyone keeps sinning. Here's a verse that proves it... and there's nothing around it that says otherwise either. I checked:



Fragment: Okay, so my friend has another verse. "If they sin against thee, (for [there is] no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;" (1 Kings 8:46) She said, "This is Solomon talking to God, so deal with that, mister." lol

Kenosiel: Mmm hm... and it's repeated in... 2Chronicles 6:36.

Kenosiel: In both cases, that's Solomon talking.

Fragment: Right, smartest guy on earth. So he'd know, right?

Kenosiel: He was certainly smarter than I am... but I'm sure you know what happened to Solomon, right?

Fragment: He got rich and famous?

Kenosiel: Yes, but he also got married... a lot. He had wives in the hundreds.

Fragment: Yeah, I know about that. And they led him into idolatry.

Kenosiel: Right. So his understanding of the truth was, for all his wisdom... incomplete. Now, it's not usually a good idea to say that someone is wrong about a statement made in a prayer just because they've made errors in life :) But... I want you to understand that just because the Bible records someone saying something, it doesn't mean that the thing recorded is true or "what the Bible teaches."

Kenosiel: The prophet Nathan told David to go build the temple. But he was later corrected in a dream, and had to take it back. Still, the prophet is on record as saying, "That's a great idea."

Kenosiel: One prophet told another prophet that God had given him a special message, but the Bible records it, then says, "But he lied." That's in 1Kings 13.

Kenosiel: The Scriptures record people saying all kinds of things, but what the Bible directly tells us, and the nature of the record itself, THAT is inspired. "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'" So the Bible says (has the words) "There is no God." Does that mean it's true? :)

Fragment: Of course not... but this is Solomon, still...

Kenosiel: Exactly, and as he himself later said, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16) Now what happens if you take that out of context?

Fragment: So what's the context of that?

Kenosiel: Solomon is old when he writes that, and he's looking for the "meaning of life." So he says a lot of things, sort of going from one extreme to the other. And finally, at the very end of the book, he writes, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:" and then he tells us what he's discovered.

Fragment: Which is???

Kenosiel: Read the Book. <laughs.>

Kenosiel: The point is... what the Bible teaches is what a writer has been inspired to set down for our learning. But what it records everyone as saying, that's a little like "hearsay" in a human court... If you can corroborate it with other evidence (verses) then it's a lot more useful than if you take it for doctrine. Besides, the Bible says you have to establish every matter with "two or three witnesses" anyway; and the New Testament verses in 1John 3 are a) backed up by several independent witnesses (other Biblical writers), and b) specifically designed for doctrine.

Fragment: Hm...

Kenosiel: Solomon's the only one recorded as saying that and... according to the other writers who WERE inspired to write down what they wrote, and according to his own life (he obviously believed he could fall, and therefore he DID) he was wrong.

Kenosiel: The Bible says that Solomon "said" no man doesn't sin, but the Bible, speaking for ITSELF, says that no man who abides in Christ sins.

Kenosiel: Solomon, of course, did not have the perfect Example of the Son before him. We're responsible for a lot more Gospel than he was, remember :)

Fragment: That last part's true, anyway... but I don't know yet. I'll have to look into this more deeply.

Kenosiel: Of course. "let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind," Paul said. There's plenty of evidence for what the Bible teaches in its own pages... the job of a witness is not really to convince, but to "testify." I've told you what the Gospel's done for me, and what it can do for you, and the verses are there with all these wonderful

promises... the "theology" just sort of falls into place as you go along.

Kenosiel: But for every question, there is a right answer... and every right answer is found right there in the Word.

Fragment: Yeah. I don't think my friend liked your last answer, though. She wants to talk to you... do you mind if I invite her to the conversation?

Kenosiel: Go ahead, she's been talking to me already... just sort of indirectly :)



"Hail, Zadoniel," said a voice through the wall. The demon in the room looked up and nodded in recognition as the speaker stepped through the plaster and the posters to join his fellow-laborer.

"What brings you to this place, Adonai?" Zadoniel asked, using the ancient word for "my lord." The newcomer was not of the very highest ranks among the demons, but since the Rebellion the evil angels sometimes used the term once applied to the Archangels to indicate their respect for those above them in the hierarchy of sinful spirits.

"Your charge is going into battle with that evangelist."

"Yes, I know it. Fortunately, she hasn't been a very pleasant person lately... as you can see, her guardian is somewhat restricted."

The demon smiled at Zadoniel, having noticed the dome of darkness resting over the house when he approached. The human's parents were not among those even claiming redemption, and the house had never been a dangerous place for the demons to traverse. With Sparkly's belief that willful sin was inevitable even for Christians, however, the darkness had increased to the point where angelic forces were not easily rallied. The protection of the Almighty was over the family, and the conviction of the Spirit was constantly working with the girl who sat at the computer, but in terms of direct spiritual security, that was another matter.

"That is good to hear," came the eventual reply, "but I want this particular talk to go our way. There is a bystander, after all. I don't want any surprises."

"I've prepared her as well as could be done, Adonai," said the tempter, whose name came from the word for "Presumption."

"I am sure you have," said the visitor, "But now let me show you how to really push those buttons."



[Sparkly has been added to the conversation.]

Sparkly: Hi.

Kenosiel: Hello :)

Sparkly: So what's all this baloney you've been filling my friend's head with?

Kenosiel: Bologna.

Sparkly: Whatever! You know what I mean.

Fragment: lol

Kenosiel: Well, we've been talking about the Gospel, and the freedom that Christ offers us through His Sacrifice.

Sparkly: So you say, but she says that you're telling her that converted people don't ever sin.

Kenosiel: That's right. They don't.

Sparkly: Well, I sin all the time. What do you say I am?

Kenosiel: Hopefully? Sad and spiritually hungry.

Sparkly: That doesn't have anything to do with it. Everyone sins. Every day people sin. That's why we have "forgiveness," you know!

Kenosiel: Well, the Bible says "all have sinned," and that's why we all need to be forgiven, that's true. And we certainly need to be forgiven for the sins we discover and put away. I'm sure Fragment shared this with you, but we were discussing things that were deliberately done that are known wrongs.

Sparkly: Yeah, those too. We need forgiveness from those. Especially those.

Kenosiel: And then you never do the things you're forgiven of again, right? :)

Sparkly: Maybe, maybe not.

Kenosiel: Well, we could swat that back and forth for a while, I suppose... or we could just let the Bible settle the matter. David tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) And we've been talking about 1 John all night, so how about: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

Sparkly: Yeah, but the way you are talking it's like you're condemned if you do one thing you know is wrong after you're converted.

Kenosiel: Not quite. I'm saying that "converted" people don't do what they know is wrong... it's natural for them to avoid evil, and so there's no need to even worry about condemnation. It'd be like a sinner worrying about being "too holy" one day. Conversion is a complete switch. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that there's no condemnation for the Believer - I'm just pointing out why that's true.

Sparkly: Then how do you explain this other verse from 1 John? "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:" (1 John 2:1)

Fragment: That's another one she found earlier, but we never did get around to it :)

Kenosiel: Well, taken by itself, that verse would probably prove your point. In fact, any of the verses you gave Fragment earlier, if you

take them by themselves, show a problem with the Victory message.

Kenosiel: The question is, what information did John's audience receive from that verse? If we can know what John intended, and what his audience came to understand from it, we can be sure that our understanding is right.

Sparkly: Well, I read what you said to Fragment earlier... there aren't any verses around this one that you can say change the meaning any.

Kenosiel: True enough. The problem there isn't a matter of context so much as a matter of translation. For example, when John says "and if any man sin," the word he uses for "sin" is in a specific tense that doesn't translate that well into English.

Kenosiel: The closest we really get to it is the "perfect" tense. You know, like "have been," "had seen," things like that. Then again, many translators like Strong have said that the best way to translate them is "simple past tense." But all that aside, you can see it for yourself :)

Sparkly: ?

Kenosiel: When Paul says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," in Romans 3:23, he's using the same word. All "have sinned."

Kenosiel: Now, translators have had a lot of problems putting that verse directly into English, but... even if John was speaking in simple present tense, which isn't all that likely, he wasn't talking about deliberate sins but, like the Old Testament, sins done in ignorance. Fragment may have shared my explanation of that with you already. But basically, John wouldn't be contradicting himself when he later says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His Seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9)

Fragment: Yeah, it really does say that, I checked.

Kenosiel: Some commentators insist that this verse means continuous, constant, repeated sin... but the more honest theologians admit that the verse is saying exactly what it seems to be saying, wording issues, and what they call "practical" issues, aside.

Fragment: Practical?

Kenosiel: Right. The commentaries that disagree seem to have a common thread - they will say something like, "But of course this teaching is not practical, therefore John must simply have been pointing out the ideal, rather than giving actual instruction."

Fragment: Oh...

Kenosiel: That's the danger of making one's past experience the way of judging the Bible, rather than using the Bible to judge one's experience.



Standing behind Sparkly, the demon that once stood behind the evangelist drew a slender sword from his hip. As the tip of the weapon cleared its sheath, the blade hissed briefly and burst into dark, purple flames. Tendrils of stolen energy crept like static discharge up from the hilt to the point, and the same eerie glow lit the eyes of the wicked spirit.

"Behold," he said to Zadoniel, as he advanced upon the human. He thrust his khrev toward her heart, and no brightly-shining, angelic blade moved in to check it.

“Fragment’s listening,” Sparkly thought to herself. “This guy is going to lead my friend into his dumb beliefs. I have to do something!” Demons can, and do, whisper thoughts to individuals they are tempting, but the stab of their spiritual weapons generally serve to strengthen antagonistic tendencies that are already present, or to introduce doubts that would naturally arise from the present direction of the human's thoughts. This conversation wasn't fun anymore, Sparkly realized, this was a fight.



Fragment: Hm... I think I'm just not at that level yet, then. You're talking about something better than I know or have seen. Maybe I will get there one day, huh?

Kenosiel: Oh, but this is where the Good News comes in :) This thing isn't about levels, or knowing enough, or being a Christian long enough to develop it. Yes, we continue to grow in grace and knowledge. Amazing as it is, the Bible says that even Christ "grew" in a certain sense because of His experience... but this did not make Him "better." Christians are the same. We grow in knowledge and power, but we are given the righteousness of Christ the moment we accept the fullness of the Gospel.

Fragment: How?

Kenosiel: By believing. We are saved by knowledge of the Father and Son, as John 17:3 says, but it is a knowledge that comes by faith, not by being smart enough :)

Sparkly: No amount of belief will help you to do what he's saying! How can any human being say they won't fall into sin? We're born sinful, we grow up sinful, and we'll always have a sinful nature.

Kenosiel: Hm... well, King David said it :) He wrote, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11) The words "might not" there actually means, "will not."

Kenosiel: Now, it's true we are born with a tendency to commit sin. When we are born, no one has to teach us how to lie or steal. Human beings, due to Adam's fall, are basically destined to get entangled with sin... this is why it was said to Nicodemus by Christ, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." in John 3:3. About this being born again, Peter explains further, and wonderfully.

Kenosiel: He says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1:22, 23)

Kenosiel: So we are born again of "incorruptible seed," meaning a seed that cannot be ruined... because that Seed is Christ Himself. It's not about levels, as I was saying to Fragment, but about being totally born again; starting over with a new nature.

Sparkly: But being of a new nature doesn't mean we don't still have a sinful nature. Our nature does not change!

Kenosiel: There isn't anywhere in the Bible that says the sinful nature remains a part of us. In fact, that's exactly what changes - we are born AGAIN :)

Kenosiel: In fact, let me share this with you. Paul says, "Therefore if

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor 5:17) Now, we still have sinful `_flesh_`, which is what Paul was talking about in Romans 7, and why we are still tempted... but we walk after the Spirit, and consider that flesh dead.

Kenosiel: The real truth is that not only is the old nature dead and a new nature comes, but that nature is that of Christ Himself. Peter writes that we are "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:4)

Sparkly: That's what they say might happen, but we can't actually claim that. How can we say that and still claim to be humble? Humility makes that an awful thing to say.

Kenosiel: Was Paul humble?

Sparkly: I'm talking about my humility, not yours or Paul's.

Kenosiel: I want you to lose yours... I want you to accept Christ's humility, it's different from yours. There is a true humility that is not dishonest. The world's version of humility says we can't say anything good about ourselves, even IF there are good things about us :) So you have a society of humble liars. But Godly humility can recognize virtue in itself, and in others... it just puts the credit where it belongs - on Christ.

Sparkly: Whatever. My biggest problem with all this is the way you make God sound.

Kenosiel: The way I make Him sound?

Sparkly: Yeah. The God WE worship is forgiving and merciful. Yours sounds like a cruel tyrant! You make it sound like when we fall He won't forgive us.

Kenosiel: Ah... I understand.

Kenosiel: The major difference between us is the faith we have, not just the faith we exercise. You say, "when we fall." I don't even say "if we fall," but rather like the Bible: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." That's the end of the Book of Jude.

Fragment: Hmm... that sounds nice.

Kenosiel: It is :) We don't even let in room for doubt, we don't waver, but we stand firm in the promises of Christ... and so how can we fall short? It's not us, but Him in us that does all this.

Sparkly: We trust that the Lord will forgive us even though we have sinned many times.

Kenosiel: No doubt He would, but for true converts He doesn't have to. The God of the Bible does better than just patch us up and send us out, knowing we'll be hurt again. He draws us near, He hold us safe, and He keeps us from sin by His power. If this is the first time you have heard this, do not be discouraged... you simply didn't know. But the Bible says, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." (Acts 17:30) In repentance, you can accept the full power of Grace, and then you'll know His true protection.

Sparkly: You have to buck a lot of really "obvious" verses to say that I'm ignorant. I saw some of your explanations to Fragment, and they looked pretty complicated. I thought the Bible was supposed to be simple!

Kenosiel: The message is simple. Christ died for us, so we live for Him. He died in our place, so we must consider our sinful selves "dead" so that He can live in us by His Spirit. Humans have made some of the

passages complicated by our traditions, so it may seem as if the explanations are difficult at first, but this is why it was written, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

Kenosiel: Not everything is immediately obvious, so we have to "study" or "work hard" to make sure we're handling the Word of truth properly. The Word of truth speaks confidence and faith. There's no "ifs" or "whens" about believers falling into sin :)

Sparkly: That's just silly! You might think you can talk your way out of what the Bible teaches with your explanations, but David sinned, and he was a man after God's own heart. Solomon sinned, and said every man sins. Paul called himself a chief of sinners, and nothing you can say will make me ignore all that!

Kenosiel began to type his response, pointing out that he had already explained most of those passages, and would gladly look at any other situation or Scripture that Sparkly might wish to bring up... but something in his spirit stopped him from saying anything further.



With the tempting spirit gone, the angel was unrestrained in his ability to help. He placed his hands upon Kenosiel's shoulders and said, "Close your eyes... and look." As the evangelist paused, he began to catch glimpses of what was happening, and he realized that it was time to stop debating... that would not get anywhere as long as there was a heart present that was unwilling to learn.

"Yes," he said, "I think I understand." Then, as he had done so many times before, Kenosiel began to type without having an entirely clear idea of what he was about to say.



Kenosiel: I have noticed, Sparkly, that your answers are getting a little more direct and cutting. It has become apparent that you aren't really trying to learn anything, and you're not really trying to teach either. You simply want me to either agree or submit, and that goes double for what you want Fragment to do.

Kenosiel: There are two demons standing beside you; one I cannot see clearly, but the other is a presumptuous spirit, and is leading you into pride. In the name of Yahshua, who is the Christ, I rebuke those spirits, and I pray you will see clearly enough to rebuke them yourself.



Turning to the other screen he had open, the human typed another message.

Kenosiel: Interesting talk I am having.

Phosphor: Wow, it's late in your part of the world... why are you still awake?

Kenosiel: Believe me, I was trying to be in bed a long time ago.

Phosphor: So how is it going?

Kenosiel: Talking to two people... I think they are both girls, but not sure about the first one. The second one is not exactly happy with the Victory message.

Phosphor: Ah.

Kenosiel: I just rebuked the demons that are working through her... oh, and the tab is flashing, she must have replied already. I'll go check it, but in the meantime, please be praying. At least one of them is actually eager to learn about this.

Phosphor: Will do.

Kenosiel: Thanks.



Returning to the other screen, the evangelist found this:

Fragment: Wow.

Sparkly: Ha! See, this is the kind of thinking that this doctrine leads to. People start judging each other, and if you don't agree with them, they say you have a demon or something.

Sparkly: I'm outta here, I've seen enough. And I hope you're smart enough to leave this guy alone too.

[Sparkly has left the conversation.]

Fragment: Are you still here?

Fragment: Hello?



As Zadoniel watched in shock, the visiting demon raged against the message on the screen. "We tear their families apart. We slay them with their own swords, and guns, and hateful words. We lead them to sins every day that He finds disgusting, and they *match* us for our temptations – yet He does not leave them alone! Why?"

Zadoniel did not have the answer to that question six thousand years before that night, and he offered none now. Was his superior simply giving vent to a long-restrained rant, or did he sense that there was something special about this conversation, this potential conversion? He had no answers to those questions either. He merely watched in silence as his charge was overcome with anger and left the battle field, and the demon that had

scratched at her heart did the same, driven to furious passion by the messenger's rebuke. Still spitting curses, the enraged demon pointed his sword at the roof, making terrible vows, and then he followed his blasphemous promises up into the air.



Before Fragment could leave, Kenosiel quickly typed:

Kenosiel: Hi, I'm here.

Kenosiel: Sorry about that, I was asking a friend to pray for this conversation.

Fragment: Oh... well, she left.

Kenosiel: So I see. I'm sorry she did.

Fragment: She is talking to me in another message screen now. She's saying that you're dangerous, and that you're trying to get me into a cult or something. And that I shouldn't talk to you anymore.

Kenosiel: Well, whether or not you want to talk to me anymore is up to you :) I can't tell you what to do... but I hope you've seen enough wisdom in what I've said, and seen the love in the picture of God that the Scriptures revealed, to want to hear more.

Fragment: Yeah... I'm sort of telling Sparkly that she should have stayed, and that she wasn't showing a right spirit. I don't know if what she was saying was wrong, but what she said was wrong... if you see what I mean.

Kenosiel: I see what you mean :)

Fragment: She's saying that you are saying you're perfect... but I know you said that that wasn't what you were saying.

Kenosiel: She knows it also, but the word "perfect" is probably the most common word used to prejudice people against the message. Unfortunately, it's a very effective tactic.

Fragment: Yeah. Well, it's late here, and I should probably be getting to bed. I'm still not sure about a lot of what you said, but I'll think about it. We're both Christians, after all.

Kenosiel: I'm glad you'll think about them. But I want you to be careful about something, and think of something. There's a danger that you may say, or be talked into saying, "You have your beliefs and I have mine - you respect mine and I will respect yours." That's a very nice-sounding conclusion, but to be perfectly honest, it's not good enough.

Kenosiel: I don't respect the beliefs of people who teach errors that I think are dangerous. I know that sounds kind of harsh, but I am not violating the Golden Rule :) I don't want other people to "respect" my beliefs either. I don't want you to go away thinking, "that's an interesting idea."

Kenosiel: I want it to cut you to the heart, I want it to wound you, in a sense, so that you will never be satisfied until you have this experience also. It's like a sword, a spiritual sword, and the blade can both injure and heal; sometimes both at once.

Kenosiel: And when you hunger and thirst after this righteousness that Christ offers to you right now... then you will be filled.

Kenosiel: And then you will be free.

Kenosiel: You know that you were born into a kind of slavery. Every

human being has been... but what those who continue in sin don't know is that they only think they are free. They are still in bondage, as long as the natural tendency is to commit a single deliberate sin. As long as the Spirit does not prevent the flesh from forcing them into wrong actions, they are bound to a destiny that ends in death. There is a real freedom. There is a true salvation that, though it is spiritual, it is very, very real.

Fragment: I understand. And as I said, it sounds nice. I want to hear more, but I just don't want to seem extreme about this.

Kenosiel: <laughs.> Paul seemed pretty extreme; Christ's teaching about the "narrow way" were pretty extreme... we can't make excuses for the way the message sounds.

Fragment: I guess not :)

Fragment: Well, I have faith. If this is true, I will accept it.

Fragment: I know I will.

Kenosiel: Then one thing you lack. Only to choose :)

Fragment: :)

Fragment: Well, pray for me, okay? And for my friend also.

Kenosiel: I will do so. Have a good night.

Fragment: Thanks. Oh, and I've added you to my "friend" list, so we will talk again.

Kenosiel: Great. Have a blessed night.

[Fragment has left the conversation.]



Kenosiel: Well, it ended on a nice note. Sort of. The one who was opposing the message left, and the other seems to have liked what I said.

Phosphor: Nice. So you'll talk to them again?

Kenosiel: Probably. But I'm going to get some sleep... finally :)

Phosphor: Okay, good. Yah bless.

Kenosiel: You too. Goodnight!

[Kenosiel has left the conversation.]



The charge looked thoughtfully at the monitor as the program loaded and gave him the welcome prompt. He moved the mouse pointer over to the now-familiar little textbox and entered his name and identification code:

Login name: Kenosiel

Password: CRU\$4D3R

He hit [Enter] and waited as his signal was confirmed; and he was instantly connected to the vast network of minds and machines that spanned the planet.

Behind him, two spirits stood watching his activities. The demon had returned from his mission the night before not long after the conversation had ended, unable to divert too much attention from what Kenosiel had said to Fragment. The angel had said nothing, and the demon knew from what had transpired during the online conversation exactly what occurred in his absence. To the delight of one and the consternation of the other this evening, the evangelist did not have to wait long before he had a conversation going, and it was from an interesting source.

Fragment: Hi!

Kenosiel: Hello :) How are you this evening?

Fragment: I'm doing fine. I was talking to Sparkly earlier, trying to explain to her what you were telling me.

Kenosiel: Oh, how did she take it?

Fragment: She is still resisting a bit, but I think she may come around :)

Kenosiel: That's good news. And if you're ever unsure of something, go right ahead and ask.

Fragment: Sure thing. Oh, by the way... I wasn't completely honest about something last night.

Kenosiel: What's that?

Fragment: Well, you asked what my name meant, and I said it was just a name.

Kenosiel: Yeah. I know most people choose names because it means something to them... I wondered what you had meant by yours.

Fragment: Well, a fragment is a broken piece. I know I've been a Christian for years, but... I never really felt a part of anything, you know? And I never felt like I had completeness on anything. It's like there was something more that I was missing... I've had my doubts about my faith, and I have even felt tempted to look around at other religions recently.

Kenosiel: Oh... well, that's more common than many people think. But of course being tempted is not sin - only giving in to them.

Fragment: Yeah, I know... but I wanted you to know that, because of what you said to me last night. Some of the things made me feel pretty bad, you know? But some of it made me think that maybe I could be sure. Maybe I could know for certain that I've been forgiven, and that I can walk by my faith. That's why I didn't leave when Sparkly did.

Kenosiel: I'm glad you stuck around.

Fragment: Me too :)

Kenosiel: Good :)

Fragment: But I do have one question, though?

Kenosiel: What's that?

Fragment: Well, I was looking at your profile again, and I followed a link to a website. I was reading some of the articles but I wasn't exactly clear on one point of what I read so far.

Kenosiel: Ah, okay... so what do you need a further explanation about?

Fragment: Well, basically... what's the deal with this whole "Sabbath" thing? I thought the commandments were nailed to the Cross, or that the day was moved, or something like that.

Kenosiel: <smiles.> Well, that's actually a very good question.

[Reader has left the conversation.]

End

A Cloak of Zeal



“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” read the first words of the twenty-second Psalm in Aramaic. They have come to be known as the words spoken by the Blessed Sacrifice as He hung upon the Cross of Redemption. Yet the significance of the Psalm did not end with the first verse. The Son of Yahweh recounted the entire chapter in His mind, from memory, and took what comfort He could from the ancient prophecy.

“A Seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to Adonai for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this.”

Two verses held far greater significance than any had realized, however. One passage of the Psalm reads, “Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.” Another was, “Save me from the lion’s mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.” Bulls and lions – to the Psalmist they were but metaphors of powerful enemies. To the Sacrifice, they were indications of what spiritual forces had truly taken the lead against Him and His mission.

More than three years had passed since that great Day. The universe had been witness to a battle between angels and demons the like of which had not been seen since the fall of ancient Babylon, and when it was over a new age had dawned in the history of the Creation. Some of the demons had yet to recover from their wounds.

After Babel’s battle, Prince Michael had provided a visible healing to the demons for the injuries they had suffered in their original rebellion against the Throne of Heaven. Until the time of the Cross these wounds had remained hidden. After the Sacrifice had been given, however, all those open signs of defeat reappeared, and the power of the demons were, in some respects, limited, even while their fury against mankind peaked.

To these injuries, now hidden by cloaks, wings and illusions, many new ones had been added as the angels kept their fallen brethren away from Golgotha. The bull-demon Moloch had been so severely damaged that he had fallen into an unconscious state from which he had yet, three years later, to awaken. His wounds would eventually heal, as would all that had been administered since the wicked spirits were cast down to earth, but after their open debasement by the Messiah the rate would be far slower.

Arioch the “Fierce Lion” was also badly hurt, but this Prince of the House of Sloth had work to do in Israel, and he would not let himself remain in inactivity. He, who had been so instrumental in the course of the nation’s rebellious history, was not about to sleep when the new threat, the Messiah’s followers, were so weak and small in number. He,

who had led the religious leaders to reject the Awaited One in their spiritual laziness, was not about to relinquish his control over those who would serve as the greatest opportunity to crush the fledgling Church. He had returned.

Demons rarely act against creatures of flesh directly. It is far easier and far more pleasant (from their point of view) for them to use human agents to accomplish their goals in the world of men. While the fallen angels have been given the authority to manipulate the physical universe in many cases, and there are times when they alter human behavior based upon seemingly “random” events that the superstitious take for portents, a demon existing without a parasitic attachment to a human or set of humans is said to be in “dry places.”

It was time to draw new blood, the dark Principality mused.

Having recently regained some of his strength, the powerful demon hovered over Jerusalem, contemplating his past victories. His fondest memory was the capture of the Northern Kingdom by the nation of Assyria, for the Hebrews’ repeated idolatry and infidelity. “How fitting,” he had laughed as the guardian spirits of Israel were being decommissioned, “that *Ariel* is to be replaced by *Arioch*!” The Lion of Elohim was to be replaced by the Fierce Lion. The twelve Seraphim that had officially guarded the borders for so many centuries were not discouraged, however; they had simply gone forward in their work with new determination. Some remained to guard Judah, and others had gone with the captives to preserve the faithful few among the crowd.

Even as these thoughts passed through his essence, Arioch perceived that blood was about to be shed in a quite literal fashion. Like an ant drawn to abandoned food, the lion shifted his attention to the sensations of anger and violence that filled the spiritual atmosphere over the city.

“The Sanhedrin sit,” he hissed with delight. They were often good for sport.



Instantly the spirit was standing by the high priest, who was listening to infuriating words being spoken by a young man in bonds. Arioch was only one of an apparent multitude of spiritual beings observing the events.

“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” the man was saying, “And they have slain those who predicted the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; you, who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it!”

This was the end of the speech. Arioch did not know whether or not the human intended to continue his

indictment of the Sanhedrin, many elements of which he had personally brought about, but the religious leaders made very sure that it was the end of the speech nonetheless.

“Away with the heretic!” some cried. Others demanded death for his blasphemy. The newcomer could see his fellow demons weaving their way through the crowd, angels bearing wrath and greed. Arioch smiled; he had only just returned to Jerusalem, and already he was thrust into the thick of spiritual politics. These were interesting times.

There was also, present among the others, a demon from the House of Pride, one of Nisroch’s underlings. This one caught the demon lord’s attention, for Nisroch had been a fellow archangel, standing with him before the Throne of the Most High before they had fallen from grace.

Arioch was about to move closer to the reprobate angel, who appeared to be a Dominion, when suddenly a blinding light filled the room. Somewhere above the building one of the archangels had opened a doorway between the earth and the Heavenly Kingdom. The holy angels that were gathered there looked up at the light shining from their home; they were being instructed, and were apparently content to let the anger of the Sanhedrin continue to mount against the human speaker. The demons were paralyzed, but most of the humans were entirely unaware of what was happening. One, however, was not – the speaker himself. “Behold!” he said in wonder, “I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God!”

The demon would not have looked up even if he could. His fellow spirits were likewise bowed to the ground and unable to do very much, drowning as they were in the pure light of the Divine Presence, but the speaker’s declaration had certainly increased the hostility in the room. As quickly as it had begun the light vanished, and soon the rage of the former human audience was again the most important factor in the spiritual atmosphere. These were interesting times indeed!

As the enraged Sanhedrin were dragging their captive Stephen out of the building, it was clear that sloth and pride had already done their work; it was time now for the other unholy principles to have their way. Arioch found the one he had been observing earlier, and waved the pride demon over.

“I am Nadachiel,” said the Dominion, bowing before his superior, “a demon of the House...”

“Of Nisroch,” finished the Prince of Sloth. “How is your Ba’al?”

“Better than many,” Nadachiel said, eyeing the scars on the fallen archangel’s being.

Arioch smiled; this was indeed a demon of pride. “And what of these events? Why is Heaven so interested in this man?” he asked, sweeping an arm up to indicate the noisy crowd just outside, and their victim. Since the rejection of the Messiah there had been no glory in the council, and the demons were able, of course, to see right through the walls.

“He is one of seven assistants to the Abomination’s apostles,” Nadachiel responded, using a customary word among the demons for the Messiah – the union of spirit and flesh that they found unbearable to contemplate. “He was among the people, working miracles and teaching... what they teach. It was not a difficult matter to stir opposition against him, and one of the synagogues provided witnesses against him who claimed he had committed blasphemy.”

“Were you responsible for this?” Ariocho asked.

“Not I; not this time,” came the reply, “but I was appointed to watch over the trial.”

“You seem to have done a fair job of it,” said Ariocho. The humans were getting further away, moving toward the gate of the city, and so the two demons flew up into the air for a closer look.

Standing above the scene, the lion demon asked another question of his companion, “Who is that?”

Nadachiel looked over to where Ariocho was pointing, and saw a man standing apart from the crowd. He was holding the clothes of the others, but apparently strongly approving of what was happening. As the outraged council members began to throw stones at the one who had annoyed them, the guardian of their apparel urged them on with shouts and sounds of delight.

“Saul of Tarsus,” said the Dominion. “An interesting character is he.”

“In what way?” asked Ariocho.

With a harsh laugh, Nadachiel said, “He truly believes in the validity of Heaven’s instructions. He truly believes in the inheritance of his people, yet he has thought himself to be unworthy of a place among them.”

“Guilt?”

“Most certainly,” said the pride demon. “And he covers it with a cloak of zeal – what he lacks in stature he makes up in determination. He was a student of Gamaliel, by the way,” he said, indicating an old man who was nearby, but not participating in the execution.

“I remember him,” Ariocho said with a snarl. “He almost went with the others over to the teachings of the Sacrifice.”

“Almost,” came the reply, “but I had a hand in preventing that. Had you been here earlier, you would have heard the old man’s philosophy reflected in Saul’s words as he disputed Stephen in the council.”

“They disputed before the speech I heard?” Arioch asked rhetorically. “No wonder he is so eager to see the stones find their mark.” Nadachiel bowed as if personally complemented. “We have need of agents such as this,” the dark Principality concluded.

“Had you been here in the past three years,” Nadachiel said, and not without a little arrogance, “you would have seen our labors in preparing men such as this. They are immune to the teachings of these apostles and disciples; they are filled with loyalty, but primarily to their earthly teachers and institutions, not to the One whom they have claimed to serve.”

“That is Binael with him,” Arioch said, indicating a Seraph that stood nearby.

Nadachiel nodded, indicating that he knew the angel’s identity. “He has thus far kept us from gaining full possession of Saul; but after today, I do not believe he will have the authority to keep us from using him as we will. We have gained an effective soldier today.”

The demon was right. Saul had not only tried to discredit Stephen’s teachings before the Sanhedrin, but had cast his lot in with the murderers. Binael appeared unshaken by his charge’s actions, but he knew that the forces of darkness were about to claim yet another soul.



Jerusalem looked, to some, as it usually did. There were occasional reports of hostility toward the new sect that had arisen, but many were oblivious to the extent of the desperate struggle going on within their city’s walls. Others heard about the persecution that was being inflicted on the believers, but they said, “It is well; we already have too many religions, and too many gods.” Still others were amused at the rumors that the high priest and other Hebrew officials were bribing the Roman soldiers huge sums of money to turn a blind eye to their taking the law into their own hands – a course of action Caesar had expressly forbidden.

For Saul of Tarsus, however, Jerusalem was a battlefield. It was a diseased patient, and he would do everything in his power to keep the sickness from spreading. “I am the Lord’s physician,” he said to his companions, “and we have an operation to perform.”

Despite the unpleasant sensations that swept over him at times, Saul believed that IaHWeH was on his side, for he had been called forward by the high priest, and made an official member of the Sanhedrin following his disputation with the now-deceased witness. Certainly, he considered himself a master of the Law of Moses, and did not like being publicly instructed by one he considered a blasphemer, therefore he could chalk

most of his unsettling feelings up to indignation at the argument with Stephen. And yet...

Arioch did not let him wander too far down that path. "Keep your mind on your work," the arch demon reminded him. Saul did as he was instructed.

Leading a small group of armed officials, Saul sought out the homes of those who were following the Apostles, and brought them into captivity. Though Stephen was the first, others followed him into martyrdom, and many more inhabited the dark prisons of the city.

Where men met on the street to discuss the Sacrifice, Saul's spies made note of their steps when departing. It was easy, surprisingly easy, to find the followers of the Way. The apostles themselves, for some reason, could not be located, but those they turned away from the Covenant of Moses were not hiding. Some ("The fools!" thought Saul) openly spoke their defiance of the sacred office of the High Priest, saying, "We have Another to plead for us, and His name is Yahshua!"

"Then let Him rescue you from my hand," he would say to them, leading them by chains to the council that had sent him forth, and from thence to death or interment in prison.



"Heaven has instructed the remaining believers to flee from Jerusalem," the dark messenger said, his face bowed to the ground.

"Let them run," Arioch replied, "we will find them in other cities, and deal with them there."

"Plans are already underway," the demon said. "My Ba'al is asked to send his charge onward to Damascus, where the believers are many, and growing."

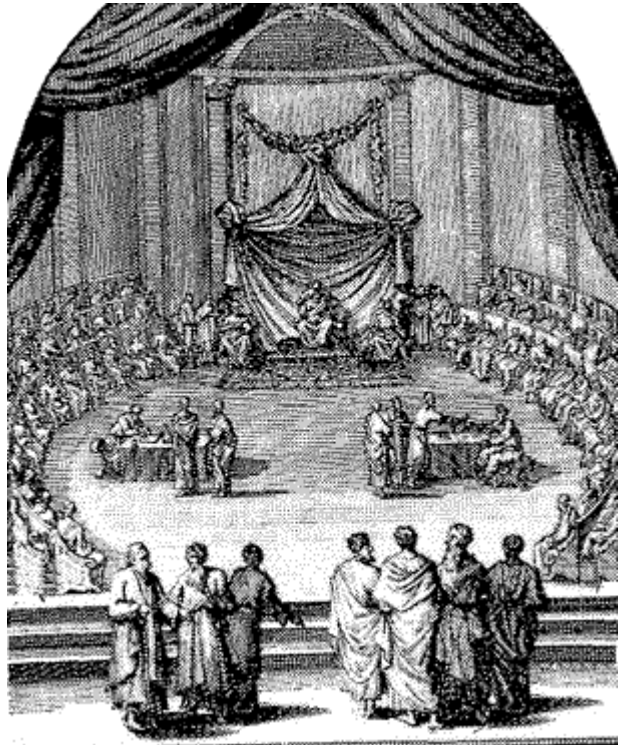
"He will go," Arioch responded. The demon departed. "One of the nameless multitudes in the army of Lucifer," the Principality mused, considering the messenger who had just vanished, "a soldier of no rank; yet he alone could tear this entire city apart, if only Heaven's restraints were to be removed."

The evil spirit turned his attention to Saul, and saw that indeed a message had come to him from the other members of the Sanhedrin, requesting his presence. He wasted no time in making ready, and presenting himself before them.

“Saul of Tarsus,” said the speaker, a highly respected member of the sect of the Pharisees. “You know why we have called you here today.” It was not a question.

“I know it,” he replied, “and I am eager to fulfill the wishes of the council.”

“You have been foremost among us in countering this insurrection,” said the speaker again. “We have need of your talents in Damascus. Go forth to the high priest, and obtain letters of introduction. He will commend you to the leaders of the Damascus synagogues, and explain your mission. They will cooperate with you fully by his authority.”



“I go,” said Saul, needing no further instructions from men or demons.

Saul went, but he was not as eager, perhaps, as his words before the council had indicated. To be sure, he was pleased with the faith they had shown in him, and desired nothing more than to please them, and earn the respect of his new peers. And yet...

Despite Arioch’s best efforts, Saul’s mind kept drifting back to Stephen. Yes, he had been angry that the younger man had spoken so eloquently. He was wrong, of course, in his application of the prophecies; the executed rebel whom he claimed to be representing could not possibly have been Messiah the Prince! Yet what a look on his face as he spoke... and what fervor in his voice... Of course he was wrong. How was he wrong?

“Keep your mind on your work!” the arch demon roared at him. He had gotten further along that winding path this time. “This should be getting easier,” Arioch muttered, “not more difficult.”



Binael had been instructed to do nothing. He knew, of course, that with Saul’s recent decisions he had no authority to directly guide the human. Darkness rippled in the air around him, barring the angel’s access to his heart. Even so, the decree of Heaven forbade him from even preventing the demons’ direct influence on the man; his only role

now was to stop his fallen counterparts from providing supernatural insight concerning the location of his prey.

“He did miracles, they say,” Saul mused, this time aloud, thinking again about the man he had seen stoned to death. It was something he had thought about before. By adding a voice to his thoughts, however, the human had inadvertently provided greater power to his words. Humans were, after all, created in the image of Elohim, who made all things by His word. Though fallen, mankind still contained glimmers of this creative power – their words created.

Arioch drew his blade, intent on striking the human with yet another wound of guilt, but as he did so the Heavens began to open, and the demon retreated in surprise. Binael heard a whisper from one of the archangels who was holding the void open. It was Raphael the Healer, and he said, “IaHWeH has set His hand upon this one, for he has been receptive to the influence of His Spirit.”

Arioch could not hear the silent communication, but he snarled with consternation when the Seraph drew his sword in response to some new information. “I have been commissioned,” the holy guardian said, “to allow Saul access to his own thoughts, without your interference.”



The distance between Jerusalem and Damascus is less than two hundred miles. The land was not even, however, and so the journey being undertaken by Saul and his men would cover several days. During these days, Saul was leading a double life. In the daylight, in the presence of his men, he was the bold, fearless champion of the Sanhedrin. He was the hero of Israel, going forward, surrounded by holy fire, and seeking out the wolves who sought to tear the weak and tired away from the flock of the Chosen People.

At night he was only Saul, and he was coming to realize that he did not know who “Saul” was as well as he thought. Aside from his uncertainty, and the feelings of conviction he was trying desperately to stifle, the newest member of the Hebrew council was furious with himself.

“Finally, finally I have arrived at the position I desired,” he thought to himself. “Finally I have seen my gifts and training recognized by the bright ones in the land, and I am called rabbi by those who would not so call me before. Finally they have seen that I am among the most clever of them all, and that my father raised me from birth to be a prince among my people... and what now? Shall I, for the sake of rumors and lies, cast this away?”

“No!” he said, almost aloud, “No, I shall not be made a heretic by these people. They will die by my hand, or by the years that visit them in prison.”

It was beneath the Prince of the House of Sloth to sulk, and so he bore the indignity of being held at bay without comment, and without expression. He merely watched as the irritating Seraph stood over the struggling man, shielding him with his wings but not himself interfering with his course of thought. “You have no imagination,” he hissed once at the guardian angel, ridiculing his sense of fair play. “Why do you not merely take him? Subsume his will, decide for him and be done with it. You, of the Seraphim, have the power to do so.”

“This is unworthy of Heaven,” Binael replied simply. “Saul must choose for himself.”

But Saul did not choose... he wavered back and forth, at least when he was alone, and he put forth a strong front before his attendant audience. So the days passed, until the Sabbath arrived.

The Jews had made a law, though not found in the Scriptures, that travel from one's home on the seventh day of the week was to be limited to a certain distance. There were times, however, when they desired to continue an important journey, or to avoid delays, even during what they considered sacred hours. As a way to get around their own requirement, therefore, they allowed that if one stopped to rest in a certain type of location, this place could be considered one's temporary dwelling, and the journey from that point forward could be resumed.

One of the many prayers Saul had offered at their last rest stop was for peace, for an end to his conflict, for (and he almost feared to pray for this) a certainty that what he was doing was acceptable in Heaven's eyes. A part of him asked, “How could Elohim not approve? I am doing the work of the Levites before the golden calf!” The Scripture came to his mind concerning this matter. The Israelites had been impatient for the return of Moses, and so they goaded Aaron into making an Egyptian image and proceeded to celebrate the new symbol of their god.

When Moses returned and saw what had happened in his absence he was furious, and said, “Who is on Yahweh's side? Let him come unto me!” All the Levites had been among those who drew near to Moses, and the prophet of the Most High had them cleanse the camp of the unrepentant, and with great fervor and violence. Saul was determined to do no less.

Another part of him was less sure of himself. He remembered the prophet Samuel, who was enraged at the people of Israel for wanting a king; but IaHWeH had said to him, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even unto this day wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods, so do they also unto you. Now, therefore, hearken unto their voice; yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.”

Samuel was instructed to let the people have their way, even while peacefully protesting their decision. Was Saul to do the same? He genuinely wanted to know this and so, after gathering his courage, he sent his request skyward.

In the Courts Above, an important decision was reached. Binael's words had been true, Saul must decide for himself; yet he had been in darkness for so long that he was having difficulty doing so. It was time, the Elohim decided, to level the playing field properly. Saul believed in IaHWeH; he was about to hear from Him.



The men who were traveling with Saul stepped back, terrified. A brilliant light had broken from the clear sky, an impossible cylinder that did not spread out like lamplight, but beamed down like a physical object. Saul himself did not step back. He was caught, trapped in the cylinder, and he had been thrown to the ground by the brilliance, covering his aching eyes with his hands.

The soldiers did not know whether to flee, to rush forward to rescue their captain, or to fall on their faces. The decision was made for them, however, when the earth rippled beneath their feet, and they dove forward, instinctively falling into positions of worship. As they lay there they heard the sound of a voice, but they could not make out the words. They knew it was a voice, and not some natural sound, but it sounded like thunder in their ears, and they did not know what was being said.

Saul, however, both heard the voice and understood the words, coming down to him in clear, commanding Hebrew. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, my Lord?" Saul asked in shock, wondering what power he could possibly have over one able to speak from the sky.



Binael stood nearby with a solemn look on his face. Saul's brief question revealed much to the universe: he did not truly know the voice of the One he had been claiming to serve all these years. Arioeh's look was not so solemn. He had been thrown backward by the light, thrust against the tempting spirits that were following Saul's men. The other angels who stood nearby, and there were always angels nearby, merely bowed to the ground in the Presence of the One who now spoke, the One who was about to reveal His identity to the cowering human.

"I am Yahshua, whom you are persecuting," said the Glorified Sacrifice, the "Abomination" hated by the

demons. Heaven fell silent for a moment, giving the hero of Israel a chance to realize what this meant. He realized it quickly. Before he could speak, however, Yahshua had something else to say to him. He asked, "Why are you kicking against the goads?"

Why are you fighting against your conscience? It was a question Saul had been too afraid, or ashamed, to ask himself for the past few days. They were so close to Damascus now, so very close, but all that meant nothing. He had no answers for this infinite Being whose servants he had dared to oppose. He had no words to offer in his defense before the Majesty of Eternity, against whom he had raised himself up to speak, and to act. Pride, pride, damnable pride! He knew, and he conceded that he had truly known all along, that this was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. This was the God of the apostles, and the disciples, the God of Stephen the martyr. Saul began to tremble. Why had he been so slow to admit it? Why had he been so slothful in the face of his convictions?

The demon Arioch, the partial answer to Saul's questions, held his sword out before his eyes, snarling as the dark fire of his unholy blade entirely failed to protect him from the light. He curled his large wings forward, wrapping them around his face, but to no avail. It was so bright, so *there*, that even the mud-born, unwashed, sour-breathed, dim-minded humans could see it. The dark Principality's thoughts raged with hatred against the beloved creatures, for which Heaven had sacrificed so much, but he was powerless to act as Saul's voice rose up to the sky, broken and contrite and humble.

"Lord, what will you have me do?"

"Arise," came the clear and forceful reply. "Go into the city, and it will be told to you, what it is you must do."

Suddenly the voice was gone, as was the light.

"Ah!" Saul cried out, "I am blinded!"

He stood up, and was now groping around uncertainly, his mind and body both in great disarray. His men were standing speechless, the thunder they had just experienced still ringing in their ears. One of them, the first to recover, stepped forward and took the hand of his captain. "My lord Saul," he said, "what was that thing?"

Saul did not answer immediately, but when he did, his words filled his men with wonder. "My lord and my God."

As they began to move slowly, shakily, toward nearby Damascus, Arioch shook the last remnants of the light's effects away, and he swung his sword down, preparing to charge in and reclaim his warrior.

"You will not escape so easily," he shouted, and swooped forward, the purple-black fire of his kherev leading the way. The instant he came within striking distance, however,

Arioch was barred once again. This time it was not by the direct light of Heaven, but a flower of fire that exploded in his path.

Binael, his six wings expanded fully around his blazing form, stood between the demon and the human. His glittering weapon was drawn, and his expression was grim, though infuriatingly satisfied, as the Principality noted. The Seraph didn't say a single word – he had nothing to communicate to the Prince of Sloth that could be stated more eloquently than the sight of his drawn sword.

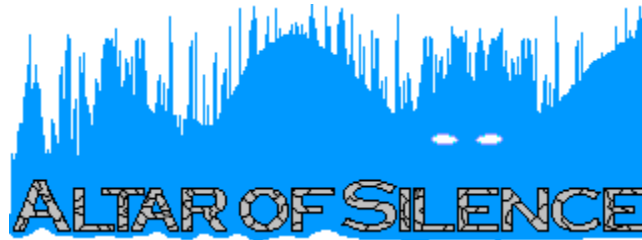
The two stared each other down for a time that, by angelic reckoning, was very long. Finally the demon spoke, choosing his words carefully, and deliberately. “I will recover still further from my wounds. My power will grow. Let Saul join himself to the Abomination and His people, if that is your design. Stand guard over him, if that is what your orders are, but you will see me in every shadow. You will find me waiting in every corner, and neither you nor he will have any rest until he returns to the dust that spewed him forth. I, Arioch, Ba'al of the House of Sloth and archangel of the Ikari'im, will forever be a thorn in the flesh of that human.”

Binael continued to say nothing. He was far less impressed by the threats and posturing of the wicked spirit before him than by the soft words he heard coming from the mouth of the man who was being led, sightless, by the hand.

Saul was praying, and Saul was thinking, and Saul had been broken on the Rock. “Forgive me, my Lord,” he said, as his men continued to exchange uncertain glances. “Forgive me, and guide me as this man guides my hand, for if you will be merciful to your servant, I will do your work on the earth. Though I am small, I will do great things. Watch and see what your servant will do.”

The praying man was speaking in Greek, and his words, when he said, “I am small,” sounded to the watching universe as this, *Ego eimi Paulus*, “I am Paul.”

End



Gabriel hit the ground... hard. His eyes, still blazing white from the heat of battle, were narrowed in pain. He attempted to rise, but the weight of his injuries pinned him to the face of the earth that, even for angels, was a surface that took an effort of will to penetrate.

A brief memory flashed through the mind of the Archangel: Lucifer, defeated, lying unconscious on the ground near the base of the Tower of Babel. In his helplessness he had lay still, as subject to the planet's gravity as any physical being. The white-robed Cherub was presently faring little better; his wings had been scored with the fiery blades of his enemies, and his body (such as it was a "body") was fighting off the shock of injury. Though the divine warrior had played key roles in every major episode of conflict since the Rebellion, he had never felt the direct sting of a demonic weapon until now.

Raising his fine-featured face from the dust and looking upward at the swarm of wicked spirits about to descend upon him, Gabriel remembered the incidents leading up to his approaching defeat.



In the days following the Rebellion, Prince Michael had made it known that the demons would not allow the citizens of planet earth any pity. Azazel, Lucifer's more common name among the spirits, was always seeking ways to keep humanity ignorant, to maintain their position as pawns in his ongoing campaign to overthrow the Kingdom of Heaven or, failing that, to preserve his own existence in the face of a prophesied judgment.

The holy angels had watched the influence of their fallen brethren at work among human beings. The Kingdom of Nimrod flourished briefly after the Deluge, only to be shattered. Scattering the rebels had spread a dark shadow over the world, although it served to delay a greater, more immediate evil. When Babylon rose again, a golden phoenix from the ashes of its destruction, Gabriel had watched with interest. When Persia began to grow in power, and the leaders of this new nation began to speak against the rule of the Babylonians, he was intrigued.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had been far more than a mere vassal to Chay'il, Azazel's demonic regent among human kingdoms. In fact, he'd been an impressive example of the heights to which men may rise if they submit to the chastening of the Almighty. The angels beheld the nobility of his final days, in which he had cast off the

arrogance and self-sufficiency that had marked his rise to fame; and he, great man that he was, had acknowledged the authority of Daniel, the prophet of the Most High.

Gabriel had been surprised, therefore, when Michael asked him to establish a presence in the realm of Cyrus. Leaving the office of Covering Cherub in the capable hands of his fellow Watcher Raziel, the mighty angel vanished from the courts of Heaven and appeared before the great dome of darkness enshrouding the Winter Palace.

That day, years ago, he had fought his way into the sanctuary of Dubbiel, the powerful angel who had remained in Persia while Chay'il departed for yet another land. "You are not to take the full glory of the Shekinah with you," Michael had told him. "You are not to disrupt the progress of the kingdom, for though you are to influence Cyrus regarding my people, the movements of the Persians according to their own will are a part of the bigger picture."

Stepping through into the endless, spiritual night of the demons' influence, Gabriel was immediately approached by powerful enemies.

"What business do you have here, Covering Cherub?" the fallen Throne Radaphiel asked him, sneering at the title that once belonged to his master.

"I come forth for the glory of IaH," Gabriel replied, drawing his khrev. "I have been instructed to stand at the throne of Cyrus – but you need not come to harm. I am not here to fight you."

"Our purpose is not the same," Radaphiel replied coldly, drawing his own sword, which burst into dark flames after clearing the sheath. "We will drag you back to the gates of Heaven." With these words the four-winged adversary led a small army to oppose the intruder.

During the battle in Heaven, and in a few conflicts since, Prince Michael had shown Himself to be capable of absorbing massive amounts of damage without any lasting effects. He would take blows meant for other angels, and continue to fight while the wounds healed themselves. Gabriel's approach was somewhat different. He didn't allow himself to be hit at all, and his speed and skill with spiritual weapons were apparent as he fought his way past many opponents on the grounds of the Winter Palace.

He charged past Radaphiel and struck at the two angels that had been behind him. Turning around, he evaded three more swords (two thrown at him and one swung) and cut into yet another opponent. As he flew up into the air the white veil that usually hung over his shoulders vanished, and a large, glowing shield appeared in his left hand just in time to intercept a fiery spear thrown in his direction.

Several more demons charged at him, giving him no time to rest and consider his course. As they did so Gabriel's head began to glow, and a helmet of shining metal appeared

where his crown had been. A golden breastplate flickered into existence over his chest, and his feet were covered with sparkling boots.

The archangel descended back to the earth like a missile, stomping a demon in the process with his golden footwear, and then whirling around and speeding toward the Palace before the others could react. They did not remain inactive for long, however, because Radaphiel rallied them and led the pursuit.



Gabriel's speed was limited within the demons' sphere of influence, but he was not in a particular rush either. If he did not demonstrate his power clearly on the way to Cyrus' throne, he would have to bear constant attacks from enemies, and would not be able to effectively carry out Heaven's purpose for his presence in Persia.

He flew through the corridors, only inches from the ground, past the mighty Persian Guard, who were completely unaware of his presence. The demons around them were not, however, and they soon joined the chase.

As he entered a large chamber Gabriel turned around and folded his wings, awaiting his opponents. They approached and he threw his own sword, blazing with white flames. His eyes flashed with light as he caused the whirling disk his weapon had become to spin in a circle and take out a number of demons.

His shield was soon busy, preventing injury from demonic attacks, but his sword was far more occupied, cutting through the hordes of spiritual soldiers. A human priest of the Persian kingdom walked into the chamber, carrying a golden vessel with him. He stopped short as one of the demons approached him, and looked around as if sensing trouble. With a scowl on his face, he rushed off to his temple.

Gabriel watched him go, knowing there would soon be more opposition. He did not have much time to contemplate that, however, for soon the large Throne with whom he had first spoken jumped forward and engaged him. They fought for a while, the holy angel making sure his back was clear, and then the Cherub was able to connect with one of the evil spirit's wings. As Radaphiel staggered backward, Gabriel's eyes flared with white light again. The demon found himself pulled by invisible means up toward the roof, and he was bound there, powerless, as other fallen angels were also thrust toward him.

Soon there was a stack of demons pressed together, all hanging in mid air, and Gabriel threw his blazing sword at them, the fiery kherev passing through each of their beings. The light faded from the holy archangel's eyes as the wounded guardians of Persia tumbled toward the ground.

"Another day..." the defeated Throne muttered as he slipped into unconsciousness.

The messenger of Heaven knew his labors for that day were not yet complete, however. As he expected, the chanting of the priest in the temple had aroused more interest, and soon he saw the expected results.

A mighty Principality who had named himself Aratron floated through the walls of the chamber, flanked on either side by what appeared to be the honor-guard of Persia's demonic spirits. He settled to the earth in an almost casual manner, and addressed the divine angel.

"You have chosen your time poorly, Gabriel. Ba'al Dubbiel is not here."

"I did not come here to see him," the angel responded, "I was instructed to stand by the throne of Cyrus, King of Persia."

"That we cannot allow," Aratron said. "My masters have guided him for too long a time to merely turn his reins over to the will of Elohim."

"The King of Heaven does not now oppose your claims on Persia," Gabriel informed his adversary, noting the surprise in Aratron's eyes as he said this. "He merely seeks the protection of His people."

The Principality laughed heartily, his surprise giving way to contempt. "For this you are come? For the safety of those who did not even have enough faith to retain their homeland? You think you will win something if you let the Israelites escape back to Jerusalem, don't you?"

Gabriel remained silent, and let Aratron continue.

"You won't win anything! Most of the *Chosen People* have preferred our rule to those of your King, and remain in their Babylonian 'exile' in royal grandeur."

"Heaven knows your plans for the Hebrews," Gabriel now spoke. "Even now you raise enemies against them from the royal courts, to crush them – for you think that IaH has abandoned them to your power."

Aratron's face darkened. "You have come far enough into our realm," he said, "to feel our power for yourself."

As Aratron dove down, Gabriel's shield vanished. The divine angel grasped the handle of his sword with both hands and parried the Principality's powerful attack. He leaped to one side, his newly-returned veil trailing after him, and struck the sword of his opponent downward.

Aratron hurtled past, off balance, but turned and renewed his attack, joined by his companions. Gabriel soon found himself once more engaged in a desperate struggle.

The holy angel's kherev increased in size, and the mighty Cherub swung it around with both hands and great skill, faster than the demons could anticipate. Soon fallen angels were being thrown about, unable to defend themselves against the rapid blows.

Gabriel thrust downward at a demon lying near his feet, and while his kherev was resting on the ground he raised his free hand toward the approaching Aratron, his will hurling the evil Principality backward against those behind him. Thus doing, he bought himself some time to go on the offensive. None were able to withstand his onslaught, and soon only Aratron and Gabriel were left standing, the former already injured in several places.

Seizing his advantage, the divine warrior rushed forward and grabbed his opponent by his silver robe. Gabriel swung him around and threw him up into the air. Faster than Aratron could move to even steady himself, the Cherub spread his wings and soared upward, striking at the Principality several times in lightning succession.

There were other demons present to witness this victory, but none dared challenge the intruder after that display. Gabriel sheathed his kherev and walked confidently toward Cyrus' throne room, with the various elements of his armor fading from sight.



When the Persian army moved against Babylon, Gabriel's was the hand that wrote the sentence on the wall of Belshazzar's chamber. When the prophet Daniel retained the favor of yet another heathen king, Gabriel's influence was demonstrated in that as well. Yet the mighty archangel did not remain with Cyrus in Babylon; he was instructed to return to Persia to work with Cambysses, the monarch's son, who would not prove as favorable to the Hebrews as had his father.

In the third year of Cyrus' reign Gabriel was attending the prince, ministering unto him with subtle influence. Within the dome of darkness cast by the idolatry of the Persians, the archangel had maintained a small sphere of influence near the throne.

"Greetings unto my herald, and blessings from the Most High."

Gabriel looked up to see El Michael standing before him, glowing brightly and casting a golden light upon the surfaces of all the objects in view – a light that could be seen by all the nearby spirits. "My Prince," he said, bowing low before Him.

"My servant Daniel, the prophet of Babylon, kneels in sorrow at a lonely altar. His burden is great, for he has been shown visions of things that must be before the end... and his spirit is greatly troubled by what many of them mean."

The nearby demons drew a little closer, attempting to overhear the words of the divine Messenger, although they dared not step directly into the burning light of the Presence

that surrounded Michael. “Let me show you what I have revealed unto my servant,” He said, and proceeded to do just that.

When Gabriel had obtained knowledge of the prophecies, El Michael concluded by saying, “I have appointed you to go forth and make these things known to him, as you did but a short time before.” With that, He vanished.

As the golden light faded from the room, Gabriel realized that the demons were all noticeably absent. He immediately knew what this meant, and as he began to walk toward the doors of the large chamber, his helmet, shield, breastplate and boots sparkled into visibility.

As he expected, a tremendous array of evil angels were waiting for him outside of the throne room. Aratron and Dubbiel were both there, although Gabriel had seen the former far more frequently than Persia’s actual demonic regent during his residency.

Dubbiel flew closer, landing on the ground in front of the Cherub. “So the thorn thinks to work itself out of our palm,” he said, staring intently at Gabriel’s eyes. “On another day, I would welcome your departure, but my demons have heard enough of your conference with Michael. Already we have sent spirits to try the will of your prophet; and we shall keep you here until his faith withers to dust.”



Aratron remained in the air, his silver robes arranged in an unusual manner. This was a new change to his appearance, for he was not thus attired on the day of Gabriel’s entrance into Persia. A flap of the spiritual material covered the lower half of his face in an imitation of a partially wrapped veil, which divine angels used to screen their countenances while in the presence of the Most High; another was draped over his head like the hood of a monk. The Principality looked, to the eyes of the spirits around him, impressive; but Gabriel saw only a desperate essence, a wounded creature who desired nothing more than to share his unrest with other beings.

The fallen angels had no armor, no shields, but they made up for this disadvantage by wielding the forces of Creation to their advantage in combat. Even now, Aratron was sparkling with electrical energy, an authority supposedly stolen from Adam when Lucifer induced humanity to fall. In a nearby chamber, the human guards shifted uncomfortably and their eyes darted nervously back and forth... there was a bad feeling in the air.

“Our territory is expanding,” Aratron hissed through his silvery mask. “The dome is larger than before, and my authority greater. You will not escape me this time.”

“I did not *escape* you last time,” Gabriel responded, but in silent whisper that only the Principality could perceive. The demon's scowl was hidden by his veil, but none missed his intentions as he drew his sword.

Before he could attack, however, Dubbiel gave a deep roar and his wings folded down over his reddish-brown robe. "I shall make an end to him," he declared, and his form blurred and expanded, taking on the appearance of a gigantic bear. As it was among the archangels of Heaven, Uriel being a lion and Raphael a bull, for example, so the mighty ones among the demons had developed associations with animals. This served them well when they were given authority over totemic religions, but was also put to good effect in combat.

Often, the demons would even change their names to reflect these new qualities, taking on titles not assigned to them while they were faithful. Dubbiel, the first part of whose name means "bear," was one such spirit.

The other fallen angels hung back, sensing their leader's desire to test the mighty messenger's power. Even Aratron re-sheathed his darkly burning blade and flew up into the shadows with his arms folded. His face, inasmuch as it was visible behind the folds of fabric, bore an expression that was equal parts anticipation and disappointment. He had wanted to fight Gabriel himself, but he knew that Dubbiel would put up an entertaining contest.

The archangel fell back before the initial assault, slipping aside to avoid a raking attack by claws that trailed dark fire. When the bear tried to follow this up with a tremendous bite, Gabriel hit it in the face with his shield. This did little to faze the animalistic angel, however, and Ba'al Dubbiel stepped in with a backhanded blow that sent his opponent spinning.

Gabriel flew up into the air to avoid a charge, and stabbed downward as he attempted to land on Dubbiel's head. The powerful demon saw the attack coming, however, and loped forward. As the demons filling the chamber watched, the two warriors battled each other, neither one able to gain the advantage over the other.

Time seemed to lose all meaning for the Cherub, as he avoided the rain of attacks from the transformed Power. Although Aratron, as a Principality, was of a higher angelic Order than the demonic Prince of Persia, Dubbiel had apparently distinguished himself in Lucifer's ranks. It was easy to see how, Gabriel mused, for a Power would not ordinarily be able to stand against a Cherub, and certainly not against an archangel such as himself, for more than a few moments.

In this dome of darkness, the spiritual representation of the Bear-demon's influence, the wicked angel had a great advantage. The human residents had cast their worship toward ungodly forces, and Heaven would not disrupt their freedom to do so. Gabriel's ability to survive unharmed in the heart of the Palace was a testimony to his own strength in the service of the Most High, and the King of Heaven's desire to protect His people from national extinction, but the environment was having a telling impact on his ability to dispatch this powerful foe.

"Ah," the Cherub gasped, as Dubbiel's claw flashed across his side.

The bear reared backward and gave a series of bellowing roars. Soon it was apparent that the demon was laughing, and words issued forth from his throat in a deep, hoarse voice. "I have won a name for myself," he said, "for I have wounded this champion of Heaven."

"You are the first," Gabriel admitted, holding his injured side. "But there is a consequence to that distinction."

Unfortunately, the Cherub was not able to press an offensive. Dubbiel had not been careless in his celebration, and by the time the holy warrior had retrieved his shield and advanced toward the bear, he was met with claws and momentum.



Aratron was beginning to grow bored.

While he, like all his fellow demons, had been enthralled by the prospect of combat between Gabriel and Dubbiel (and had not been disappointed by the reality of what had unfolded before them) this was certainly going on longer than any of them had anticipated!

His eyes blazed in slowly increasing frustration under their shadowy hood, and his mouth muttered curses behind the silvery veil covering his face. "Make an end," he hissed, remembering the Power's boastful claim at the beginning of the battle.

It soon became apparent, however, that even with the damage the holy angel had sustained he was still a match for the fallen prince. It was also apparent that Dubbiel was not about to ask for help from any of his fellow spirits. With a flick of his mind, Aratron summoned one of the many nearby demons, who was instantly kneeling before him.

"Aid our prince," he said, pointing regally at the dueling sprits. The Virtue nodded and flew closer to the battle. Aratron held no official position in Persia, but he was respected by the resident demons due to his great strength, and Dubbiel often treated him as a close second. In fact his name, Aratron, signified a "Plough," and he had been the entering wedge when Chay'il and Dubbiel had initially established their strong presence over Cyrus' people.

Dubbiel and Gabriel both noticed the Virtue circling around them as they continued to fight, but neither of them acknowledged his presence. When the intruding angel drew his sword, the demonic prince glanced at him with an expression made all the more dark by his ursine features. The Virtue did not notice, however, for his gaze was fixed on the swift movements of the white-robed Cherub, and when he saw what he believed to be a vulnerable flaw in his defense, he stepped in with a furtive thrust.

Opposition came from an unexpected source. A giant paw slammed into the demon, throwing him backward, and sending his kherev spinning into the ranks of the audience. “He is mine,” Dubbiel growled, looking around for Aratron, for he knew the Virtue would not have dared approach unless commanded. “I will not share my triumph with another!”



Yet while the bear had not been imprudent with his mocking laughter, he was not so cautious in his anger. Gabriel threw his flickering kherev at the giant, furry form. Dubbiel saw the attack and threw himself to the side, sustaining only singed fur in the process; but the archangel's attack was not over yet. As his eyes began to glow, Gabriel willed his weapon not to return to his possession, for it had become stuck in the wall on the far side of the chamber. He raised his hands to his opponent, who immediately found himself being pulled toward the wall.

The bear roared as, caught off guard, he realized he was speeding toward the exposed point of the divine weapon. “Angels do not pervert the forces of nature,” he bellowed in protest, knowing Heaven's ban on its soldiers using the sorcery that came so naturally to demonic spirits.

“This is not gravity,” Gabriel said, increasing the velocity of the large animal. “You are bound by divine will.”

Dubbiel turned aside in a last attempt to avoid being impaled on the bright blade. At the same time, he started to shift back into the normal, angelic form. He had begun the change too late, however, for the speed at which he was being repelled from his opponent. Gabriel's kherev sank deep into his shoulder and then, as the bear was pulled up into the air by the same invisible means, it opened a larger wound in the partially changed body. “There will be a consequence,” Dubbiel said, as the light left his eyes. But Aratron knew that although the prince was mimicking Gabriel's earlier words, the threat was meant for him.

“It is very late,” Gabriel said, but even as he spoke these words, he was speeding toward the door. Aratron did not need to give a command, the demons that had been standing by during the fight with Dubbiel immediately surged forward to stop the Cherub's progress.

He made it out of the palace, and halfway to the limit of the dome of darkness, before the demons, which were in their spiritual element, caught up with him. Gabriel, his wings beating the air, slashed at those who drew alongside him on the left and on the right. “Almost there,” he thought, as he saw the edge of the demons' main influence drawing closer. Once beyond that barrier, no creature would be able to catch him.

“Almost there,” but he was forced to pull back in order to avoid flying directly into the path of Aratron's outstretched blade. Rather than merely stopping, he swung back and

few straight upward, hoping to avoid his enemies long enough to pass through the spiritual layer, which was closer to the ground this far from the Palace.

Other demons were above him, however, and Gabriel soon found himself locked in battle with Aratron and the Persian honor guard.

A whirl of blades and wings later, most of the demons that stood in his path were lying motionless on the ground, and Aratron was nursing several serious lacerations. The hood over his head had been split, and now only the silver cloth covering his mouth distinguished him from the other demons around him. Gabriel had not entirely escaped further injury, however. Dubbiel's initial success had slowed him considerably, and other enemies had managed to sneak in an occasional hit.

All this would have been bearable had it not been for what happened next. As Gabriel and Aratron drew near to each other, prepared to cross swords once again, a flash of reddish-brown cloth caught the archangel's eye, and suddenly the Principality he was facing plummeted to the ground, hit from above by a powerful blow. "I told you he was mine," Dubbiel shouted at him, now fully returned to his angelic appearance.

The evil Power drew his sword, the dark counterpart to Gabriel's bright kherev, and although he was still suffering from his slowly-healing wound, he was naturally faster than in his previous, larger form. Strength was not an issue now, for the demon was merely trying to withstand the Cherub as long as possible, and he was adequately able to do so without the aid of his animalistic shape.

Dubbiel slowly began to force Gabriel backward, back toward the Palace building, and deeper into the darkness of the Persians' idolatrous worship. The divine angel could feel his arms growing weary, and he was beginning to truly grow concerned. "Daniel," he said, remembering the prophet who was even then silently praying for assurance.

"Daniel is in our power," the demon in front of him snarled. "We have broken him, and we will break you."

The archangel knew far better than to believe this disheartening report, but he would have dearly loved the opportunity to investigate the status of Daniel's faith in person. As he darted in to attack the demon he felt a sharp pain across his back, and he found himself spinning toward the ground.

As Gabriel fell from the air, Dubbiel saw Aratron hovering motionlessly where he had been, a severed wing in his hand. "A gift," the Principality said, holding the offering out to his prince.

Dubbiel was not amused. "Interfering fool!" he said. "You know well enough that Gabriel is a Cherub."

“I do indeed,” Aratron snapped, offended that he was not to be praised for his assistance. “But it will take him some time to unfold his second pair of wings. The demons below us will certainly...”

“Not this Cherub,” Dubbiel interrupted, a small smile playing across his face as he saw Gabriel rising up behind his annoying underling. The prince of the kingdom of Persia gave his fellow demon no warning when the archangel struck.

“That one must learn his place,” the mighty Power said to his regenerated opponent, as they both watched a trail of silver falling to the earth. “So,” he said, focusing his attention once more on Gabriel and indicating the new, shining white wings, “two down and four to go.”



As Gabriel watched the milling demons draw still closer, he reflected that Dubbiel had indeed done all that he had threatened. The third and final pair of wings that the Cherub was able to generate was injured, and the weariness spreading through his body made even standing a feat currently beyond his capabilities.

It had been days, literally days, since the battle had begun, and although neither angels nor demons felt natural exhaustion, the injuries they sustained translated into an increasing difficulty in being able to act. Dubbiel was badly hurt as well, but he was at least able to maintain the aerial advantage. Currently, he seemed to believe that his superiority over Heaven’s champion was already established, for he was now ordering the other spirits, most of which had not even engaged the angel yet, to attack *en masse*.

Gabriel knew he had been sent by Heaven to aid the human standing before the stone altar in Babylon. He knew that he had a divine commission to fulfill; therefore, although he was quickly beginning to run out of ideas as to how this could possibly be accomplished, he had every confidence that he would soon be standing in Babylon.

Consequently, he was not entirely surprised when the golden glow of El Michael’s presence flashed across the faces of the nearest demons, and they all fell back in shock and fear.

As the Prince of Heaven appeared before him, Gabriel immediately felt his injured being responding to the sweet presence of Heaven. Soon he could stand again, and the dark spirits surrounding them seemed unable to draw near to the shining globe that surrounded the holy angels.

“I thought you said I was not to use the light of the Shekinah in Persia,” Gabriel said, looking at the effect of the light on the multitudes around them.



“I said you weren’t to take It with you when you were entering in,” Michael responded. “I didn’t say anything about utilizing It when you were breaking *out*.”

“Oh,” Gabriel said.

Soon the two divine warriors, surrounded by unbearable brightness, were cutting through the ranks of the fallen angels and making their way toward the edge of the dome. “Go,” Michael said to His fellow messenger, as He turned to face those spirits who were brave enough to oppose them. “Go,” He repeated, pointing toward the barrier with His sword.

Gabriel went, sparing only a single glance backward to see Dubbiel flying directly toward Michael with fire in his eyes.



The silent altar that stood by the Tigris River, known to the natives as the Hiddekel, was surrounded by wicked spirits. Though the structure itself was holy, the heart of Babylon was undeniably unholy ground. The faithful prophet was kneeling before the uncut stones, weary from fasting, weary from prayer. He could not see the demons that were around him on every side, but he could feel their presence, their influence, cutting into his faith, and tempting him to doubt both his sanity and his commitment to the King of Heaven.

“You reflect on madness,” they whispered to him. “Your Prince has abandoned you to illusions.”

“It is not so,” Daniel sighed, grasping the soil. “He will send a messenger.”

Even as he spoke these words, Gabriel was approaching, blazing with the glory of the Divine Presence, rising on the scene like the morning sun.

Most of the demons fled immediately, unwilling to test the long-delayed fury of the Covering Cherub. A few lingered a little longer, and one powerful demon waited until the very last moment before sheathing his sword and speeding off.

Before he could land, however, Gabriel beheld with surprise the appearance of El Michael just above the stone altar. The Cherub had traveled from Persia as quickly as he could, arriving as swiftly as a thought, yet his Prince had managed to finish off the remaining Persian demons, and to precede him to Daniel’s location.

Daniel immediately felt a sense of deep peace as Michael lit upon the altar. The whispers were gone, and the dark shadows that had been cast over his soul seemed to have departed. The effect was noticeably different on the Babylonians, however.

The former soldiers of Babylon, those few who had been retained by their conqueror Cyrus and sent to protect the prophet on his journey, had been standing some distance off. After three weeks of doing nothing significant, they were resigned to making the most of their camp, and had been gambling the last of their supplies with each other while awaiting messengers to bring fresh food. As one of them glanced over at the silent prophet, all of them were suddenly stricken by a holy dread. This was not a sensation with which they were familiar, and they stood up, threw down their weapons, and fled.

Suddenly permitted to see the divine Being standing before him, Daniel did exactly what one might expect at being overwhelmed by so great a shock on an entirely empty stomach. He fainted.

Michael raised His sword to Gabriel, in a wordless signal to indicate His triumph in Persia, and then vanished.

The archangel landed on the ground and drew the particles surrounding him together, taking on a physical appearance. His wings swirled downward to form a pure, white garment. Now corporeal, the Cherub reached forward and gently shook the unconscious prophet's shoulders.

"Wake up, Daniel," he said, and lifted his face carefully off the ground, setting him in a kneeling position. The prophet leaned forward, resting his weight on his palms, but his eyes opened and he beheld the messenger standing before him, ready to deliver his long-delayed message.

End

Holy Kisses

Altar of Silence

Afterword

Silence, prayer and music: with these three types of sounds are Heaven filled. When surrounded by these, a human is as close as he can be to the atmosphere of the Divine Kingdom. Angels watch over those who are beloved by Heaven, and guard the footsteps of the ones who have placed their trust in the Most High.

Altar of Silence, the first of three similar planned compilations, serves as but one window into the spiritual world, and reveals the importance of understanding our place in the grander scheme of creation. This invisible world is often closer to us than most realize, and time spent in quiet acknowledgement of our many blessings, or in seeking communion with our Creator through prayer and music, is key to our success in even the apparently mundane endeavors of our lives. As the Scriptures tell us, holy angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation,” (Hebrews 1:14) and we may thus be sure that guardians, warriors and witnesses are never very far from those who earnestly desire to accomplish the will of our Heavenly Father.

And while desire, on its own, is not enough to ensure victory (for “the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” as they say) Yahweh does honor the commitment of His people. As we have seen in the eight chapters of this book, a sincere wish to be faithful, combined with the effort of will required to choose righteousness, meets an answering strain from the Heavenly Courts. John the Beloved saw one of the tantalizing glimpses of this relationship: “And another angel came and stood at the Altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the Golden Altar which was before the Throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before Elohim out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the Altar, and cast it into the earth; and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.” (Revelation 8:3-5)

Let us be grateful for the care shown to lowly humanity by the mighty creatures of the invisible world, and Yahweh Himself, even while asking with king David, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:4)

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the Elohim of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an Holy Kiss. All the saints salute you.” (2Corinthians 13:11-13)

D.A.