

LOVE

*Before Time Began*

By

Mark McGee

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## *The Eternal God*

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3-6

When did God choose the Apostle Paul and other human beings for every spiritual blessing, to be holy and without blame before Him in love, and to be adopted as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself? “... before the foundation of the world.” The Greek word for “foundation” is καταβολή and means ‘a laying down, throwing down, casting down, foundation, depositing, sowing, act of conception.’ It comes from the word καταβάλλω which is a combination of the preposition κατά (down, against, according to) and the verb βάλλω (to throw, cast). Jesus used the word καταβολή when he said – “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

The Apostle Peter used the word καταβολή in the context of how God saves people through Christ, who were “foreordained before the foundation of the world” to be the unblemished, unspotted sacrifice for our sin.

“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” 1 Peter 1:17-21

Paul wrote to Timothy that he shouldn’t be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because God had a purpose for suffering for the Gospel from “before time began” and it is connected to our salvation and holy calling – “who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Think about that for a minute. God gave us His ‘grace’ (which was in Christ Jesus) ‘before time began.’ How could God give ‘us’ anything before time began? How could we receive what He gave us before

time began? Paul also told Titus that God made us a promise before time began – “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2). That promise was the hope of ‘eternal life.’

God is called the “Eternal God” and the “Everlasting God” in Scripture (e.g. Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 9:6). God exists ‘from everlasting to everlasting’ – “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God.” (Psalm 90:2)

We also know from Scripture that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternal and were involved in creating the universe.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Genesis 1:1-2

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:1-3

In order to understand something that God purposed, promised and gave before He created the world, we need to consider what God was thinking prior to the beginning of time. To know what God was thinking before time, we need to see what He has revealed to us

about that since there is no way we can know that information apart from revelation.

Jesus gave His disciples some insights to what was going on between Him and the Father before time began.

“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” John 17:5

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”  
John 17:24

It's obvious from these Scriptures and many others in the Bible that God's purpose and plan for 'salvation' and the 'Gospel' began **before** His creation of the universe and the beginning of time. This amazing plan is truly eternal.

Let's look at our Lord's prayer again.

“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”  
John 17:24-26

God the Father 'loved' God the Son and shared 'glory' with the Son 'before the foundation of the world.' These are keys to understanding what God purposed and promised 'before time began' and why He did what He did.

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed before time began in a perfect, loving relationship. There was no jealousy among them – only perfect harmony and unity. That's important to know and understand because God's character is integral to how we understand and experience salvation – in this life and in the next life.

## *The Eternal Son*

Jesus spoke of being with the Father “before the foundation of the world,” but does that mean Jesus is eternal? Was Jesus involved in planning eternal salvation with the Father or did God ‘create’ Jesus to carry out that plan? Did Jesus want to do the “will” of the Father because He was eternal and “equal” with the Father or because God created Jesus to do His will?

The earliest religion that taught that Jesus was not eternal nor divine was Judaism. Jesus came specifically to the Jews, but most rejected His offer of ‘eternal life.’ The apostles dealt with many opponents to Christ’s deity during the 1st century AD (e.g. 1 John 4:1-4; 2 John 7). The early Ebionites of the late 1st century and 2nd century AD believed Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary, not the eternal Son of God. Arianism was a serious issue during the 4th century. Arians believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but that He did not always exist. Muslims have believed since the 7th century that Jesus is a created being. Socinians kept that idea alive in the 16th century as did the Biddellians (English Unitarians) in the 17th century. The 19th century gave birth to several groups that believed God created Jesus, including Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christadelphians, and Christian Scientists.

What say the **Scriptures**? The Bible claims that God is eternal (e.g. Deuteronomy 33:27) and that Jesus is God. The Bible teaches that God is “From everlasting to everlasting” (1 Chronicles 16:36) and that Jesus is God. Here are several supporting texts.

“Then *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.”  
Genesis 21:33

“Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel From everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” Psalm 41:13

“Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God.” Psalm 90:2

“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved. Your throne *is* established from of old; You *are* from everlasting.”  
Psalm 93:1-2

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”  
Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:1-3

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” Colossians 1:16

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Matthew 1:23

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” John 5:17-18

“Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” John 8:58

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” John 14:9-11

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.” Philippians 2:5-7

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Colossians 2:8-10

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

“I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:13-16

“... looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:13

“But to the Son *He* says: ‘Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom.’” Hebrews 1:8-9

“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:1

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’” Revelation 1:8

Original (Orthodox) Christianity was clear in its statement that Jesus Christ is God and eternally existent with the Father and the Holy Spirit. That means Jesus was a primary participant in God’s plan of salvation from before the “foundation of the world” and “the beginning of time.”

## *The Eternal Offer*

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 3:14-16

Those were Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus was surprised when Jesus told Him that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” but Nicodemus would not have been surprised by the use of the words “eternal life” and “everlasting life.”

Another Jewish ruler who approached Jesus asked Him this question: “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16) The idea of ‘eternal life’ was not something foreign to Jews before Jesus came to earth to offer the ‘gift’ of eternal life.

Living forever was not foreign to Gentiles either. I addressed this in detail in the book *A History of Man’s Quest for Immortality*, so I’ll be brief here. The Egyptian immortality cult is one example of the quest for immortality and belief in life after death.

“Probably the greatest physical example of dedication to the belief in an afterlife was what happened in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians believed in the resurrection of the dead and in the immortality of the soul and body in an afterlife. They believed it was possible to live after death in a wonderful place and never taste death again. That belief led to a complex system of ceremonies dedicated to the preservation of the human body after death and prayers and incantations to the gods for the purpose of helping the deceased return to life and enjoy it fully and without fear in the afterlife.”  
Mark A McGee, *A History of Man’s Quest for Immortality*, Fifth Estate Publishing, 2007, pp 218-219

Most ancient civilizations had beliefs concerning life after death. Many of those views were dreary and depressing. However, Judaism’s view of life after death was different than many of their ancient neighbors. Jews’ belief came from a personal encounter with a personal God.

“The eternal God *is your* refuge, And underneath *are* the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, And will say, ‘Destroy!’” Deuteronomy 33:7

“Why should I fear in the days of evil, *When* the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth And boast in the multitude of their riches, None *of them* can by any means redeem *his* brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him—For the redemption of their souls *is* costly, And it shall cease forever—

That he should continue to live eternally, *And* not see the Pit.”

Psalm 49:5-9

When Jesus told Martha that her brother, Lazarus, would “rise again,” she replied – “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Martha stated a prevailing Jewish belief that God would raise the dead at the end of time.

“At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, *Even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12:1-3

“Your dead shall live; *Together with* my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew *is like* the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.”

Isaiah 26:19

We know from what Luke wrote about Paul's speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin that Pharisees believed in a resurrection from the dead and Sadducees did not (Acts 23:6-9). We also know from what Luke wrote about Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees that He believed in the resurrection of the dead and they didn't (Luke 20:27-38).

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But even Moses showed in the *burning bush passage* that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” Luke 20:34-38

Jesus told a parable about exhibiting true humility at a wedding feast and the importance of inviting the poor, maimed, lame and blind. He then explained what they could expect to receive at the “resurrection of the just:

“When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Luke 14:12-14

Jesus taught His disciples that He would suffer many things in Jerusalem at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day (Matthew 16:21). Jesus also promised His disciples that He was going to His “Father’s house” where He would prepare a place for them so they could live with Him forever.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.” John 14:1-3

We see that place revealed in the last chapters of the Bible:

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor

crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:1-4

## *The Eternal Purpose*

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand.” John 10:27-29

Given all of this revealed insight from the Bible about how God chose from before time that Jesus would come to earth, suffer, die and rise from the dead so that people who believe in Him would live forever (John 17:1-3), why didn’t God just bypass creating a world where salvation would be necessary? Why didn’t God create a heaven and earth the first time where human beings would not fail and not need a divine rescue? Why?

We come now to one of the most difficult and debated theological issues in all of history – the existence of evil, sin, pain, suffering and death. If God is a “loving” God and an “all-powerful” God, why did He create a world where evil, sin, pain, suffering and death were possible? Why would He allow that to happen when it was within His power to create a world where evil, sin, pain, suffering and death were impossible? What was His purpose?

If God meant for human beings to be able to answer that important question, He would have revealed the answer to us. I say “revealed” because there is no other way humans could possibly know why God chose to do something before time began, before He created the heavens and the earth. As God asked Job – “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4) The answer is simple – Job wasn’t there; no human beings existed when God laid the foundations of the earth. How can we possibly know why God did what He did? He must reveal it to us – and He has – in His Word.

In light of the fact that God promised us eternal life “before time began” (Titus 1:2), chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:4) and “has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9), we see clearly that God had a plan for all of humanity before He created the heavens and the earth. The “gospel of God” was not an afterthought when things didn’t go well in the Garden of Eden. The “gospel of His Son” was not a plan that God threw together at the last minute when He saw things turning out badly for Adam and Eve. The All-Knowing, All-Wise God created the heavens and the earth with an eternal plan that we are witness to every day.

## *The Plan Revealed*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 1:1

God conceived a ‘plan’ based on His ‘purpose’ and Genesis 1:1 is the beginning of ‘revealing’ that plan to His new creation. As we read God’s process of *bara* (create) in Genesis 1, we see His immense power and size, his phenomenal intellect and wisdom, and we see His incomparable creativity and amazing sense of order. We also see that God is alive (e.g. conscious, aware, moving, acting), personal (e.g. thought, sight, speech, intent, will) and existed before time (e.g. eternal, not encumbered by time or space).

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ Genesis 1:26-28

The creation of man was God's crowning achievement. God (*elohim*) made (*na'a'seh* – let us make) man (*adam*) “in Our image” (*besalmenu*), “according to Our likeness” (*kidmutenu*). The statement is repeated in verse 27 – “So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” God (*elohim*) created (*wayyibra*) man (*haadam*) in His own image (*besalmow*) in the image (*beselem*) of God (*elohim*) He created (*bara*) them male and female He created (*bara*) them.

The Hebrew word for “image,” *tselem*, and the word for “likeness,” *d<sup>e</sup>mûwth*, work together to help reveal God's intention for humans. The word *tselem* means “a resemblance, a representative figure.” It was used in Genesis 5:3 to describe how Adam “begot a *son* in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth,” and in Numbers 33:52 and other Scriptures for how idols were “images” of false gods (graven images). The word *d<sup>e</sup>mûwth* means “similitude, similar in appearance.” It could mean both a visual and audible similarity. It comes from the word *dâmâh*, which means “to resemble, to be like.” Using the two words together shows that God's intention was to create a living being that was not just an “image” of Him, but also “like” Him.

God placed so much emphasis on the importance of creating man in His image and likeness that He would say to Noah and his family after the Flood – “Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.” The Hebrew

words translated “in the image of God” are *baselem elohim* – the same words used in Genesis 1:26-27.

It’s important to remember that when God made man “in Our image, according to Our likeness” He was revealing a plan that Father, Son and Holy Spirit had already determined to carry out. Everything we see God do in the process of Creation is based on that plan – “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9). It appears that God’s earlier creative acts were part of the preparation for the unveiling of His great plan concerning the *adam* He created “in Our image, according to Our likeness.”

There are many amazing creatures in God’s universe, but only human beings were created in God’s image and likeness. It speaks to a purposeful relationship. God created man, male and female, “in Our image, according to Our likeness” for a specific purpose and relationship.

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## ***The Plan to Rule***

From that beginning point we learn that God had two plans in His relationship with man. The first plan was to **rule**.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth

and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:26-27

Part of God’s plan in creating a living being “in Our image, according to Our likeness” was to “have dominion over” other created beings (e.g. fish, birds, cattle, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth). The word “dominion” is a translation of the Hebrew word *wěyirdû* in Genesis 1:26 (“let them have dominion over”) and *ûrědû* in Genesis 1:28 (“have dominion over”). Both words come from the word *râdâh*, which means “to reign, rule over, subjugate, dominate.”

Genesis 1:26-28 is a brief overview of God’s creation of man (male and female). Genesis 2 is a detailed view of God’s crowning creative achievement. Knowing that God purposed and planned the unfolding events of creation “before time began,” watch closely to see what God did and said.

“And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads ... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden

to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.' And the Lord God said, '*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.' Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This *is* now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." Genesis 2:7-10, 15-25

God created *adam* in a very personal way – “the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” The Hebrew word translated “formed” is *wayyîšer* and comes from the word *yâtsar*,

meaning “to fashion, frame, to shape, form.” The word was used for the work of a potter in making something from clay. God “formed, fashioned, framed” *adam* from the dust of the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” The Hebrew word for “breathed” is *nâphach*, which means “to inflate, to puff, to blow.” The outcome of God’s creative action in forming *adam* and breathing the breath of life into his nostrils was that “man became a living being.”

God apparently created *adam* in a place called Eden, then moved him “eastward” to a garden where God had created trees that were “pleasant to the sight and good for food.” God placed *adam* in the garden of Eden “to tend and keep it.” The Hebrew word for “tend” is *âbad* and means “to dress, till, work, labor, serve.” The Hebrew word for “keep” is *shâmar* and means “to guard, protect, preserve, hedge about, attend to, keep watch for.” This was part of God’s plan from “before time began” for man to **rule** the Earth with Him.

Two of the trees in the Garden of Eden are identified as the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” This is the Supreme Ruler commanding the human ruler about a particular danger in the garden. It was one of the trees God had created, but it was the fruit of this tree that *adam* was not to eat. The result of disobeying God’s command would be to “die.”

The fact that God created a tree of the “knowledge of good and evil” and that eating its fruit would lead to death is important to note as we see the revealing of God’s eternal plan in time and space. The fact that God created and identified another tree as the “tree of life” is also important to note. One tree contained the fruit of life, while the other tree contained fruit of death. It would appear that God’s eternal plan contained an important aspect of life and death in time and space. We’ll see more about that in the next part of our study.

Another aspect of *adam* sharing rule with God was naming “every beast of the field and every bird of the air.” In Genesis 1:26 God said that *adam* would “have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God the Creator brought the animals and birds to *adam* the ‘earth ruler’ to be named. That demonstrates purpose and planning.

It was during the naming of the animals and birds that *adam* realized there was no helper comparable to him. God completed the creative purpose and plan described in Genesis 1:26-28 and “caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:21-22). Adam understood the physical and emotional relationship involved and named her “Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.”

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In one statement – “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over” – God revealed a major part of the plan Father, Son and Holy Spirit designed “before the beginning of time.” Is there anything else to God’s eternal plan?

## *The Plan to Overcome*

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where *are* you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ And He said, ‘Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?’” Genesis 3:7-11

When we last saw Adam in the Garden of Eden he had just named his wife and they were both naked “and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). However, in Genesis 3:7-11 we see Adam and his wife hiding themselves from God because of shame and fear. What happened?

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ Then the serpent said

to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” Genesis 3:1-6

Enter the serpent that was “*more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.*” God “made” the serpent? He did. Was it a mistake? No. Keep in mind that God is revealing the plan Father, Son and Holy Spirit purposed “before time began.”

The serpent deceived the woman (1 Timothy 2:14) with lies about her relationship with God and with God’s command to her husband. What the serpent did was “evil” and we know that the serpent is “*the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world*” (Revelation 12:9). The serpent began by deceiving the woman in the Garden of Eden (2 Corinthians 11:3) and from that beginning point reached out to deceive “*the whole world.*”

Once the woman and man ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and hid themselves from God’s presence.

What's God going to do? He sounds upset – “*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?*” Adam blames his wife and she blames the serpent. Did what Adam and his wife do throw a wrench into God's eternal plan? Watch how God handles it.

“So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.’ To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.’ Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: ‘Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.’”

When God saw everything that He had made, He said it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). However, in what appears to be a short period of time, God is upset with three of the living creatures He had made and is speaking about being cursed, eating dust all the days of life, enmity between creatures, bruising, sorrow, pain, toil, sweat and death. The question here is whether something went terribly wrong with God’s plan from **before time began**. Let’s remember the plan.

“ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was ... Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” John 17:3-5, 24

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Ephesians 1:3-5

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Timothy 1:8-10

“... according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.” Titus 1:1-2

“... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” 1 Peter 1:18-21

It is because we understand what is in God's eternal plan that we can understand why He said this to the serpent – *“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”* The Hebrew word for “bruise” is *shûwph* and means “to crush, gape, seize, break, overwhelm.” We know from Scripture that the Seed of the woman is Jesus Christ. God said Jesus would crush the head of the seed of the serpent and the seed of the serpent would crush the heel of Jesus. Both were realized in Jesus' death on the Cross.

It's important for us to see that before God spoke to Adam and his wife, He spoke to the serpent and revealed the part He (God) would play in overcoming evil – *“He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel”*. God's promise in Genesis 3:15 is explained by God's Son in John 3:14-17:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

God also revealed the important role *“the woman”* would play in **overcoming** evil – *“I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed.”* God's promise in Genesis 3:15 is explained by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1 –

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end ...

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*” Luke 1:30-33,

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This is God’s plan of *overcoming* evil; a plan Father, Son and Holy Spirit designed together in eternity.

## ***OVERCOMING THE WORLD***

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” Colossians 2:13-15

God has won the final victory for each of us through Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross .. but .. what about thousands of years of human suffering on earth? What about the power of evil in our world? What is God’s eternal plan for all of that?

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

In just one brief statement, Jesus Christ summarized God’s eternal plan. Let’s consider it in four stages:

## ***God Has Spoken***

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” Hebrews 1:1-4

God did not abandon Adam and his wife after they began to die in the Garden of Eden. That wasn't His plan. God's plan was and is an epic adventure to go through every part of life with them, struggling with them, suffering with them, providing for them, rescuing them.

The first part of God's provision was to cover their nakedness (e.g. guilt and shame).

“Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” Genesis 3:21

The next thing God did was to remove them from the garden because it had become a dangerous place to live. If Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of life, they would have lived forever in the terrible position of unrighteousness and enmity with God. That was not part of God's eternal plan. His plan was to rescue them.

“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’— therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” Genesis 3:22-24

God did not keep His eternal plan a secret from His people. He spoke to them directly, through *“the prophets”* and *“by His Son.”*

When Cain became jealous and angry, God said to him – *“Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”* (Genesis 4:6-7). After Cain killed his brother, God provided another son for Adam and Eve through whom the “Seed of the woman” would eventually be born (Genesis 5:3). God’s plan from eternity.

When the wickedness of humanity became so great that God was grieved in His heart and considered destroying all of mankind, He chose to save Noah and his family through His grace. *“So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord’”(Genesis 6:7-8).* God’s plan from eternity.

When the human race rebelled against God, the Lord chose Abram telling him – *“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Genesis 12:2-3). God’s plan from eternity.

When God purposed to set His people free from the oppression of Egypt’s pharaoh, He chose Moses – *“And the Lord said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt”* (Exodus 3:7-10). God’s plan from eternity.

When God purposed to establish an earthly throne for His Son, He chose Samuel – *“Now the Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons”* (1

Samuel 16:1) – and God told Samuel to choose David to be King – *“And the Lord said, ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!’ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward”* (1 Samuel 16:12-13). God’s plan from eternity.

When God purposed to save the world, He sent His Son – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”* (John 3:16-17). God’s plan from eternity.

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## ***The Need for Peace***

What happened in the Garden of Eden moved Adam and Eve from a position of **ruling with God** to being in need for **reconciliation with God**. That was a big change in their relationship – a change God had planned for in eternity.

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where *are* you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” Genesis 3:8-10

God knew where Adam was, but His question addressed the heart of humanity's problem. Adam and Eve "hid" from the presence of their Creator. The problem? Fear. Why fear? Because Adam knew what he had done. He was afraid of what was coming. God had told him – "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17) Adam knew he had disobeyed God and brought a terrifying change into their relationship – that change was "sin."

Rejecting "the word" of God is **rebellion** against God. That rebellion of rejecting God's Word "is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Samuel 15:23). "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). There can be no **peace** where there is rebellion, lawlessness and wickedness (Isaiah 48:22). Even though God immediately introduced the ultimate path to forgiveness of sin in His words to the serpent ("He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel"), the human race would suffer greatly from the rebellion.

"To the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of

your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:16-19

God made tunics of skin and clothed Adam and Eve before they left the Garden of Eden for the struggles that awaited them outside. God taught them how to make “sin offerings” that He would accept. Adam and Eve taught their children how to present the offerings to God (Genesis 4:2-5). As descendants of the first parents rebelled against God, the Lord started again with Noah and his family and taught them about the penalty of rebellion and the importance of obedience and offerings to God (Genesis 8:20-21). As descendants of Noah rebelled against God, the Lord chose Abram and taught him the importance of obedience and offerings to God (Genesis 15 & 22). As descendants of Abraham rebelled against God, the Lord chose Moses and taught him and the people of Israel the importance of obedience and offerings to God (Exodus 12 & 29; Leviticus 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 14, 17, 22, 23).

All of these offerings were pointing to THE PLAN God designed in eternity “before time began,” that He then revealed “in time”. God planned to **offer HIMSELF** to make peace with those who rebelled against Him. That PEACE would come in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The **He** in “He shall bruise your head” is Jesus Christ.

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Romans 5:9-11

We have peace with God through the “*blood of His cross.*” Another plan made in eternity.

“For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” Colossians 1:19-22

When God told the serpent (Satan) in the Garden of Eden that He would put “enmity” between Satan and the woman and between Satan’s seed and the woman’s Seed, who would bruise (crush) the head of Satan’s seed, God was presenting His plan for human reconciliation. What we see in God’s eternal plan is that God would do everything in reconciling humans spiritually and physically. God

the Father would send God the Son from Heaven to earth who would be born of a virgin after God the Holy Spirit had “come upon” her (Luke 1:35). God the Son would die on the Cross and “triumph” over Satan by wiping out the requirements against us, “taking it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14-15).

The Hebrew and Greek words for “peace” are used hundreds of times in the Bible. Peace is a primary theme in God’s eternal plan. God wants us to have peace with Him and with each other.

The Hebrew verb שָׁלַם (*shalam*) can be translated as “be whole, be complete, make amends, make safe, be sound, be uninjured, requite, recompense, reward, offer sacrifice, make peace-offering.” The noun *shalom* can be translated as “completeness, sounds, welfare, safety, health, prosperity, quiet, tranquility, contentment, friendship, well-being.”

Here are some examples of how the Hebrew words for peace are used in the Old Testament.

“Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.” Genesis 15:15

“So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.” Joshua 9:15

“Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the Lord.” 1 Kings 2:33

“The Lord will give strength to His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace.” Psalm 29:11

“I will hear what God the Lord will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints; But let them not turn back to folly.” Psalm 85:8

“You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You.” Isaiah 26:3

[Other Hebrew words translated as “peace” include חָשַׁח (*chashah*), תּוֹדָה (*todah*), אָשַׁח (*sega*), and שָׁלוֹם (*shalvah*)]

The Greek words translated “peace” include the noun εἰρήνη (*eiréné* – peace of mind, harmony, concord, security, safety, felicity, tranquility), the verb εἰρηνεύω (*eiréneuó* – keep the peace, bring to peace, be at peace, live in peace), and the adjective εἰρηνοποιός (*eirénopios* – peacemaking, peacemaker).

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Here are some examples of how the Greek words for peace are used in the New Testament.

“Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

“And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.’” Mark 5:34

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Luke 2:14

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27

“For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.” Romans 8:6

“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” Romans 12:18

“For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” 1 Corinthians 14:33

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” Ephesians 2:13-16

God is the “author” of peace. The “fruit” of the Holy Spirit is peace. Jesus “made” peace in “one body through the cross” so He might reconcile Jew and Gentile to God. Our peace is truly “in Christ.” **Peace** is God’s eternal plan.

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## ***Tribulation In The World***

The third stage of God’s eternal plan is dealing with “tribulation” in the world. The Greek word translated tribulation is θλιψιν and means “persecution, pressure, affliction, distress.” It comes from θλίβω which means to “rub together, press together, constrict, compress, afflict.” The word “world” is κόσμω (*kosmo*), which was understood in ancient Greek writings to include the order of the universe, the earth and the human inhabitants of the earth.

God told Adam that he would die if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In addition to death, God revealed other types of “tribulation” that Adam, Eve and their descendants would struggle with during their lifetime.

“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.’ Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: ‘Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat *of* it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you *are*, And to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:16-19

Sorrow, pain, desire, curses, toil, thorns, thistles, sweat, death. Adam and Eve and their descendants experienced all of that and much more until they died and their bodies returned to dust. Tribulation, stress, distress, affliction, persecution. That’s what Adam and Eve faced every day of their lives. They suffered great sorrow when their son Cain murdered their son Abel. God sent Cain away from his mother and father, but He gave Adam and Eve another son to carry the seed of reconciliation forward (Genesis 5:3-8). One of the most powerful statements in the Bible is Genesis 5:5 – “So all the days that

Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.” God said Adam would die and Adam did die. Tribulation and death are our future as well.

Adam and Eve were not the only ones who would suffer because of their sin. Within several generations from our first parents the wickedness of the human race was so great on the earth that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). God also suffered sorrow and was grieved in His heart by the actions of humanity (Genesis 6:6). God said these words – “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them” (Genesis 6:7). Was it God’s eternal plan to destroy the human race, both man and beast, creeping things and the birds of the air? No, it wasn’t. God’s eternal plan was to reconcile man to Himself. In Genesis 6 we see how the wickedness of the human race affected God. That was part of God’s journey with His creation. God’s plan is reconciliation and He demonstrated it by once again revealing His love, grace and mercy – “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8).

The words translated “grace” are used hundreds of times in the Bible. Even though we see God’s grace in creation and in how he dealt with Adam’s sin in the garden, Genesis 6:8 is the first time we see the word “grace” used in the Bible.

The Hebrew word translated “grace” in Genesis 6:8 is חַן (*chen* – from חָנַן *chanan*). The noun means “favor, acceptance” and the verb means “show favor, mercy, pity.” Dr. William Wilson explained the usage of the word this way – “denotes a free and spontaneous willingness to bestow good on him that is destitute of it, either in a way of kindness חַוּן, or in a way of compassion ... The word excludes all idea of merit or desert in the object of free favour” (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, William Wilson, MacDonald Publishing Co., 1975).

The world God saw in Genesis 6 was certainly not deserving of favor, mercy or pity because “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” God felt deep sorrow and was grieved, but His eternal plan was to reconcile mankind to Himself. God demonstrated grace and mercy to one man, Noah. God demonstrated His grace toward humanity after Cain killed Abel by giving Adam and Even another son, Seth, through which the Seed would be born. Noah was from the lineage of Seth.

“Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that *were* with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained.” Genesis 8:1-2

God began again with the human race to effect reconciliation. The Lord expanded His covenant with man through animal sacrifice (Genesis 8:20-22), the sanctity of life, the penalty for murder, and the sign of the covenant (Genesis 9:1-17). God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” So, how did the family of man respond to God’s grace?

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake *them thoroughly*.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” Genesis 11:1-4

They rebelled against God. God’s eternal plan was reconciliation, so how did He respond to their rebellion?

“But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the

city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”

Genesis 11:5-9

God confused the languages of people and they scattered across the earth according to their family and language (Genesis 10 lists the early families and the locations where they scattered). What was next in God’s eternal plan of reconciliation? He chose a man named Abram who was of the lineage of Noah and Shem.

“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

Genesis 12:1-3

Abram, who later became Abraham, was the man God chose to complete His eternal plan of reconciliation. Abraham and his wife Sarah had a son named Isaac who would carry the seed forward (Genesis 21:12). Isaac’s son Jacob was later named Israel and had 12 sons. One of them was named Judah and it was from his lineage that God would bring the promised Seed of the woman to reconcile the world. Jesus Christ is the promised Reconciler, the Redeemer, of the world – “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals ... You

are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:5, 9-10)

What happened in the thousands of years between Abraham, Judah, David and Jesus Christ at the end of time? Tribulation, trouble, persecution, struggle, sorrow, grief, pain, and death. God has suffered with His creation. He has known sorrow and grief. He has suffered the pain of rejection. God the Son came to earth to “save that which was lost” (Matthew 18:11), but the people to whom Jesus came rejected Him and He suffered and died a horrible death on the Cross paying the penalty for their sins and our sins. Isaiah the prophet wrote that Messiah would be “despised and rejected by men,” would be a “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, would be smitten by God and afflicted, would be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:1-6) That was God’s eternal plan for reconciliation. It was the Father’s will and the Son obeyed.

Jesus said that in this world we “will have tribulation.” He told His disciples that the world would hate them because they hated Him. Jesus said the world would persecute them because they persecuted Him (John 15:18-25). The Apostle Paul told Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). The Apostle Peter told Christians that though they had “been

grieved by various trials” and their faith “tested by fire,” they could “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” knowing they would receive the end of their faith – “the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9). James wrote to believers that they should “count it all joy” when they fell into various trials, knowing that the testing of their faith produced patience. James also wrote that the believer who endured testing would “receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:2-12).

Christians, of all people, should not be surprised that we live in a world of pain, sorrow and death. God said that it would be that way and it is. Jesus said we would have tribulation in this world and we do. Even as we know that to be true, we also need to remember that God is always with us. He also feels pain and sorrow and experienced the death of His Son. He has traveled every step of man’s journey from Adam to the present and will continue to journey with His people throughout eternity. God will never leave us.

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you ... And the Lord, He *is* the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”  
Deuteronomy 31:6, 8

“No man shall *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you ... Have I not commanded you? Be strong

and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God *is* with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:5, 9

“... and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”  
Matthew 28:20

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”  
Romans 8:28-30

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.” 1  
Corinthians 10:13

“*Let your* conduct *be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord *is* my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”  
Hebrews 13:5-6

## ***Be Of Good Cheer***

The fourth stage of understanding God's Plan for Reconciliation is to "be of good cheer." The Greek words translated "be of good cheer" are *αλλα θαρσειτε* and mean "but be of good courage." The word *θαρσειτε* comes from *θάρσος* and means "courage, confidence, emboldened" (from the Greek word for "bold").

Jesus presented His disciples with a prophetic picture of their lives: trouble in the world, but courage and confidence in Christ Who had "overcome" the world. As the youngest apostle of Christ would write to Christians in the last years of his life – "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you." (1 John 3:13) That picture has not changed in the years since Jesus first spoke them to His closest followers. At every point in Church history we see Christians facing "tribulation" in the world. We also see many Christians demonstrating great courage as they face great opposition from the enemies of Christ.

The Apostle John was the last apostle alive when he wrote Christians about the great battles they would fight in the Name of Christ.

"I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one." 1 John 2:14

"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from

us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” 1 John 2:18-19

“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” 1 John 2:22-23

“These things I have written to you concerning those who *try to deceive you*.” 1 John 2:26

Deception of believers began with Satan in the Garden of Eden –

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” Genesis 3:1

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” 1 Timothy 2:14

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as a chaste virgin* to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if you receive a different spirit* which you have not received,

or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Revelation 12:9

John made it clear in his letter to Christians at the end of the 1st century AD what the purpose of Jesus Christ had been from before the beginning of time.

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8b

Jesus Christ, Who came into the world to “destroy the works of the devil,” warned His disciples about how deception would be a primary way Satan would oppose His followers –

“Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in

various places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. ‘Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.’ Matthew 24:3-11

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe *it*. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.” Matthew 24:23-24

The Lord’s Apostles continued His warning about deceivers —

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.”  
Ephesians 5:6-7

“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:12-17

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.” 2 John 7-8

Jesus Christ commanded the Apostle John to “write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” (Revelation 1:11) Jesus dictated seven letters to seven churches, called on them seven times to “overcome,” and gave them seven promises —

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Revelation 2:7

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” Revelation 2:11

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*.” Revelation 2:17

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.” Revelation 2:26

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3:5

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him My new name.*” Revelation 3:12

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” Revelation 3:21

What methods did Jesus give His disciples for “overcoming” the wicked one? **Faith** in the One Who overcomes.

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:4-5

How does this “faith” express itself in the process of “overcoming” the wicked one?

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children,

and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:1-6

Christians come from a long line of “overcomers” —

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens* and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be

made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” Hebrews 11:32 – 12:3

Overcoming is not easy and it often comes at great cost, but overcoming is God’s eternal purpose for those who believe in Him.

Paul said he was NOT ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, “for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The “good news” of Jesus Christ is that He came from Heaven to earth to “destroy the works of the devil.”

Jesus accomplished that eternal objective by dying on the Cross – “For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19-20) — and rising from the grave – “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away,

reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5)

From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, God’s plan is clear and unmistakable – Jesus Christ is the Great Overcomer and those who belong to Him will overcome with Him and “inherit all things” —

“Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’ And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.’ Revelation 21:5-7

The Gospel is “good news” because Jesus Christ won the victory over wickedness, unrighteousness, sin and death. Through Him we too are conquerors —

“What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of

Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:31-39

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?' The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

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