

The Big Picture

by Lynn Andrew

Starting with biblical Creation and taking certain hints found in the Bible, we paint the Big Picture by deduction and interpolation: data from outside the domain of natural science and common theology is assembled into a theory that explains many things.

Readers familiar with the Christian Bible will recognize words and phrases that point to sources without needing explicit references. Chapter and verse would not only be cumbersome but would prove nothing because the context is extremely wide and includes between-the-lines inferences.

To appreciate the Big Picture we have to acknowledge that common theology fails to explain evil. When God created humankind he said that what he had done was very good, yet in every generation we find ourselves badly out of order. We have blamed this on Eve's little slip, but our sensibility screams that the proportion of that act to humanity's rapid descent into debauchery, warfare, and slavery, etc. is preposterous. Something absolutely terrible must exist in the realm of God's heaven beyond this universe for him to have created our world knowing the suffering it would involve.

Be careful when you try to explain the preponderance and persistence of evil, for you will likely wind up on the brink of one of two heresies: 1) that Satan is a formidable adversary to God; or 2) that God ordains evil as a means of achieving good.

It is said that there is war in heaven. If there is, it should have a huge impact on theology. But it doesn't. Our understanding of heaven and its dealings with earth should start there—with the earthly implications of an ongoing conflict in heaven. Why doesn't it? The answer is not that the Bible is silent about this war, if we may call it that.

It is not difficult to open the biblical door on this subject, and no doubt many have done so; but as far as I know, their conclusions lack the perspective of the fundamental reason for Creation and therefore seem rather pointless. That might be why theology, as commonly taught, fails to adequately cover the war in heaven.

Now put the two together—the purpose in Creation together with the Bible's revelations of wicked principalities and powers in the heavenlyies—and a Big Picture emerges that explains many things. It explains odd things we encounter when reading the Bible, things we have a tendency to assume are unimportant because they are circumvented by preachers, minimized by commentaries deferring to other commentators, and ignored in study-bible footnotes. But more importantly the Big Picture adds a dimension to the main issues: the nations, Israel, and the church. If we are cognizant of this dimension, the Bible yields a much fuller revelation of the mainspring that drives the world in which we live, its history, and the cosmic future.

A place to start is with the beings the Bible calls "sons of God." If we can figure out who and what they are, what they are up to and why, and how they fit into the purpose of Almighty God who created them, we will be on our way to filling in the Big Picture.

("Son of God" is an entirely different term, by the way. It refers to the Messiah whom we understand is no less than Creator God.)

"Sons of God" appears in Genesis six and again in the book of Job, where we get a glimpse of these god-like creatures who are able to contend with God about his designs and policies, and yet they continue to operate. We are told the whole world lies in the evil one, yet clearly, "principalities and powers in heavenly places" refers to more than Satan. Called the prince of powers of the air and being counted among the "sons of God," Satan is evidently chief of their tribe.

The Big Picture is framed within one supreme, all-sufficient Creator of heaven and earth, but there are lesser beings made in his image. God (*elohim*) said, "Let us make man in our image." (Was he speaking to himself or to other *elohim*?)

At minimum, "made in the image of God" means having free will (or being a significantly free moral agent), which includes moral discernment and freedom to independently choose a course of action based on one's own moral judgment.

Satan has his name mentioned over 50 times in the Bible. But "gods" (not specifically Satan) are mentioned well over 200 times. While most of the time those *elohim* refer immediately to physical idols, the Bible acknowledges that standing behind idols are seducing spirits and doctrines promoted by demons.

If no other beings exist that may rightfully be called gods, Scripture would not need to make a big issue of the *name* of God: why would he need a name if he is the only one? In spite of some Bible

translations hiding his name in LORD, it is YHVH which we pronounce Yahweh (or Jehovah), meaning *the self-existing, timeless one*, or *I am that which I am*, as was explained to Moses, a name so revered that often he is distinguished in other ways, such as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” or “the Holy One of Israel.”

In order to make any use of what the Bible reveals concerning this issue we must set aside the simplistic notion that pagan mythology somehow covers it all and the subject is not worthy of serious attention. Old- and New-Testament Scripture presents these lower gods as real. Some of them are named, and most significantly they are associated with particular nations. While Yahweh became the God of the nation Israel, other nations acquired their own gods that influence their cultures.

Genesis tells us Yahweh fostered nations and languages when he broke up the early civilization in the land of Shinar. Roots of some 70 nations are traced in biblical genealogies. Did the gods then assign themselves to particular nations? Or did Satan oversee the assignments? More reasonably, we may assume that Yahweh made the assignments—like a king allocating territories for his sons to rule. (Satan said to Jesus that all the kingdoms of the earth had been given to him.) If God made the assignment of nations to gods (or gods to nations), he left one region to himself, a land where no intermediary deity could legally prevent him from reigning directly and supremely. (From this vantage point we see Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, as evidence of that reservation.)

Yahweh made his intentions clear in covenants, and he constantly reminded Israel that he is God Most High and the *only* God with whom they were to be concerned; and his prophets beat back the illegal intrusion of unscrupulous divinities by ridiculing their idols. "Yahweh, your God," said Moses, "is God of gods and Lord of lords."

The land Yahweh God reserved for himself was named after Noah's unfairly-cursed grandson. Would it not be an act of war and yet entirely within reason if Yahweh's adversary-in-chief urged everyone living in Canaan to serve other gods? That's what appears to have happened. (As a counter force, Michael, the great angelic prince, was appointed to stand for Yahweh's people.)

It is not necessary to assume that pagan pantheons are as scandal-ridden as their poets describe them or as grotesque as their idols and ritual practices would suggest. Ugly things happen in war that would not necessarily be predicted by the personalities overseeing the battles. While these "sons of God" are famous for their "demons" (from Greek *daimon*, meaning divine power), we need not think of them as being evil creatures originally. But many of them certainly became sponsors of wickedness in their lying efforts to maintain their grip on their territories. "The Creator is too busy to care about you," they said.

The core of this analysis hangs on God's astonishing revelation that he created beings distinct from himself yet in his image. In other words, he made others significantly similar to himself with the ability to relate to him in a positive way like nothing else—but by that same freedom they might decide to oppose him.

Theoretically, it doesn't have to go entirely one way or the other: as with any society, there would be degrees and shades of obedient loyalty to one's superior *vs* loyalty to one's own self-interest. We who bear the joy and burden of this divine gift of moral freedom understand very well this rudiment of psychology, and it should make us wary.

If we're tempted to question the divine wisdom by which God voluntarily subjected the world to these unholy beings, the book of Job gives us pause. Job and his family were submitted to suffering and death in order to answer Satan's argument, which was that creatures of free will are not only inherently corruptible they are sure to turn against their Maker when tested. In answer to Job's perplexity about why he was so treated, God elaborates on a few things in creation that are astonishing as well—on a different level but as inexplicable in their own way. Job was never told that it was his piety that put him in a position where God—not Satan—could single him out to endure the trial. But the reader knows, and the apparent injustice of Job's suffering is the foundation of the ironic narrative. The entire book of Job, including the introductory negotiation with Satan and Job's rewards at its conclusion, is a cameo of the Big Picture.

In Scripture we encounter good angels (implied by the phrase "LORD of hosts") and an opposition appearing as Satan's "fallen" angels. It seems that Satan pioneered the "know thyself" movement and gathered a following of a third part of innumerable angels. How was their "fall" necessarily an act of war? It became an act of rebellion because it usurped the right of Creator God to receive undivided loyalty.

Going their own way on the impulse of their own judgment, in defiance of Yahweh's superior authority, would inevitably begin an erosion of the structure of heaven and its peace. Is it not reasonable that this movement had to be opposed at all costs?

But we, who are a little lower than angels and even gods by nature ("I said you are gods/And all of you sons of the Most High"), empathize with Satan because we were born into and live within the same wilderness of self will that he explored. What are we to do when we find ourselves with this godlike ability to think and act independently and to map out our own interpretation of reality? Well, we do it. We exercise our gifts that enable us to explore and develop the wilderness. Then what happens if someone waxes great by personalizing his gift of administration and discovers that he is greatly admired by his associates? How does he manage the accolades laid at his feet? Does he automatically say, "I reject this: all glory goes to the God who made the wilderness that I've explored and developed?" Of course not. Free-willed beings are self-respecting.

So we understand how it would be easy for Satan, even in his original perfection, to develop an intoxicating taste for celebrity and stardom. It would be unreasonable to fault him if he were to claim that his drive to build his own empire was merely an unfolding of something intrinsic to the design of his very being and waiting to be exercised.

"Angel," by the way, appears to be a term that can refer to various agents involved with heaven's communications here on earth. Though usually associated with a particular being and circumstance, it's a

term of function more than a term of essential being. For example, an encounter with one referred to as "*the* angel of the Lord" sometimes is interpreted to mean an epiphany of pre-incarnate Christ. So "gods" and "angels" are not mutually exclusive labels. Even human messengers are referred to as angels on occasion.

If this seems uncomfortably technical and complicated, is there any reason to believe that heaven is no more complex than we imagined it to be in Sunday School when now we know that on the physical side everything is overwhelmingly complex? So we need to ask, Why did some angels descend into Satan's regime and not others? Were they (1) conquered in some arena from which the loyal angels were absent? Were they (2) created different from the staunchly righteous angels, more liberal and free to invent their own avenues of "obedience"? Or (3) were all angels created the same and the fallen-away individuals simply less successful at managing their free will?

Think about those possibilities for a moment.

Why would the Creator imbue all of his servants with a potentially explosive element that might be ignited by a spark of pride and set his entire kingdom ablaze? I think we have to conclude that the majority of angels were created with the needle of their moral compasses fixed on the worship of their Creator and unable to deviate from their original holiness for any reason. It is important that they are unable to lie.

Indeed, it seems unreasonably generous that he allowed *any* of the angels any measure of moral freedom at all. To make more than a third of them able to rebel would seem absurd unless he were not the

supreme Creator. So we may assume that two thirds were, shall we say, conservatively designed. They are intelligent and powerful beings who are dedicated servants of Yahweh by design with no mechanism by which they might experience an impulse to independent scheming or putting self-determination first. Therefore, lacking that very significant freedom to indulge in self-inspired choice, they are not to be counted among the "sons of God" made in his image.

And the others—did the "sons of God" *have* to fall? God has no part in evil, but if the potential for pride and self-will exists, the dynamics of life guarantee that the potential to act independently will be activated as a temptation if nothing else. This too we understand well. Was Yahweh surprised when Satan swept all the "sons of God" into his corner? Of course not. But though Satan's behavior is somewhat reasonable, it appears unreasonably tragic that it left his Creator with no trustworthy beings made in his own image. Yes, it *is* unreasonable, but within the Big Picture we find that ultimately it is not so.

If there is a war, what is the evidence on earth and what does the action look like? When Yahweh got a people together and led them out of Egypt, from the nations and their gods, and brought them into the land he had promised to them (and to himself), he first had to purge the area of demonic cultures that Satan and his cohorts had planted there.

Yahweh was the farmer who had the harrowing task of recovering a field overgrown with weeds in order to raise his chosen crop. Since the field belongs to the farmer, no one will fault the owner if he gives

it a new name and plows the weeds under—will they? Well, yes, some do (wittingly or not). They like to call unfair what Yahweh did to reclaim Canaan and rename it Israel even though the reclamation was never completed. (Jebusites, the original inhabitants of Jerusalem, were accepted and not expelled from the land, for example.) A large part of the Old Testament is about those battles. Thus the land Yahweh reserved for himself is a well documented theater of the war—especially Jerusalem, the “city of the great King.”

This is where we need to understand the reason why earth—and I believe the whole physical universe—was created. In war, both sides typically pay a terrible price; but if the conflict may be resolved within a limited theater, the damage is limited. When Yahweh made this earth and declared it very good, he was not unaware that it would become a battlefield. So did he mean by “very good” that it was very good for that purpose? Yes, but the Bible tells us there will be peace on earth, so he meant that too. He knows the end from the beginning, and while the dark part of the end is victory over Satan, his fallen angels, and their followers, the bright outcome features an incorruptible, eternal Bride for Christ, *remade* in his image.

It was at the risk (or perhaps the certainty) of an insurrection that God created beings in his image. It was a daring thing to do, and any philosopher, applying the most basic principles, would have warned him that chances of everything going perfectly well were slight. (We wouldn't be here if God were a philosopher.) But having taken that step, Yahweh could not let his willful sons establish for themselves

permanent principalities in defiance of his authority. (And speaking of conflicts, it would be surprising if there were no wars among those rebel "sons of God" themselves with repercussions here on earth.)

We understand that God's essential nature is love and therefore that his purpose in creating beings in his image was to build a glorious edifice of familial fellowship grounded in love. But should systemic discord develop along the way, he would have unlovely rot in the foundation to deal with. Why did he not eradicate the agents of evil by immediately unmaking them? Two reasons come to mind: 1) as far as we know, only things within material time can cease to exist; and 2) gaps or voids in the foundation of the building would be detrimental to the overall plan, perhaps much more than we can guess. But eventually the rot must be cleaned out, of course, and safely separated from heaven and earth. It follows logically that the Creator had to create a secure and isolated place for rebels and malcontents to be contained and kept from undoing his designs and polluting heaven's atmosphere of love, joy, and peace with the fallout of discord.

But a legal problem currently prohibits the use of the prison. We understand that God must uphold justice in order for him to command respect and obedience. He said he loves justice. So the question Satan would certainly have raised is whether it would not be an act of *injustice* for his Creator to condemn him for exercising the free will which his Creator had bestowed upon him. If his Creator did not expect him to explore his own potential as a moral pioneer, why was he given that ability? In other words, was it even possible for him and

others like him to go on forever without developing his own realm in which self admiration and self determination would be proven an effective (and therefore legitimate) means of doing things—in his case managing a host of angels? We might call it a class-action lawsuit by Satan on behalf of all the “sons of God.”

How would God answer that argument? And how could he justify condemning Satan—and now all the rest of us—if he cannot answer it? If Satan argues that he rules his band of angels as competently as Yahweh did—or even better—where is the objective proof that his, or any free agent’s, independent policy is criminally inferior?

Does this supposition about angelic psychology seem to have veered away from the biblical data? Not if all beings created in God’s image are compatible to the extent that we communicate on the same issues. And this must be so, for if we take at face value the visitations of angels as recorded in Scripture, we find that they are sometimes indistinguishable from humans. Zechariah even saw Satan in the form of a man. Apparently they are able to materialize at will, and it is not a phantom image because it is on record that they enter into conversation, eat food, and engage in battle. (If this sort of biblical lore seems fantastic and optional, try removing everything from the Bible that has to do with angels: the Scriptures come unglued; nothing works without them.)

So I think God set up this world to test Satan’s claim to immunity from prosecution. He told Satan he would use a separate material universe designed to host a fresh, neutral being. “Let us make man in our

image," he said: man would be free to rebel. And furthermore this new world would be open to inspection by all the angels and gods; nothing would be hidden. To Satan it was an opportunity to prove his legitimacy—or at least he would have a good shot at corrupting the new creature and thus adding evidence to his argument. What did he have to lose?

When our universe sprang into being (very quickly in heaven's timeless view), the sons of God shouted for joy. Yes, the physical marvel that unfolded held so many possibilities for development that it surpassed, in its own way, the beauty and potential of heaven. I imagine that Satan lectured the other "sons of God" on not letting it become a playground and a distraction from their serious business. "Watch this," he said. "I'm going to turn the human-creature to our advantage." And he attached a puppet spirit to a dumb serpent-creature he found roaming the garden of Eden and set himself up as its ventriloquist.

By the way, I often hear it said that because of the vast size and apparent age of the physical universe, its purpose must include more than what goes on here on this little earth. The error in such thinking is the assumption that size has some fundamental significance, which it does not. Even in human experience we know that by means of a suitable algorithm on a computer, vast constructions in virtual space and time require no additional effort and cost almost nothing. And physical matter is certainly a manifestation of information. The initial design of the infrastructure that yields the world is everything; to fling

out any number of derivative versions is comparatively nothing. Or if the original design makes use of process in its execution, then any number of by-products of no independent significance may be generated (but in that primordial project intelligent beings made in God's image would not included, for we will see that our genesis is distinctly different). So the stars, the mere debris of Creation, may have no significance other than to remind us that we owe our Creator a profound sense of awe for what it took to make planet Earth.

If you seek a more equitable reason for the galaxies, try the experimental genesis idea on for size: the vast universe was the essential outcome, and the planet that served his purposes best was chosen. But note that scientifically speaking our flesh and blood could not exist under any other conditions—even slight variations in a number of physical conditions would prohibit life—and I think Yahweh was very particular about the kind of flesh and blood *he* would take on.

Although the idea is ridiculous that billions of galaxies with no life in them is a shameful waste, the gods do play to that notion and make sport of the physical heavens. The planets, they say, are their manifestations and together with the sun and stars their plans are on display. And to divert attention away from Yahweh they continually promote myths about visitors from far away places when in fact the evidence they present consists of illusions they fabricate themselves.

So God designed and established this physical world to be inhabited by novel creatures made in his image with this new feature of a physical extension. While the moral part of man remains essentially

spiritual, his spirit's physical habitation is an energetic part of him. Just as the "sons of God" could chose to disobey, so could the human being; therefore it was a valid demonstration God set before Satan. In fact, it was skewed in Satan's favor because the physical side of man introduced a host of potential temptations for him to explore and exploit to help mankind assert independence. (If Satan's wisdom had not been compromised by his own failure to fear God, perhaps he would have wondered about that instead of rejoicing over it.)

Based on the male/female principle of mutual attraction, earth's living residents were designed to never tire of multiplying. Let us assume that for a being made in the image of God this was a novelty made possible by the physical side (contrary to pagan lore where the gods and goddesses manage to achieve their own procreation). I think the loyal angels were horrified when Eve emerged while Satan and his sexless gods were fascinated by her potential. Let me explain.

Is it not surprising that the Creator would link to earthly time-bound flesh his unique ability to generate spirits? That he would embed this sacred genesis in temporal creature-stuff must have been seen as an extravagant and insecure sharing of his power. It appeared to put physical nature in control of creating spirits: God would have to respond to a physical circumstance and supply the spirit to inhabit the physical body. He sends forth his spirit and they are created. In other words, he regulates conception; but in the case of mankind, our god-like free will is definitely in the picture as well because the spirit in his image which he puts on each human being is significantly like the

spirit of God. (It is tempting, but we have no license to fit a more comprehensive model to this.) The prognosis of this design's security was not good: it opened another avenue for devilish interference, allowing the "sons of God" to insert their own materializations.

Satan was quick to see his opportunity, and he went right to it, taking it upon himself to test the stability of the pristine human pair by exploiting the division of the sexes. But it was too easy, and one wonders again if that did not make Satan wonder, especially after Yahweh slaughtered a pair of lambs in order to clothe the flesh of the sinners rather than making them skirts of plant material. The shockingly crimson blood that spilled onto the ground must have startled the gods the first time they beheld it: they wondered what it meant.

Having thus destroyed the possibility of a blessed and obedient race developing on earth and forcing Yahweh to put the brake on nature's cooperation and bedevil mankind's use of the planet lest things spiral out of control immediately, Satan proposed that he and his rebel gods be allowed to demonstrate that they could govern humankind relatively successfully. At any rate, they were given the opportunity to do so. Each of the gods (or perhaps an association of them) was promised a territory on earth to govern and thereby prove or disprove their competence while Yahweh would keep a portion for his own governance to which theirs are to be compared.

But we have jumped ahead. We need to go back to Genesis six, and with all respect for the ancient text, take the liberty of adding a bit of color as we paint the Big Picture.

Things were going well for Satan. He had shown right away that Yahweh's new creation was morally fragile and subject to the same isolating pressure caused by free will that he experienced himself. But some of the angelic sons of God pressed their freedom too far. They were fascinated by the power of the self-replicating genesis design, the genius of it at the human psychological level, and particularly the beauty it bestowed on the human female, which surpassed anything in the angelic realm. There was more significance in Adam's rib than they could account for. They were intrigued by the variety it gave the faces of mankind—whatever the underlying mechanism was—and they desired it for themselves. They discovered the back door God had designed for his own use by which they could force him to create beings in *their* image. Or something like that. (This biological intervention on the part of angels has far-ranging implications.)

But that was a blatant violation of the ground rules, and it landed those angel mavericks in prison. It also necessitated a wash-down of the battleground theater. God had said that Creation was good in every way, and so it was, but if the satanic crowd would not abide by the rules, he would have to say he was sorry but the contest could not proceed on earth. The field of humanity had become infested with demon-possessed semi-human criminals out of which he had harvested but one Enoch. But rather than call off the whole thing, he saved a single family whose genes were free of satanic meddling and flooded out the rest. This too must have made Satan wonder: the flood potential had been built into the planet and was there from the beginning!

By the way, Jesus gave us a parable that can apply here. A field was sown with good seed, and then the enemy came along and sowed tares. Bible teachers may identify the good seed as those obedient to the Spirit of God and the tares as those seduced by lies of the devil. But that is not how Jesus interpreted it: he said the good seed are the sons of the kingdom of God and the tares are sons of the evil one. Apparently Jesus' interpretation of his own parable—if taken literally—is too shocking to be repeated out loud. But it becomes more reasonable if we note that it agrees with the fact that devilish personages have appeared and influenced the world in every age, and they are only the tip of a sprawling criminal underworld.

In spite of knowing this ahead of time, Yahweh set out once again to show Satan that his free-willed creatures would obey him if properly taught and governed. But there was no logic in it because Satan had forced his hand and gotten him to curse the earth and distance himself, making strict obedience virtually impossible. Yet Yahweh seemed to be willing to carry on with the compromised arrangement. He gave those "sons of God" who were still free exactly what they wanted: an opportunity to show that their methods of educating and governing could achieve stability and therefore be worthy of perpetuation.

But Satan and his demons had walked into a trap of their own making: their devilish administrations were doomed because they hated the newcomer made in the image of God. Yahweh, on the other hand, spoke and acted as though he loved them, regardless of how badly someone behaved. He was bound to keep providing fresh spirits

for their offspring, and due to the confluence of two streams of flesh and one of divinely crafted spirits, every newborn was unpredictably unique. (The angels, I suppose, all look pretty much the same, at least within each type and rank.) This meant there was an ever-present danger that a child would grow up to upset everything the devilish rulers had accomplished. They despised humans for being immersed in lowly matter yet capable of lofty achievement as they p learned to exploit the material creation—and should the curse ever be lifted, the wretched creatures would have the means to enjoy heaven on earth.

In spite of such dangers, the devils were compelled to press and entice men into the material realm in order to distance them from knowing and obeying their Creator. While this immersion in profane matters boosted science and industry, it plagued the whole of civilization with material addiction, making human society increasingly unresponsive to any outside influence either good or bad. Developments in travel efficiency made it increasingly difficult to keep people from regularly migrating across borders and thereby causing quarrels among their demonic overlords whose policy was to keep them locked down and dedicated to the gods of their native nations.

Yes, this earth is the theater of heaven's war. It's all about the governing principalities and powers trying to prove their worthiness by establishing permanent ownership of a realm and thereby becoming indispensable. Since our physical body in its present form is transient, the disposal of our eternal spirit is what matters. To the overlords, the physical comfort of the masses is unimportant. If enough souls can be

bent into images of a governing demon and persuaded to worship him, then that god will have collected a pool of witnesses to testify to his competence. But humanity develops in ways that cannot be predicted by lesser intelligences than Creator God himself.

As the governing gods were free to educate by any means they wished, it was not long before they discovered that the human frame is capable of harboring multiple spirits and that it is possible to plant demon agents within a person, attaching them as robot-like parasites to the God-given spirit and thus not only securing the following of that unfortunate soul but possibly creating a hybrid with extraordinary ability. This was their answer to the natural generation of genius and prodigy in the human being, and by means of these super-tares they compete with Yahweh for establishing stable cultures on earth. Trans-humanism is not a new thing.

Hence we have wars occurring among nations as demon surrogates work to fulfill their lust for power by organizing campaigns using and abusing the common humanity they despise. Though emperors often reach beyond their legitimate borders, Yahweh does not allow his servants to indulge in wanton aggression. The purpose of this planet is not to host games wherein gods try to unseat brother gods; but it does come to that, which puts a tool in Yahweh's hands that he can use to discipline his own nation when he allows it to be overrun and defeated by the forces of the foreign gods they defiantly worshiped. Because thereafter he has the right to turn around and punish the nations for their illegal aggression.

So the centerpiece of the Big Picture is this cosmic contest that may ultimately define what will be allowed as good and what, if anything, will be damned for being evil. Inescapably we are not only surrounded by but immersed in that war since the habit of rebellion became natural to our fleshly seed long ago, and by now the imprint of rebel cultures profanes all our brains.

While nothing negates God's intrinsic love which he naturally extends to all of his creation, if evil is to be eliminated from heaven and earth, at least some of his creatures will have to be cut off and eventually isolated. If not that, then the rival hope of the "sons of God" will be realized and heaven will forever tolerate legitimized evil throughout its domains.

The purpose of earth was never to become an anthropocentric paradise, contrary to what many suppose. To believe that is to discredit God's wisdom. Fundamentally, earth's purpose was to be the theater in which the argument between God and Satan is played out. Satan would have understood that the physical arena was designed to limit battle-damage in heaven, but he should have wondered why the advantage seemed to be all on his side. From our vantage point, we see that Satan's advantage was transient, but we marvel at the price heaven was willing to pay for it.

Bear in mind what we know about the character of our God. He is not a tyrant. He is patient, loving, and kind. He demands obedience because free will is highly explosive, and we need guidelines and training to avoid being hurt by it. Sin consists of disbelieving his

warning, and willfully disregarding the warning is what potentially delivers one into the company of devils. But how can anyone avoid being a rebel when we are born with that tendency? Fortunately, the day of final reckoning has not yet arrived, and there is still much more to the Big Picture.

Scripture tells of a future time that must make Satan tremble as it draws near. The prophets speak of justice demanding wrath, and it appears that justice detonates God's weapon of mass destruction. But why hasn't he used it by now to rid heaven of the fallen angels and earth of their followers?—for they truly have failed to maintain peace on earth. Does his patience indicate weakness? Impossible. Was the (what we suppose) early development of evil in his original plan a purposeful thing to help define or accentuate ultimate good? Certainly not! These questions must have made Satan wonder too.

But from Satan's desperate point of view the urgent and practical thing is to forestall judgment until he and the rebel "sons of God" have hit on a successful demonstration of Utopia. Yes, peace on earth by whatever means, even if achieved by severely degrading human freedom, responsibility, and even human nature will serve their purpose because in Satan's view this was never about the welfare of humanity: only the ultimate welfare of himself.

To briefly recap: Yahweh's opposition had corrupted his good creation early on, but the Bible lets us in on the secret that this earth is still capable of producing a peaceful family in his image, free and sharing in his love. Satan has a contrary purpose, and it is not simply

to mess things up. He is determined to demonstrate that he is capable of successfully managing mankind, which he hopes will validate his brand of godhood and prevent his permanent ejection from heaven. Everything Satan does is aimed at that end because he realizes it is his only hope to preserve his autonomy. If you enlist to help him achieve his victory, as many do for lack of knowledge, you become a member of his army and that makes you his property. Where he goes you go.

The good news is that Yahweh has provided a means of rescue from human nature's free fall into Satan's kingdom, and it explains how Christ will push Satan aside. Then he will demonstrate the second part of what he meant by "very good" when he created earth. In the aftermath of that day of wrath there will appear a redeemed people who are beyond judgment because they have been remade in his image without sin, justice having been fulfilled by Christ taking their penalty upon himself. This is the bomb shelter from the wrath of God to which everyone is invited and which the demons try to cover up.

Thus is answered Satan's fundamental argument that free will cannot long stand without committing sin. He is right technically, but he never foresaw how God would apply divine love and step in to become a powerful sacrifice more than equal to the penalty that had (and will) accumulate on behalf of his beloved sinners. Satan never believed it could happen. Who would? The cost was unimaginable to Satan as it is unimaginable to everyone. Fortunately we are so made that we need not imagine it before we understand the simple gospel and let it apply to us.

The final chapter has yet to be played out; the practical success of the redemption of humanity has yet to be demonstrated. So in Satan's view it is imperative that the world never get to that place. The prophets' prediction of an age of peace with freedom is Satan's nightmare that must not be allowed to come to pass. Satan's version of the age of peace sees mankind's free will disabled, cooperation coerced, and freedom severely curtailed.

The shock and wonder of Creator God becoming man struck like lightning in Satan's kingdoms when the Spirit of Christ marched forth clad in ordinary humans inaccessible to demonic manipulation, lawfully challenging satanic institutions and establishing churches for Jesus Christ. This called for a direct counter by the "sons of God." Satan slapped the "God" title on one of his fallen angels, a moon deity, and opened a channel to him in the name of his prophet, disseminating a bastardized religion that marginalizes Jesus. He waited for the organized church of Christ to get bogged down with bickering over relics and other petty concerns and then constructed an imposing shrine on Jerusalem's temple site and took the world by storm. Though having lost many wars over the centuries, the aggression is not over yet. By coercion and violence it continues to obscure and stamp out true knowledge of Jesus Christ; and the shrine on the temple mount still stands against the fulfillment of end-time prophecy.

As Satan works to break those prophetic Scriptures in which Christ sets him aside and brings about a nation of obedient sons and daughters on this earth, he has his useful theologians among us who insist

that the age of God's rule is not to take place quite as prescribed in Scripture. They sideline our essential preparation for future offices of obedience by hiding the Millennium from view, dangerously ignoring Jesus' stern words about the dreadful future awaiting those of his would-be servants who neglect to invest their talents now in preparation for faithful service later in his coming kingdom.

The turning point in the war that occurred when God entered the human race was not a surprise entirely. Ever since the events of Genesis six there had been speculations by seers and poets that this could happen. However, when the reality came it revealed more about the love of God for his Creation than anyone imagined, and even Satan didn't get it. Although hidden in the Scriptures was a prediction that Messiah would arrive in the womb of a virgin, the implication was not understood then and is not widely appreciated now. If the Son of God had made appearances before that, those events were of no consequence compared to this. If this had been explained to Satan beforehand, no doubt he would not have agreed to a theater of war where God would literally appear on the stage. The Incarnation tied God to Planet Earth and Planet Earth to God. There was no longer any possibility that Creation would not be shown to be good in the end.

Satan knew the birth of Jesus was a bombshell, but since human life was not permanent, the potential for damage to his case by this transient influencer within captive Israel was not evident at first. Satan's initial counter-offer to Jesus demonstrates this lack of understanding. The devil's proposal was to hand over the rule of the nations

that had been maintained by the "sons of God" if Jesus would forego his allegiance to Yahweh and not declare himself *the* "Son of God" but instead join the "sons of God" under Satan's rule.

Evidently Satan did not know (or believe) who Jesus of Nazareth was at that point, or if he did he did not foresee the full significance of the resurrection promised in Scripture. Yahweh had preserved the continuity of the Jewish nation, but it was still morally corrupt and not significantly better than any other nation with respect to the foundational markers of holiness. What Jesus was about to do was necessary in order to fulfill the promised resurrection of human bodies, but even more significantly it would make possible the moral purity of free-willed beings that so far had been unattainable. That was the game changer and essentially the end of the war. But few recognize it even today, and so the war rages on under a false pretense and satanic hope that the kingdom of Satan will coerce peace and engineer a valid example of sustainability on earth.

Of all the nations, only Israel was offered this amazing opportunity for resurrected life. None of the "sons of God" could promise this. Though reincarnation is set before them as a ruse to keep them in line, salvation from the dead end of sin could only be arranged by the Lawgiver himself and only if no law were violated in the process, including the law that death is the payment for moral imperfection.

When we look around at the religious cultures of the world, we should not be surprised to find rumors and even evidence of supernatural events everywhere. No doubt all of the "sons of God" are able

to bring some of that about. In the biblical records there are seers like Balaam and magicians like those in Egypt. The miraculous does not signify a way of salvation from sin. Only the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ has the power to do that; thus it is said salvation is of the Jews. By the light of this we see that shamanism is likely connected to the "sons of God," not to God Most High. Regardless of what truth and practical advantage there may be outside God's Anointed, the end is bound to be deadly. The resurrection promised through Christ is where the war has its consummation as we are called to partake of his death and be absorbed into his glorious body. Every other story is a counterfeit script devised by demons.

It should be clear now why Jesus prescribed that prayers be in his name. We must be unambiguous when there are other gods about. Tacking something like "in your name" to the end of a prayer doesn't necessarily qualify. Beginning the prayer with "In the name of Jesus" is much better. "In the name of Jesus Christ" makes the message doubly secure. But either "Jesus" or "Christ" is sufficient. There are no other gods named Jesus, and only he has been anointed King; that is why we find the apostles freely referring to him simply as "Jesus" when the context makes it clear that ordinary humans are excluded; otherwise "Jesus of Nazareth" serves to narrow the field to a point. Throughout the Bible we find the "name" being emphasized. His name is holy precisely because it separates him from other gods. And that applies today as much as it did in ancient times because those other gods are still around and the default salutation might fit the god of the nation you happen to be in! While as Christians we belong in

the holy meta-nation of Christ, it is still advisable to display your colors, which signifies that you are aware of the battle and have no interest in addressing one of the adversaries of Christ.

If in some secret "prayer language" you do not know exactly what and to whom you have prayed, beware! All the gods are capable of causing supernatural manifestations designed to deflect sincere prayers. And we should not assume that by using the name of some saint that a prayer is safe from being hijacked by the enemy. In fact, using any other name in prayer amounts to idolatry. How destructive and wasteful this particular lack of understanding has been I suppose no one knows; hopefully the Spirit of Christ secures the door we leave unguarded.

Ironically, the leaders of the Jewish nation were prompted by Satan when the blessing promised in their Scriptures materialized, and we must assume that Satan failed to see that what he had led them to do was truly according to their Scriptures until it was too late to reverse the momentum. When Jesus resurrected, he demonstrated a miraculous body, the first of its kind but not the last. His small band of disciples were the first to receive the Holy Spirit whom he released, but not the last. The Spirit of Christ conferred to them was contagious and no respecter of nations. It spread throughout the Roman empire and everywhere, right under the noses of the "sons of God" because every missionary effectively extended Yahweh's territory as he or she set foot in foreign lands, revealing to all the manifold wisdom of God that Israel had carefully preserved in writing.

This upset the whole economy of the gods. Now an individual person can walk into a thoroughly pagan territory, thus making an opening for the Spirit of Creator God, carving out a new segment for the body of Christ, and effectively extending the nation of Yahweh—but not without opposition from the demon masters because this encroachment of what they consider their sovereign right was not expected.

Not that the territorial divisions were ever strictly sacrosanct, for the Spirit often found an opening through gifted prophets even before Christ's resurrection, but Satan could readily squelch the effects, as for example in Nineveh and Babylon.

Basically the land of Israel, and the temple in Jerusalem in particular, is the place Yahweh chose to be heaven's embassy, as intermittent as it has been. But the missionary principle seems to have been active all along. For example, how was Yahweh allowed to destroy Sodom if it belonged to another god? Answer: He placed one of his own there. Lot was not the missionary type, but he got involved with the politics of the place though he was not consciously sent there for that purpose. He was an anomaly, a righteous man in a corrupt culture. God sent him there as a legal foothold that gave him an opening to send in angels and manage the culture; and the change he made was drastic and permanent and a foretaste of things to come when he returns bodily to earth at the end of this age.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that someone today is worthy of more than their particular experience of temporal life offers

them. To be brought into existence at all, with the opportunity to try out on earth and perhaps leave progeny, is a gift that in no way imputes debt to the giver. If someone suffers a painful existence and a shortened lifespan, the tragedy, if there is one, will be due to uncured corruption of their spirit, for the never-dying spirit takes into eternity marks made in time. Human casualties of angelic wars must be seen in the context of Christ's strategy where evil is not immediately eradicated but allowed to grow along with good. There is little justice, no fairness, and never equity under conditions of war.

The old world order seems to be dissolving today, but that is not so. We know this because the prophets predict violent destruction of the anti-Christ nations at the time of Messiah's return. The "sons of God" will not be entirely out of business until then. Satan hangs onto his hope that not enough faithful and able bond-servants of Christ will be brought into the resurrection age to successfully apply Christ's enforcement of righteousness throughout the world. Look around and see what Satan is doing today. What he resists is the development of sanctified saints who will have been prepared, once released from unholy flesh, to prove that free will is not essentially corrupting.

Christian teachers assist Satan when they ignore the Big Picture. Christians are taught that the world was created for them and that to be blessed by God here and accepted into the eternal bliss of heaven is their goal. Sanctification and obedience are loosely tied to salvation and seem scarcely necessary. They have it backwards. Satan would be happy to have everyone tucked away safely in heaven. What he fears is

many sanctified servants in glorified bodies exercising their gifts as rulers in Christ's future kingdom on this earth: a host of exhibits positioned to be Yahweh's evidence in the ultimate trial to prove that the "sons of God" miscalculated about the inevitability of sin. At the conclusion of that trial, the guilty verdict having been unanimously approved by a jury of angels, Yahweh will demand that the demons and every other determined rebel be delivered to a place separated from concourse with heaven, which translates to incapacitation by chains of pain in what is referred to as hell or the lake of fire, an outcome of shame and everlasting contempt.

The takeaway from this rambling essay is that we may lose out if we're not learning something in this life that will be useful in the next. It is not enough to merely acknowledge Christ and look forward to happiness in heaven. We also have an obligation to risk developing our faith into something of value as a return on the Master's investment in us. There is no safety in ignorance if you have read this.

Our only safety is in *successfully* investing the talents we are given. This is a cosmic battle in which we are the territory to be won by Christ or lost to Satan. Always remember what Jesus said in that frightful parable about the one who thought he was playing it safe.

You might ask, "Who are these obedient citizens? Do you know anyone who could qualify for being a perfectly and permanently reliable servant of God who will never, ever falter?" My answer, of course is, "No, I don't." Then how is it that God can have this confidence in people? Is heaven so transformative that we enter in as world-loving

saints and come back with Jesus as trusted servants ready to brush off every worldly temptation?

This is the point where we must take seriously some things Jesus said, such as the way being narrow and few finding it. Again, remember the servants in Jesus parables who were rewarded with posts of responsibility for making wise investments with the master's money. The surprising doom of the servant who played it safe and merely preserved what he was given is evidence that if we don't learn to be profitable now we will be worse than useless to him then. So the exercise of investing our talents to benefit our Master and not ourselves is of far more practical importance than we have been led to believe. Being detached from worldly ways prepares us to joyfully use our glorified bodies effectively and to laugh at any temptation to self indulgence.

If you have doubts about this theory, recall that its mainspring is how it explains the persistence of Satan without making him equal to God and without seeing God as needing evil to achieve his purposes. The former heresy is a simplistic doctrine found in Eastern religions. The latter heresy is less obvious and by default slips without opposition into otherwise good Christian doctrine.

As you read the Bible with this Big Picture in mind, you may be amazed, as I am, at how much additional material there is that easily fits and supports this perspective.

A theory is only as good as the answers it yields or as bad as its wrong predictions. So try this one and see how well it performs!

Here are some examples:

Q: How can we be sure this Big Picture is true since it draws from the Christian Bible exclusively and ignores or rejects perspectives from science and established religion?

A: Either the Bible is God's perspective on man or it is one of man's perspectives on God. It can't be both. You have to make a choice and go with one or the other. If you want to integrate science and history in such a way that it modifies or sidelines biblical data, you're in the latter camp.

I take it that God wants us to see things from a particular point of view because he is trying to adjust our values to align with his intention for mankind. As we align our hearts to agree with the Bible, its message grows wider and deeper for us. We find the Word is not only nourishing food, it is medicine to cure the disease of pride and rebellion. For those criticizing the Bible, the medicine has been ineffective: for some it works, for others it does not.

If you have determined which parts of Scripture are gifts from God and which parts are from man, keep it to yourself or be honest and acknowledge it is a gift from you.

Consider this parallel: The surface of Planet Earth is the only place in the material universe equipped by God to be our home. Someone may think Earth is imperfect and a better planet can be imagined. So what? What good does that do? You might improve the map of the Earth by editing out volcanoes, but that doesn't change the fact that for practical living this is the only planet in the universe of possible planets.

Q: What does “investing talents” mean in practical terms?

A: To answer that we must look into the future expression of our various gifts and then back up and figure out what investment in this present life will deliver increased value to our Master when he returns to take over the government of the earth.

The Big Picture informs us that Planet Earth is a platform on which God has set out to prove to Satan that beings created with freedom to disobey can truly obey and adore him in spite of being free to explore independence—in other words that free will does not inevitably become marred by unlawful indulgences of self-will. Given that the blood of Christ has conferred legal innocence and new or regenerated bodies have severed us from slavery to the First Adam and placed us in the royal line of the Second Adam, by what means will an individual deliver talents of increased value to the King in the future theocracy? Some will literally participate in governing cities, applying skills learned in the former life. That sets a vocational pattern, but not everyone will be called on to continue an old vocation, so we can't rely on that. The common denominator for everyone is the value to the King of vastly increased reliability, which has its root in the disciplines of our present lives. In other words, regardless of vocation, our return on the Master's investment in us will be proven by applying what we have learned about being faithfully focused and trustworthy in times of testing. Because in the end it is the perfect record of uncorrupted loyal service that will qualify us for being exhibits in the trial which must turn out to prove Satan's error if he is to be condemned.

But if someone who has received talents to invest comes through a thousand years being afraid to demonstrate an increase in those talents, will that person be ushered out of the courtroom along with Satan and his demons? What do you think? What does the Bible say?

Q: Micaiah had a "word from Yahweh" in which a "spirit" volunteered to put lying words in the mouths of Ahab's prophets. Was that spirit one of the fallen angels?

A: Note that just before he said that Micaiah had spoken sarcastically to Ahab, telling him a lie which everyone present knew was merely an insult. The two kings who had summoned Micaiah on this occasion had put him in a difficult position, and this was his way of expressing his displeasure and contempt for Ahab. So can we be sure that what he said next was intended to be taken literally? He did not say the "spirit" (literally "breath") was an angel. Basically, Micaiah was saying that Ahab's prophets were false prophets, and the way he said it was well within the style of true prophets. But is there some truth in the picture of Yahweh consulting his hosts of angels? This gets into the question of the purpose of the angels, which I never thought was to be for giving advice to their Creator. Additionally the matter at hand, which they were supposedly unable to answer after extended debate, is so trivial that we must take that whole scene with Yahweh and the angels as being Micaiah's invention.

Q: If the "sons of God" are the evil influencers in the world, why was it said that "an evil spirit from Yahweh was upon Saul"?

A: The Hebrew word *ra'* translated "evil" in that quotation is not

the kind of moral evil contemplated in the question. Rather as a masculine intensive noun it means distress or adversity. The spirit of Saul's kingship anointing, which was given by Yahweh, had been taken from him, and thereafter he became Yahweh's adversary by violating his vow to never execute David.

Q: In Daniel chapters 4 and 5 it is said that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he will. That seems to indicate that Yahweh rules the nations, not the "sons of God."

A: This passage is about a lesson Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, learned after his aggression in Israel. Yahweh had earned the right to overrule the gods of Babylon, and he did so very effectively through Daniel. So this was a penalty against Babylon's demons and not the general rule for all nations. It worked for the good of Babylon for some time as Nebuchadnezzar learned that his success was not due to his excellence but the God of Israel.

Q: Who are the "watchers" in Daniel 4:17?

A: They are "holy ones," that is angels who watch over the affairs of earth and, according to this passage, have authority to override natural causes by their own decrees, which would certainly be on behalf of Yahweh, the most high. They are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture under the "watcher" terminology, but that does not necessarily indicate a unique kind of creature or office because Yahweh's loyal/holy angels are often found intervening in the affairs of men.

Q: You mentioned Michael, the archangel who guards Israel. In the book of Daniel he appears to be joining in forceful opposition to

the "the prince of Persia."

A: The "prince of the kingdom of Persia" is clearly one of the "sons of God" who has dominion over the king of Persia who would be Cyrus at that time. But Cyrus is Yahweh's anointed and so is being aided by holy angels.

Q: As recorded in 2 Chronicles and Ezra, Cyrus, king of Persia, said that Yahweh, the God of heaven, had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. How does that square with the nations being controlled by the "sons of God"?

A: First to note is that what Cyrus said is not what Yahweh or one of his prophets said. Isaiah named Cyrus long before he was born and predicted that Yahweh would anoint him to subdue nations—not that he would own all the kingdoms of the earth. The culture from which Cyrus arose was monotheistic, and Cyrus knew of Yahweh, which could mean that many in Persia had escaped the dominion of demons. Yahweh had told Isaiah that he would enable Cyrus to subdue nations and open the "gates of hell." Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, a messianic figure who loosed the gates of tyrannical strongholds, ultimately to proclaim the release of the Jewish captives.

The arrangement that allows the "sons of God" to exercise dominion over nations does not prevent the knowledge of Yahweh from crossing borders and lodging in the minds and hearts of individuals who may influence their cultures. Another example is Solomon's influence in Ethiopia through the queen of Sheba which persists to this day. Paul the apostle began the movement that broke demon

strongholds in western nations.

Q: How could so many theologians and Bible students and preachers miss the Big Picture? Is it because the focus is too narrow in the New Testament?

A: Consider Ephesians 3:8-12: "This grace was given to me, who am less than the least of all saints, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things: to the intent that now it might be made known through the church to the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him."

Who are these principalities and powers? Paul uses the same phrase in other places. An example is Ephesians 6:12: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies." Is this not a perfect description of what we have been calling the "sons of God"?

Paul is admitting that there is a larger purpose behind evangelism—larger than simply winning souls for heaven. The "eternal purpose" is to demonstrate the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers through the example of the church—the church being that mystery hidden in Christ comprised of Jew and Gentile raised in him to a new resurrected life of unqualified obedience.

In Colossians 1:16 Paul confirms that principalities and powers were created by Christ and for Christ. Then in the next chapter he says Christ triumphed over them. In other words the stage has been set for their defeat (for they are still quite active).

In Titus 3:1 Paul uses "principalities and powers" to refer to human government with the implication that the wickedness in the heavenlies does not necessarily manifest as pure evil on earth. This is as we would expect, because the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, while in rebellion against Yahweh, are intent on governing nations to demonstrate their own competence.

The reason this is missed by most theologians goes back to ignorance of the war in heaven caused by their failure to pursue an answer to why the continuing activity of Satan. I hate to say it, but could Satan have his hand in promoting this ignorance?

Q: Does the Big Picture explain how conspiracies can form? It's somewhat of a mystery because if you look closely you see a lot of stupidity and incompetence on the part of those who are supposedly conspiring.

A: That is virtually proof that strings are being pulled by principalities and powers beyond the human level. Also the eventual failure and implosion of grand designs proves that those powers are not very competent themselves and are having to submit to higher Authority.

Q: Why didn't Satan foresee the possibility of Christ's incarnation and object to it at the outset of the experiment?

A: Yes, Satan might well have wondered why the Son of God in-

vested so much care when he made this universe. Amazing handiwork would be expected, but far beyond that was the plethora of marvels and beauties hidden like treasures that would beg the question, "Who made this?"—in case anyone doubted or forgot. Also there was an uncanny resemblance to heaven, and if Satan had thought of the implication of that instead of shouting for joy as if it were his gift and playground, he might have seen that it had been fashioned such that God could actually walk on this planet. This was of a different order from the "back door" in the design of the human being that the devils discovered and exploited later. While the affinity of earth for the stuff of heaven made it possible for the two to coexist, the thing that Satan apparently did not notice when man appeared was that the human being was made little lower than the angels in such a way that not only could the Spirit of God inhabit him but also God could fully and independently participate in the time-bound human frame. Who would have thought that the Creator would ever want to do that?

Q: Doesn't the Big Picture contradict the Bible's speaking of God ruling the world with equity?

A: Several psalms include that language, but it is always about the future Kingdom. "Let the nations be glad," says the psalmist, "for you *will* judge the nations with equity and govern the nations upon the earth." But even if taken as a statement about the present, there is no contradiction because the "sons of God" who temporarily rule the nations are not doing so in place of God. Yahweh is always the overarching Monarch whose purposes are never subverted, and the reason we

can say that is the frame around the Big Picture means that. If God is not timelessly sovereign, there is no Big Picture and we know nothing. It follows that as a practical matter for all people everywhere, God is personally accessible regardless of the state of nations. There is nothing in the arrangement allowed to the "sons of God" that prevents you or anyone else from punching through the principalities and powers in high places and obtaining access to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the God of all comfort.

Q: Suffering can be viewed in various ways, none of them being entirely satisfactory. What does the Big Picture say?

A: Within the frame of the Big Picture we see God having placed himself in the way of suffering: loss of peace in heaven, rejection of his love, and subjecting himself to the weakness and mortality of human flesh. We cannot say that suffering is the direct result of sin unless we define risk-taking as sin, because the risk inherent in the highest order of creation looms behind the emergence of evil. So it is logical to say that suffering is the inevitable result of love, but also common experience tells us this is so. The universe is so constructed.

Q: Why are Jews generally unwelcome in every nation but Israel?

A: Satan wants to break the prophecy that has Jerusalem standing and waiting for Christ at his return. In particular the temple which validates the prophecy will be built by no one but Jews. So the fewer descendants of Jacob the better in Satan's view. Many Jews are not Zionists, but they're still capable of producing offspring who may one day participate in the building of the temple. This applies to Gentiles

who support Israel as well. Secondly, the rulers hate to have to make exceptions for Jews, for they do not obey and blend in well. Jews have customs that render them resistant to regimentation. Thirdly, Jewish blood produces exceptionally talented individuals whom the demons cannot help but admire.

Q: Hindus worship thousands of gods. Are they all "sons of God"?

A: The Bible reveals little of angelic ranking, but we are given enough to know that they are not all on the same level. So the answer could be that among the fallen angels the "sons of God" represent a natural level of leadership over any number of lesser demons. But whether or not Hindu mythology bears any relation to reality is uncertain.

Q: There's a proverb that says Yahweh has made everything for its own end; even the wicked for the day of evil. So how can you call it heresy to say that God created evil.

A: You might balance that with the proverb in the following chapter which says, He that justifies the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh.

Q: Does this theater of war in the Big Picture rule out the "gap" theory of there being a period in earth's history between the beginning of creation and the earth as we know it?

A: The Big Picture has no view of a significant era in the cosmic battle that predates what we know from Genesis. It would be hard to fit that in given that the purpose of the entire material universe is wrapped up in Christ preparing his answer to Satan.

Scripture presents the genesis of the universe as proceeding perfectly from the wisdom of God, which is contrary to the idea of chaos and reset. By wisdom and understanding Yahweh founded the heavens and earth. In other words, the physical universe unfolded from an exceedingly wise design that we can only observe one instant of and try to understand its mechanisms.

Q: Does the Big Picture explain the Tree of Life?

A: By Yahweh's own words we know that the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden needed guarding in order to keep sinful man from eating fruit that would undo the penalty of death that came as a result of disobedience. This makes poetic sense, but it raises several more questions: 1) Why were cherubim assigned to guard the Tree of Life and not regular angels? 2) Why were the cherubim placed eastward or on the east side of the garden? 3) What does the flame of a sword that turned every way represent? 4) Does this tree still exist and if not, why not? 5) If the Tree of Life still exists in some form, then does the garden exist too? 6) Does it imply that there is a "fruit" other than the blood of Christ that would allow humans to live forever? 7) How does Yahweh's statement that the man has become "like one of us to know good and evil" relate to the need to guard the tree?

Obviously the garden and the trees go together; otherwise we would have to ask why the trees were there. The whole scene is about the whole of mankind. In other words, the fact of man being created in the image of God requires the moral free will which itself is the soil in which the tree of the knowledge of good and evil grows; and the

tree of life is the divine nature which can withstand evil without dying. But the surprising thing about this marvelous metaphor of the trees—which could stand alone and cause us no difficulty—is that it links not only to wisdom, obedience, human health, and longevity but to the throne or seat of God, which is where we normally find cherubim acting as guardians. So the tree of life must be important.

We find “tree of life” occurring twelve times in the Bible and looking like bookends in Genesis and Revelation. In the middle, Proverbs applies tree of life as a metaphor representing an ongoing supply of some life-giving benefit. In Revelation the tree of life is presented as it is in Genesis (not a simple metaphor but perhaps a symbol) but in the end it is no longer guarded by cherubim or the flaming sword.

To answer the first question we need to know what cherubim are. The word appears nearly 90 times in the Bible, counting “cherub,” the singular form (and not counting the man named Cherub). Images of cherubim decorate the tabernacle and temple in addition to the sculptures over the mercy seat where they are described as having wings and faces. They are first mentioned in Genesis without explanation as if their existence and purpose were common knowledge. Where did Moses get his information about them? The Hebrew word seems to be original, providing no clue as to their purpose or appearance. Psalm 18, echoing 2 Samuel 22:11 images Yahweh riding on the wings of a cherub, inspired, no doubt, from the concept of him being enthroned above the cherubim carvings over the mercy seat in the tabernacle. Ezekiel, in his vision of a future temple, informs us that each cherub

had two faces, one of a man and the other of a young lion, and that the sound of their wings was as the voice of God while another description counts four faces, adding the face of an eagle plus the cherub's own face and human-like hands under their wings. Apparently the standard images used in decorative carvings showed the two faces because more than that would be difficult to depict. The body in the artistic depictions may have been four-footed, perhaps of an ox because in Ezekiel chapter 1 an ox is listed instead of the "cherub" face. But when actually encountered in visions they are complexities of motions and symbols speaking of another world beyond three dimensions.

The famous passage in Ezekiel about the king of Tyre that confuses many is resolved in the Big Picture in which "sons of God" actually exert control through human kings and princes. It makes the most sense if we allow that the king of Tyre was possessed by Satan himself because of this key geographical location on the Mediterranean and its proximity to Yahweh's territory. The description in this passage looks through the king of Tyre and speaks to Satan: "You were the anointed cherub that covers; and I set you up upon the holy mountain of God." From this we might draw the conclusion that cherubim are an angelic class of the highest order, and if that includes Satan it may also include the "sons of God." However, "cherub" could be a term of lesser specificity, covering more than one class of living beings in the angelic realm. The Big Picture supports this in that we have made a material distinction between fallen angels and loyal angels. The description of the king-of-Tyre cherub is vastly different from Ezekiel's description of cherubim. So if fallen angels may be called cherubim while other

cherubim are in a very different class, the term refers to their functions rather than their essential beings. Thus our question #1 might be answered by pointing this out and noting that the cherubim guarding the way to the tree were not necessarily like the ones around the throne of God.

Question #2 wonders why only the eastern approach to the tree of life was guarded. All kinds of answers to that may be imagined. It does say that the flaming sword was omnidirectional. The simplest answer is that it grounds the tree of life by this geographic citation while other features of the garden disappeared beyond the edges of the Big Picture frame. So we can expect that the tree of life will be revisited.

Question #3 asks what the flame of the sword represents. Since swords do not have flames, it is a fair question. If the flame is a symbol, the sword must be a symbol too. Could the sword represent the Word of God? Several of the Proverbs use "tree of life" metaphorically to mean a continuing action like a tree replenishing its fruit. Psalm 1 promises that one who meditates on the Law of God will be like a tree yielding fruit for being planted near a stream of water.

Question #4 asks whether the tree still exists. If the tree symbolizes the source of fruit that comes of meditating on the Word, then the tree equates to the Holy Spirit or perhaps one of his several facets.

Question #5 contemplates that the tree of life was an integral part of the garden. The Big Picture definitely has the Garden of Eden being transitory with no future purpose.

Question #6 zeroes in on the eternal life giving property of the

fruit and sets it against the blood of the atonement. This question sounds simplistic but it is not. It asks if the fruit could confer immediate immortality then would it not have been an alternative to the redemption we know? The Big Picture has the answer in plain sight: this would win the war for Satan; sin and sinners would become permanent.

Question #7 takes in the context which connects the two trees. The knowledge of good and evil is what forces the tree of life into the future where it appears again in the New Jerusalem with fruit for healing of the nations! If we may take this symbolically, the healing is relative to the scars of Satan's past dominion, and it will be safe to administer because the truth about Satan is out in the open. As long as there was knowledge of good vs. evil there was compromise or attempts to reconcile the two. Put the tree of life in that environment and you have the setup for perpetual compromise with Satan.

Q: Does the Big Picture confirm the existence of guardian angels?

A: Angels appearing to benefit someone in some way is a feature of Scripture as well as living experience. But the idea that everyone has an angel dedicated to protect or care for them comes from a misinterpretation of Matthew 18:10. The context there is about the value of children and Jesus confirms that children have intuition derived from an innate awareness of the goodness of God. In that passage "angels" must be taken in the sense of messaging. Hebrews 1:14 mentions "ministering spirits," which does not have enough in it to confirm the idea of dedicated guardian angels. Tradition speaks of personal

guardian angels, but Jesus' words in Matthew 18:10 are more in line with Psalm 8:2. Psalm 91:11 says, "He will give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." But since the next verse is one Jesus applied to himself in his answer to Satan, the whole of Psalm 91 may be considered prophetic of Messiah.

Q: How is Heaven made any more stable with human inhabitants replacing fallen angels?

A: There can be no guarantee that Heaven will never again experience a divergence unless free will is no longer free and humans are no longer in God's image. But one thing about humans that angels lack is gender, and that may dampen the energy of independence whenever it moves from potential to kinetic. Minus the procreation mechanism there remains an underlying male/female dynamic that gives birth to a variety of humbling manifestations and connects with the basis for the relationship between Christ and his church, which is love and worship. If redeemed souls in this life love to worship their Redeemer, how much more when the old nature is a memory and only a memory.

Q: Why are the psalms and songs of the saints so focused on glorifying God as if we can add to his glory?

A: The reason for this should be plain by now too: our corrupted nature means that by default we glorify Satan. Not that we would ever contemplate worshipping the devil, but like him we are fallen from holiness, and so we need the pressure of the discipline of consciously glorifying our savior God, reveling in his love, and learning to obey his first and foremost commandment first and foremost. This extends far

beyond devotional exercises. Obviously we must not align our energies with any organization or effort which disrespects Christian principles. Not so obvious is that in this war neutrality is beyond our reach. We must intentionally glorify God or we risk glorifying the demons who rule the world and would have us glorify anything and anyone else. From this viewpoint we must say that nominally Christian nations and communities and homes and individuals are as riddled with idolatry as was Israel under its worst king—because neutrality is an illusion.

Q: Does the Big Picture help explain why prayer seems necessary to move the hand of God even though it is about something that is promised in Scripture and in his will?

A: The usual answers to this revolve around the concept that God wants us to develop in some way, such as increasing our faith, learning more about his will, becoming more dependent on him, etc. But another idea, which falls in line with the Big Picture, is that when we live within territory that has been allocated by God to the "sons of God" we are the only legal channel that Yahweh has available for doing things his way. In other words, we are the army of God in enemy territory: we are not at home here but we being the Spirit within us who in that arrangement does not act apart from us.

Q: What can the Big Picture tell us about heaven—that is the experience of heaven we all look forward to?

A: One's first impression might be that we are experimental elements of an experiment, cogs in a wheel that will become unnecessary

when the war is over. But if we step back and really look at the big picture, it becomes clear that Jesus Christ has permanently connected us with himself and the godhead. This view makes everything else grow dim. What Christ did and his demonstration of love certainly stands to certify the glorious end. But we must realize who he is, the creator of all we know, and that compels us to see him the same at the beginning as at the end. So we are not a species invented for the sake of the war. Our being in God's image is a very heavy thing and we have infinite value to him. On the other hand we are who we are, shaped in body, mind, and soul by this physical earth. So in order for heaven to be comfortable it must be familiar.

Q: How does the Big Picture reconcile the sovereignty of God with the free will of man?

A: The Bible makes no apology for mixing election and responsibility. Raising this question is ignoring the frame surrounding the Big Picture, which is the horizon beyond which lie the infinities of God. It is futile to try to explore outside the frame because it represents the limits of the human mind. This much we can say: while we are free moral agents, God creates our spirits and determines our talents.

Q: Many people believe there is an "atmosphere" of spiritual or metaphysical information and power that permeates physical reality. Is this compatible with the Big Picture?

A: No, because that is an atheistic idea which turns reality inside out. In reality our physical universe is merely a little picture within the Big Picture. It is the handiwork of Jesus Christ in which his Spirit

is active through his Word and nothing else.

Q: Are miracles exceptions, or are they built into Creation?

A: With this Big Picture in mind, small details like so-called miracles become less problematical. The primitive idea that the physical universe encompasses everything and the spiritual world exists as a sort of glow within it relegates miracles to the margins. The truth is that the entire physical universe is an artifice within the domain of God. Therefore any anomaly within what we call the laws of physics is no less "natural" within the Big Picture than is our entire physical universe. Once you see it, this truth is obvious; you escape the confines of materialistic science in which there is no reason for the existence of anything, let alone the existence of miracles. The Architect of our universe may prefer to be constrained by certain "laws" or conventions of his design, but we have no grounds for supposing that he is absolutely bound by those particular constraints that we happen to be aware of—or that he must rigidly stick to the laws of his own making and never indulge in embellishments. Those physical laws that we know of are reflections of the main structure of Creation, but they are not everything.

Q: How can we rationally suspend disbelief of biblical miracles that seem to be mere embellishments?

A: Take an outrageous miracle like the "smart" earthquake that opened certain tombs in Jerusalem, out of which came sympathetic resurrections. Forget the unlikelihood of this occurring under the regime of physical laws. Look at it as a preview gifted to murderous

Jerusalem confirming the Nazarene's claim that his death is the key to the future resurrection of the saints. Certainly it is not beyond human ingenuity to make up such a happy scene, but let us not give human imagination credit for what God has included in his story. If it is anyone's imagination, it is his.

Q: First Peter chapter 3 verse 22 says, speaking of Jesus, "who is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." Yet the Big Picture seems to show the evil powers still ruling over nations. How is that reconciled?

A: Consider Colossians 2:15: "having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Both passages are about the resurrection of Christ. The Big Picture never diminishes the overarching authority of the triune God, so passages such as this must be seen in their context.

Q: With do many authors, how did the Bible escape being corrupted by Satan?

A: When Yahweh began conversing with Abraham, Satan might have known the conversations would be remembered and recorded and inevitably the promises spoken by God to his nation would become its treasure and define its character. Perhaps the devil was smart enough to anticipate that one of Jacob's offspring might be educated in Egypt's famed university and learn the art of writing and preserving history. To lessen the likelihood of that happening, the Egyptian overlords put into Pharaoh's mind to stop further genesis of He-

brew males by having them murdered at birth or drowned shortly thereafter, neither of which were effective. One Hebrew baby floated into the heart of Pharaoh's daughter and became a prince named Moses. No doubt he received the best education Egypt could offer and learned to love writing and history. Who knows when he began the project that became our Pentateuch? The book of Genesis might have been his doctoral thesis. Being rather meek as a speaker, Moses favored writing. Once a writer always a writer, and the subsequent adventure in the exodus and beyond gave him plenty of material for a second volume. Having found himself becoming the father of a nation, he was thrust into the position of a legislator and legal adviser, and therein he put his writing skill to good use, laboring forty years on Leviticus and assembling information in Numbers.

Satan found that what Moses had begun could not be stopped from growing into the veritable counsel of Yahweh who declared it his right to protect and guide its development. The many counterfeit and substitute scriptures of devilish sponsorship never had the same appeal to so many as did the truth about the love of God.

Ultimately the Israel's Bible grew to encapsulate not only his history, but also heaven's plans as they were craftily revealed within the writings of Hebrew prophets.

Without the Hebrew Scriptures there would be no charter for Israel and no literary womb of expectation living in the minds and hearts of Jews when it came time for Messiah to appear. Thus Jesus of Nazareth stepped into a story that had been written for him. It fit him

well, and he brought it to life and fullness such that it inspired twenty-seven more books to be added to the library of sixty-six books that we call our Bible.

Satan continues to try by every means to hinder the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, but the Bible carries its own guarantee of its preservation in the power it has to make unfailing disciples of Jesus Christ. And now with billions of copies in thousands of languages the overwhelming success of the Bible cannot be denied. Yet scholars who find it's popularity unwarranted write critically of certain elements that appear to them unhistorical or unscientific, as if their petty complaints could somehow undo the success the Word of God has achieved. It's like political critics of a great military leader pointing out that while the campaign he led was a resounding success and no soldiers were actually lost in battle, two or three of them were injured and so the victory is not really a victory.

Q: Where do "liberal" Christians fit in the Big Picture? For example, those who associate themselves with a religious organization that fails to uphold the divinity of Jesus Christ.

A: They would appear to be neutral in the war by ignorance or blindness or worse. But regardless of the cause, by not being faithful servants of Christ they are not simply dwelling in neutral territory because everyone is under the sway of some higher power. In wartime, unclaimed assets do not remain unclaimed for long! If they are not actually in Satan's reserve army they are very vulnerable to being pulled into his service. The chances are not even: as Jesus said, the way is

wide that leads to destruction and few find the narrow way that leads to life. The reason, of course, is that they think they have as much life as anyone. The question we need to ask is, would they be happy in heaven, assuming it were possible, being clothed in filthy rags while others wear the glorious righteousness of Christ; or would they be too ashamed to stay. The idea that everyone will somehow at some time become sufficiently enlightened and compliable to love God while serving him on his terms, not theirs, is a violation of the principle of enduring free will which separates Satan from God.

Q: How could Satan have miscalculated so badly?

A: The history of the world confirms that the material creation was never appreciated for what it is by the "sons of God," and of course neither is it understood by those influenced by demons, which includes almost everyone at certain times and places—though not to rival those whose birthright intelligence becomes subverted by a satanic insanity that propels them to inflict terrible damage on their countries. In general the "sons of God" refuse to believe that the human heart is not enough: in truth everyone needs the love of God like they need a physical heart. Demons believe they can prop people up by artificial means and put them to work in a system that sustains minimal prosperity without being threatened by individual ingenuity; but as long as what they ignore is primary and what they accentuate is secondary, it cannot succeed. Simply put, their empires fail because individual motivation cannot long be sustained without individual ownership and freedom of choice. If societies are not in accordance with na-

ture, economic and moral weakness leaves them vulnerable to a more energetic rival—if they do not simply collapse from their weak production. These ruling demons keep trying to subvert nature because if they are to prove the legitimacy of their rebellion they cannot simply imitate the way Creator God treats his subjects. Should a Cyrus achieve unusual success, it is because Yahweh planted within his spirit an enlightened desire to follow the demon-defying philosophy that imitates Yahweh's policy by allowing individual freedom.

At some point in the future, Almighty God will call a meeting of the "sons of God" and tell them it is time they end their madness. He is ready, he will tell them, to unveil a world of obedient citizens rescued from the same populations they have ruined. After a thousand years or so of him ruling the world without their interference, the verdict will be that free-willed beings indeed can be perfectly obedient. Because enough of them will have been prepared for this demonstration, it will be time to conclude the trial and finalize the war.

Q: Since the Big Picture looks at the controversy between Satan and God, does it explain the "temptation of Jesus" in the desert?

A: Yes. This is very significant. We need to explain how Matthew and Luke knew about this—or did they? It bears the marks of a theological statement in story form. The theology behind it was well understood by the time the Gospel records were written. The story may have been invented earlier by someone as a way to express the theology, which it does in a compact and unforgettable way. Possibly Jesus was the source of the story, but there is no indication of that other

than the deduction that no one else could have known about it as a literal event. But of course it cannot be taken as essentially literal because there is no literal action, only a series of Satan's proposals in symbolic form and Christ's rejection of them.

Ultimately the origin of the story is the Holy Spirit who also brought it to Matthew's mind and for the good reason that it confirms the supremacy of Satan in the world, the super-supremacy of Christ as the confident Father's Son, and the desperation of Satan to prove his legitimacy by tempting the Son of God to join his conspiracy.

The three "temptations" tested Jesus character in three particulars: 1) managing physical appetite; 2) respecting the plan of God; 3) rejecting religious heroism.

Q: Where is there evidence that humans can ever become incorruptible and permanently dedicated to serving Christ and not prone to self-preservation?

A: The martyrs. The evidence of the Scriptures being true has always been people who stake their lives on it, especially those who choose to undergo unspeakable persecution and death. Many of the Old-Testament prophets were such, up to and including John the Baptist.

Jesus Christ is the fountain-head of the blood shed by disciples who are pleased to suffer and die rather than be disloyal to him. Humans will sacrifice their lives in wars and for convictions that are contrary to the truth of Scripture, but their support is visible while the martyr passes the ultimate test by the power of Christ.

Q: In Genesis, God said all green plants are for food. But we know that many are poisonous. Do the "sons of God" have anything to do with that?

A: There are very significant implications from the revelation in Genesis chapter 6 where "sons of God" cohabiting with daughters of men sired monstrous anomalies. If demons could do that, what limit can we put on their ability to understand biology and manipulate it to their own ends? Given the fact that spiritual beings can bring about physical manifestations, what limits their ability to genetically re-engineer God's creation to the extent of producing novel variations? We have no idea how much of evolutionary science is invalid for ignoring this; how much of apparent evolution has been falsified by the efforts of demons? Are we prone to disease more so than the patriarchs were? If demonic invasion of human bodies is possible, as we know it is, what gives us the right to be simple-minded about this and assume they left no permanent marks on the flesh we inherit?

Q: What will it be like when the demonic meddling with Yahweh's designs is rolled back? Will natural human bodies revert to lasting a thousand years? Will lions share straw-cribs with oxen?

A: Is that not possible? Can Jesus Christ who created everything and rolled back death not quickly undo what Satan has done?

Q: When Korah and his company opposed Moses, it seems that the ground opening up and consuming them is a punishment disproportionate to their trespass. How does the Big Picture answer the critics who read that as a story manufactured by the priesthood?

A: The Big Picture provides the context. It informs us that establishing Israel as a nation in Canaan was central to Yahweh's plan in which he is raising up a family to disprove Satan's contention that free will inevitably leads to rebellion. It was inevitable that Satan would send demonic influences while Israel was in the desert no-man's land and infiltrate the ranks under Moses, which would have fractured Israel before it could stake its claim in the promised land. By the way, Korah and his company of princes who intended to fracture Moses' leadership is an analog of the rebellion of Satan that intends to fracture the domain of God.

Q: After the war is over and evil disposed of, what will become of this material universe? Will Earth be so damaged that it will have to be abandoned? Will Jerusalem finally be destroyed forever? Or will there be mercy for archaeologists (among many others) who would shed tears if the city where God lived and died is no more?

A: That comes under the question about New Earth. Is it physical or spiritual—that is, temporal or eternal? An unending series of temporal planet-earths would be eternal, but is there any reason why New Earth could not be "spiritual" in nature. By "spiritual" we usually mean a realm where things do not decay or wear out. Actually we know almost nothing of the spiritual realm because our senses are physical. But we can assume that it will not be something we perceive as shockingly different from what we see and hear and feel in this temporal life; otherwise, we would not be prepared for it, our minds would have to start over, and we would be like newborn babies. Worst

of all would be a bodiless spiritual existence with no senses. Can we imagine living without bodies? Only fools think so.

So we can reason our way into "seeing" what the eternal New Earth is like: superficially a lot like this temporal one. We have evidence that reproduction will be a thing of the past. In fact, a great number of internal simplifications can be imagined as a result of that change, which would not impair our ability to move and speak and recognize one another. If an image on a screen can look real to us, chemistry and biology of glorified bodies could be different and still leave the world seeming much the same.

Actually, the name "New Earth" tells it all: it will be a planet with most things outwardly like this earth. This material earth will have served its secondary purpose, which will be seen then as its primary purpose.

I say let Old Earth live on for a long, long time as a museum at least, and let the gardeners among us make it flourish like Eden. Not that what I say matters, but I feel it may be Yahweh's idea. After all, in a very real sense the Incarnation was permanent. People living in New Earth will visit Old Earth like angels do now.

And what about New Jerusalem—that three-dimensional city seen coming to join Earth? It suggests a complexity in heaven that models the Millennial kingdom on earth lifted to a new degree. Does that mean there will be second-class citizens in heaven? Apparently so, and some higher than first-class too: They that are wise will shine as the sun and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever

and ever. Not everyone will have a place to live in New Jerusalem, for nations exist on New Earth outside of New Jerusalem's walls—places where healing is still required and is being administered, perhaps healing of minds.

Many will purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked will do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but they that are wise will understand.

Q: Was Yahweh perfectly honest when he sold this theater of war, or did he trick Satan into accepting something which he couldn't win?

A: Satan has won throughout history. The demons have maintained the control they desired and largely prevented developments that would fit God's declaration of the good creation. God has lost beloved souls to demonic possession and ultimate food for demons. The perfection of saints which the trial will require in order to benefit God has come at an enormous price, and the battle to win them is not over.

Q: How does democratic government fit into this theory?

A: Democracy is a failure of demonic influence and it can only be sustained when enough people live according to principles of honesty, generosity, and self-sacrifice—in addition to hatred of dictatorial injustice. This puts the people, not God directly, in opposition to the demons, so it is perfectly legal under the terms of the war. The great danger to Satan is that people learn what good government requires and how to participate in it, which makes them better candidates for serving as ministers under the future theocracy. All forms of demon

worship including all pagan religions and corruptions of Christianity are poisonous to democracy since the demons remain in control.

Q: Is it possible for people to be happy under demon rule?

A: If that ever happened it would tend to prove the opposite of what Satan needs to show in order to win his argument. This is why examples of governments that foster happy society are almost nonexistent.

Q: Why have the "sons of God" not learned to quell the turmoil on earth after at least six thousand years of trial and error?

A: The spirits Yahweh places in human souls are made in his image, not the image of demons. So as long as there remain humans unconverted to the image of Satan's obedient demons there will be resistance to tyrannical government.

Q: Why was Israel not charged with spreading the knowledge of the true God by sending out missionaries and establishing worship centers in foreign lands?

A: Because it would violate the rules of the contest. Yahweh had reserved Israel for himself, and the "sons of God" were given dominion over every other nation. That rule still holds today. When the nation became well established under David and Solomon, the temple in Jerusalem became the center of learning and worship of Yahweh. It was open to other nations as Solomon declared in his prayer of dedication, but they had to go to Israel; Israel was not charged with going to them. Yahweh had the right to a temple, and as long as it stood, that was his one material witness. The secondary level of this is that

individuals who carried the knowledge of Yahweh with them could not be prevented from traveling and sharing the truth, but the fact that there was but one true God was represented by the one temple on earth dedicated to him. However, if Satan destroys the temple, Yahweh maintains his witness in his servants, and they are free to build worship centers anywhere, albeit under the opposition of the local overlords, which would vary. When Jesus Christ arrived he brought within himself an alternative to the temple in Jerusalem, and when they destroyed that temple he raised it up in three days in such a form that the Spirit of God was dispensed to every believer and they became his temples empowered to evangelize the world. This is how Yahweh maintains his right to a temple on earth as long as there is no temple in Jerusalem. Jonah's mission was not a violation of the rule because he was preaching repentance based on their knowledge of the true God which they had learned by their visits to Jerusalem.

Q: Did the prophet Jonah actually spend time in the belly of a fish, preach repentance to Nineveh, and convince everyone in Nineveh to repent?

A: Jonah revolted at the very thought that God would send him into enemy territory as a missionary because he adhered to the official doctrine that the nations were to come to Israel to meet God. For him to go preach in a foreign land ruled by Yahweh's adversary was contrary to any protocol he had ever heard of. It turned his world view on its head. All his life he had known that God would someday send the Messiah to punish the nations and rule the world from Jerusalem.

Now consider the parallels between Jesus and Jonah: 1) Both were called on to execute a plan different from what had been revealed through the prophets; 2) Both were from the area in Israel known as Galilee; 3) Both were held in the belly of death three days; 4) Both were brought back to life by a miracle; 5) Both went on to bring people to repentance who were and remained enemies of the Jews; 6) Both saw the enemy they had brought to repentance readopt pagan idolatry in the years following; 7) Both were disowned by the Jews in Jesus' day and thereafter (Search the scriptures, they said: did any prophet come out of Galilee?); 8) Both had to bear the sorrow of their people being persecuted by those they had saved. Jesus said Jonah, son of Amittai, was a sign relative to himself. Clearly the book of Jonah was put in their Scriptures so we can look back and see that the plan Jesus executed was the plan all along. By the way, the name Jonah means *a dove*—not that that's significant or anything. Also Peter was the disciple who had to be convinced that Gentiles were to be included in the great gift of salvation. Peter's father's name was Jonah—not that that is significant at all. Unfortunately, the Big Picture stops there—with the story of Jonah and the whale being a sign on the verge of being a parable for us to look back at—and whether or not it is also factual is a detail too small to be seen in the Big Picture.

Q: In Jeremiah 25, starting with verse 15 to the end of the chapter, Yahweh names twenty nations that he will punish then goes on to include all nations earth. Doesn't this contradict the Big Picture where the "sons of God" rule the nations outside of Israel?

A: You can look at this the other way around: the dispensation in that passage is different therefore it must refer to a future time, the time often spoken of when Christ will return to subdue the nations.

Q: Why did Satan have to ask permission to inflict Job but not Paul?

A: The story of Job is a miniature of the Big Picture. Job is analogous to Israel, the nation Yahweh reserved for himself. Paul stepped out of Israel into Satan's territory where he met demonic forces head on.

Q: What is the origin of God?

A: Within the Big Picture we know the reason for the physical universe, but we must stop there and not fantasize about the reason for God: the picture is mounted within a frame that represents the limit of biblical truth and indeed the limit of the rational human mind.

Q: How do we reconcile Isaiah's "day-star son of the morning" that is interpreted to refer to Satan, with Christ referring to himself as the "bright morning star" in Revelation.

A: Seeing that a couplet in Job establishes the equation of "sons of God" with "morning stars," the Isaiah passage that uses the phrase "day-star son of the morning" must refer to one of them and certainly it is Satan. Then when we get to the very end of the Bible we find Christ referring to himself as the "bright morning star" after Satan and his host are removed from the picture. So "morning stars," like "sons of God," is a broad descriptor of heavenly beings who bear the image of God. This clears up the apparent clash of terms when mem-

bers of the church are promised the morning star. It also suggests that the new name given to each believer is a private name by which Christ will be known to the individual; so once the minor gods are out of the way, God has the freedom to be known by many names for his special significance to each human, without confusion.

Q: Who is the "prince" in Ezekiel 44-48?

A: We are given a glimpse of the perplexity of real life that we naturally assume is not there if not explicitly described. This prince does not coincide with Jesus Messiah, but yet he is prominent in Jerusalem as a priest and prince under the King. Jesus Christ may be physically present as King in Jerusalem, but the presence of the prince on earth makes it possible that he be reigning from the New Jerusalem in heaven. This prince would be David in resurrection.

Q: If the Big Picture explains odd things found in the Bible, what about Balaam?

A: As prophets go, Balaam was not unusual. The prophets who wrote books in our Bible were unusual. Balaam typifies the conflicts under which prophets operate as they open themselves to direct influence of demons. He understands the supremacy of Yahweh and the privileged position of Israel, but he lacks the moral integrity of a true servant of Yahweh, so he stands apart, admiring Jacob from afar while making his living serving pagan clients.

The Balaam lore in the Bible is in the form of poems which celebrate a foreign prophet who feels constrained to speak truth about Israel. The stories perhaps have a loose connection with history, which

is normal for that type of literature.

Q: Why are there walls and gates in New Jerusalem as it is pictured in Revelation?

A: The walls are not symbolic. They protect the Holy City against future rebellions—of humans! Free will cannot be made safe.

Q: Does the land called Israel still belong to Yahweh today?

A: Are other gods still manifesting around the world? Why, in this hostile environment, would Yahweh give up his claim on the land where he will establish his seat of government and worship?

Q: The impulse to sacrifice appears in virtually every religion. How does the Big Picture explain this?

A: Free will tends to oppose authority. This is obvious to everyone. So there is a common, innate feeling that heaven is offended by what we do. The sacrifice is a acknowledgment of that debt and an attempt to pay it with something of real value. How valuable does the sacrifice need to be? Generally the troubling circumstances of life are interpreted to answer that question—be it lack of food, health, or security. Thus if a particular sacrifice doesn't bring an end to some trouble, more (and more costly) sacrifice is required.

What Yahweh did for his nation was define offenses in terms of comprehensive law and prescribe appropriate sacrifices; so there was no longer a need to interpret omens and quantify offenses. Since offenses between man and his neighbor were included this was a tremendous advancement in religion and civilization in general. But it was no cure for conflicts caused by the fundamental appetite for self

advancement. The law reflects the nature of free will but does not sanctify it; it only serves to validate Satan's contention that it is an incurable liability. Sacrifice, if measured and carried out equitably, makes peace and prosperity possible in theory, and to some extent in practice, but the system depends on corruptible priests and judges.

The complete cure would require a holiness of spirit that would entail adding a divine element to the human soul, something that was not included within the bounds of Creation and could only by the Maker participating in human flesh, becoming the ultimate Sacrifice himself, and thereby sanctifying the sacrifices he had prescribed.

Q: Jesus said to the sick man, "Thy sins are forgiven." How was he able to do this before his sacrifice?

A: When Jesus said he has authority when on earth to forgive sins, it was a way of saying he was there as God incarnate. God specified shedding of blood for forgiveness, but not the date of payment.

Q: How is Israel's theft of treasure from Egypt at the exodus justified?

A: 1) This is the winners booty from the war of the gods that had taken place. Far more damage than that was inflicted in that war. 2) The Egyptian people were not happy with their priests and politicians who were demon puppets; they sympathized with the Hebrews and willfully compensated for their mistreatment. 3) Egypt eventually recovered its loss when Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem and took away the treasures of the house of Yahweh and the treasures of the king's house: he took all away including the

shields of gold which Solomon had made.

Q: What god rules the Vatican?

A: All the kingdoms of the earth are under demonic overlords. The Holy Roman Empire inherited the demons who mastered Rome, but there is no reason to believe the arrangements are static. A particular transgender who calls herself the "Queen of Heaven" seems to be wielding a strong influence there.

Q: Does the Big Picture re-frame our outlook on fellow humanity?

A: Yes. By emphasizing that we are spirits assigned to inhabit bodies and minds and environments that are strange to us initially and always perplexing, we recognize that we all face essentially the same struggle. None of us asked to be here. But we are so designed that we instinctively take courage and make the best of whatever we are presented with—unless we encounter love, which changes everything, more or less. If we lack that awareness we naturally feel we are uniquely unfortunate and therefore entitled to optimize our own ends at the expense of others.

Q: What can we say about the Jewish animal sacrifices if it's true that they will be resumed during the reign of Christ?

A: In other words, what is their purpose and effect? Assuming that the purpose will be the same as held forth in Leviticus and that the effect will be what is anticipated there and free of corruption, a simple thought experiment will point to a remedy for the nominal faith of believers who eschew works.

Imagine you are in the habit of ignoring your neighbor's need to

hear and understand the gospel. You have excuses, but you know that disobeying a command is a sin. So you pray for them but never speak to them about it. If this is not quite what you are commanded to do, you know that forgiveness is guaranteed so you need not worry about it too much. Now leave all that the same but introduce one new element: having committed a sin you are expected to acknowledge it by killing a perfectly good animal to make you aware of the fact that the lamb of God died for you. Which is more difficult: speaking to your neighbor or buying an expensive animal and watching it go to waste?

These rituals were spoken by God directly to Moses. Their detail is amazing and bears evidence of careful design for some purpose that is not apparent. If there is beauty in simplicity, there was no beauty in this.

The fact that no room is left for human invention or augmentation makes a statement that man can do nothing to overcome the destructiveness of sin; if there is a remedy it depends entirely on God. The fact that blood is central to the rituals makes a statement that sin is a debt payable by the currency of death. The fact that the sinner does not suffer other than by the loss of property makes a statement that physical pain has no efficacy in removing the blot of one's sin. All of these statements stand against pagan rituals and insulate Israel from pagan religion.

But the outstanding thing to notice is that these God-given rituals point to Christ without taking the place of Christ.

Q: What does the Big Picture add anything to help understand the

mystery of the humanity of Christ?

A: It certainly does. Satan's whole argument is basically that the design of beings in the image of God makes the peaceful monarchy of heaven impossible. By living a perfectly obedient and sinless life in truly human flesh Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated that the design is good. Though a special case, his humanity was genuine, and it will have perfectly human "offspring" on the other side of our resurrection. The satanic attacks on the doctrine of the hypostatic union reveal that acknowledgment of this is essential. The body of Jesus began as the natural egg of a woman which bore the marks of the turmoil of her ancestors yet it produced the second Adam able to undo the curse of the first, another proof that the original design was good. The record shows a perfectly balanced personality in spite of the spoiled social and religious environment.

Here are more questions that anyone having read this essay should be able to answer:

Q: Why is Satan still around?

Q: What is the purpose of the future reign of Christ on earth?

Q: Why was Yahweh not revealed to every nation as he was to Israel?

Q: Why are nations emphasized in the Bible?

Q: Why are governments always enslavers?

Q: Why do dictators claim to be gods?

Q: Why did Jesus ask the identity of the demon?

Q: Why are demons pushing UFO stories?

Q: Why is the universe so large if there is no life on other planets?

Q: Does God make use of the evolution principle?