



discover meaning

*Uncover the origins and issues of the earth's epic conflict
and find meaning in the bigger picture*

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TREES OF GREEN

There are a lot of good and beautiful things on planet earth, fortunately. We see this in people and in nature. Think for a moment of Fred Hollows and the good he did, and that the Fred Hollows' foundation continues to do. And he is just one of an army of good, selfless people. And in nature - what inspired the song *What a Wonderful World*, most famously sung by Louis Armstrong?

I see trees of green, red roses too

I see them bloom for me and you

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

No doubt, as the writers were penning those lines, and when Louis sang them, evil was doing its damage - maybe not even far from them, maybe even within the sound of the notes and lyrics. How often too, among *the trees of green*, has death and destruction either from nature or from humans unfolded? The reality is that the beautiful rose and the thorns are a part of life.

Vasily Grossman was a Soviet journalist who followed the Red Army all the way into Berlin. As the Soviets pushed back the Germans, they reached one of the most notorious of Nazi death camps - Treblinka. What Grossman found haunted him until his death. Among the accounts he heard of the crimes committed there, one stuck out in particular. Grossman described it like this:

The chief commandant of the camp selected several children from one of the transports, killed their parents, dressed the children in the best clothes, gave them lots of sweets, played with them, and then gave orders to kill

them a few days later when he became bored with the game. And that was just the beginning.

However unique, the Holocaust was just one especially gruesome manifestation of the evil that lurks across all human history. Whether accounts of torture, slavery, rape, plunder and murder - then or now - who doesn't cringe, gasp, and writhe before the evil that reeks in the world?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

The world seems manic - depressive - one moment full of goodness and charm, the next boiling over with evil and bad. It's as if there's a full blown contest, a struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, raging all around us.

Humans have for millennia sensed something of this battle. Many ancient religions taught, in one form or another, the existence of supernatural realities engaged in a fearful struggle in which we too are involved. Many centuries before Christ, the Zoroastrian religion taught that there were supernatural forces of good and evil locked in battle.

Poet T.S. Eliot wrote:

*The world turns and the world changes
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change;
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.*

A Dutch theologian from the 16th century named Erasmus wrote, *To begin with we must be constantly aware of the fact that life here below is best described as being a type of continual warfare.*

WHEN IT GETS PERSONAL

One doesn't need to be a theologian, or a poet, to sense the reality of this controversy. Who hasn't felt a sense of conflict, of a struggle between opposing forces going on inside one's very own mind, one's own conscience, one's own heart? *Should I cheat on my exam? Should I lie to my boss? What about this attraction to another person's spouse?* Who hasn't, at times, felt a powerful pulling in opposite directions regarding moral decisions?

We're constantly presented with choices, options, and forces seen and unseen pulling us in various, even opposing ways. And though sometimes it's clearly between right and wrong, at other times that distinction isn't always so easy. Or, even when we know what is right and what is wrong, why do we sometimes feel compelled, pushed by forces to do what is wrong?

Why do we do what is wrong even when we know it's wrong?

No question, many people sense the reality of this good versus evil struggle. And we don't just see it in the grand events unfolding around us. We see it, we feel it, and we experience it in our own existence, in our own struggles. We all have a story. Our own story from beginning to end is a struggle.

What are these forces? Are they merely part of our own imagination? Or, if not, if there are literal powers greater than ourselves, how did they get started? Where did they come from? What do they want with us? And how are we to relate to them?

THE UNIVERSE

For starters, one thing is sure: our universe is a very big place, much bigger than even scientists had ever imagined. For much of history, people had a very limited view of the size of the cosmos, some thinking the stars were only a few miles away. Many believed, even a century ago, that the Milky Way, our galaxy, was the extent of the universe. Today we know better, and our minds are staggered by the immensity of the cosmos.

And, even more mind-boggling, scientists now think that the universe we see with Hubble and other telescopes constitutes only about 10 per cent of what is out there anyway!

Given what we now know about the vastness of the universe and the number of stars and galaxies spread out across it, more and more people think that we're not alone, that the sheer odds would make it likely that other life in the cosmos exists.

In fact, there's a branch of science - astrobiology - devoted to the study of cosmic life. NASA has its own Astrobiology Institute, and its website reads, *Astrobiology is devoted to the study of the origins, evolution, distribution, and future of life in the universe. ... Does life exist on worlds other than Earth? How could terrestrial life potentially survive and adapt beyond our home planet?*

THE BIBLE AND THE COSMOS

Scientists and astronomers are pointing telescopes toward the sky in the hope of retrieving an intelligent signal from the heavens. The more they discover, the more they reveal the scope and wonder of it all. While

they search the sky, the Bible not only talks about the existence of extra-terrestrial life, but has given us some fascinating insights into what this life is like. Scripture makes clear what science suspects - earth isn't the only place in the universe with intelligent life.

Why should it be? Again, considering the size of the universe and the vast number of bodies it contains, it's not far-fetched to believe that other life exists. And if that's true, what's illogical or impossible about the idea that this life could, in some way, interact with humanity?

In fact, that's exactly what the Bible itself says.



Then God would use the church to show the powers and authorities in the spiritual world that he has many different kinds of wisdom.

Ephesians 3:10 Contemporary English Version



For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

(It's important to note that when the Bible talks about heaven or heavenly places, it can mean the universe, the cosmos as a whole, and not just heaven as popularly understood. For example, see Psalm 19.)

Right from the start then, these verses point to the reality of intelligent life in other parts of the universe. More so, they depict these powers as interacting with us here on earth.



For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

1 Corinthians 4:9

A spectacle to men and to angels? This verse clearly indicates that beings from another part of the universe are watching this epic struggle unfold here.



Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, From where do you come? So Satan answered the LORD and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.

Job 1:6-7



And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:7-9, 12

A GREATER REALITY

These few texts, taken together, show:

- the reality of intelligent life in other parts of the universe
- we are being watched by that life
- we can interact with that life daily
- some of this life is openly hostile to us

Scripture depicts a war in another part of the cosmos - a battle between angels. The leading angel, called the *Morning Star* (Isaiah 14:12 or literally Day Star) and his angels - who according to the texts were the losers - were cast down to the earth, where the battle continues, only now with us involved. Taking these texts, along with ones that show other angels friendly toward us, we can see that according to the Bible we on earth are in the midst of this battle. It's a battle between good and evil - a spiritual battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. That we might not see these beings does not prove that they aren't there any more than the fact that we can't see radiation means it's not there either.

Think about this: How many mobile phone calls are in the air around us right now, as real as the breath coming out of our mouths? And yet, because we can't see those calls, because we don't have in and of ourselves the receptors to pick them up, are we going to deny their reality?

Many people laugh off the idea of Satan, or of angels, or of the supernatural itself. For them, only the natural world, which follows natural laws and scientific principles, exists. But that is a very narrow view of reality. In contrast, while the Bible acknowledges the natural world and natural laws and principles, it just doesn't limit reality to them, that's all. It points us to a greater world and reality.

THE FALL OF THE MORNING STAR

How did this struggle of epic proportions get started? Where did these evil supernatural beings come from? How did evil arise in a universe created by a God who claims to be all-loving and all-powerful? These are good questions.

One of the most fascinating insights the Bible gives about life in other parts of the cosmos is found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Using the symbolism of an ancient king for this extra-terrestrial life - the Bible often uses symbols of earthly things to point to greater realities - the texts talk about a majestic and exalted being in another part of the cosmos. See Ezekiel 28:11-19.

After describing this majestic, beautiful and exalted being, called the Morning Star - or Lucifer, the Bible says something amazing about him:



You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Ezekiel 28:15

First, the verb for *created* in this text comes from a Hebrew word *bara*, that deals only with the creative activity of God. Which means this being was created directly by God. And having been created directly by God, Lucifer was *perfect*, even perfect in his *ways*.

How then could Lucifer, also called Satan - a being created perfect by God - have *iniquity* in him, even to the point where he starts a war in heaven? See Revelation 12:7-9, 12 above. A perfect being, in a perfect environment, created by a perfect God; yet iniquity - also called sin and evil - arose in him?

Without openly expressing it, the verse in Ezekiel above - one of many - presupposes the freedom inherent in God's intelligent creations.

What does this mean? The answer is found in one word - love. You may wonder what the connection is, but if you keep reading, it will become clear.

THE FREEDOM FACTOR

When asked about the most important commandment, Jesus answered that it was *to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* Matthew 22:37

What's interesting is that the most important of all the commandments is the one commandment that cannot be forced. Love, to be love, must be freely given. Even God can't force love any more than He can create a circle with four straight edges. Once it has four straight edges, it's no longer a circle. In the same way, once love is forced, it's no longer love. God could force all His intelligent creatures to fear Him, to worship Him, even to obey Him. But He cannot force a single one to love Him. Love must be freely given, or else it's not love.

What this means then, is that a certain amount of moral freedom exists in God's creation. And that's because love demands it. If God's creatures weren't free, they couldn't love Him or each other.

Iniquity arose in this perfect being in a perfect environment because perfection included moral freedom, the kind of freedom needed if God were to have intelligent creatures who could love Him. And freedom, to truly be freedom, entails risk.

To paraphrase Gregory Boyd's point: *The warfare worldview (also known as the great controversy) first believes that God's creatures, both angels and men, were made free to choose as they wish. They could exercise their own power of choice. That means they could choose to go against God's will as well as with it. That is the risk God took. It means God would have to make plans for if and when that happened. And the cosmic drama believes this is exactly what happened. Thus the cosmos and this earth have become a war zone.* Gregory Boyd, *God at War*, p.58 paraphrased.

FREEDOM ON EARTH

This same principle of moral freedom is found in the earliest chapters of earth's history. The Bible says:



In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

And when God was finished ...



Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31

The God who created Lucifer continues His creation, but now in another part of His universe - the earth. We have perfect beings in a perfect environment created by a perfect God. And included in this perfection is the freedom that must exist in order for love to exist as well.

Freedom of choice was theirs:



And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17

The mere fact that God had warned them not to eat of the tree shows that they had the moral freedom to choose to disobey Him. No point in warning robots!

And, as their story unfolded, not only did they have the freedom to disobey, they chose to disobey, following the words of Satan in direct rebellion against God. And that brought sin, suffering and death into our world. It brought the battle between good and evil to planet earth.



Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:12

A closer look at these bible passages we have covered, reveals that Lucifer's key issue with God was that God's love and God's laws were opposites: God was not what He claimed to be - love. For Satan, he wanted a love with no restrictions.

ENMITY

In fact, after Satan, in the guise of a serpent, caused the fall of humanity (see Genesis 3:1-14), the Lord said to him:



And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

Genesis 3:15

There's much in this text worth exploring, but what's crucial is that we can see a hint of *the* great controversy here between two opposing forces. There will be *enmity* - the spirit of enemies - and they will *bruise* each other. This points to the battles that we see raging, not only among the great nations and ideologies of the world, but in the inner recesses of our own hearts and minds.



Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Though using some symbolic language, this warning isn't symbolic. It's real, just as the struggles, the challenges, and the conflicts we all face in our lives are real.

GOOD WINS!

The good news, however, is that the Bible reveals the end of all these struggles. And it is going to end with this wonderful promise:



God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no

more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3-4

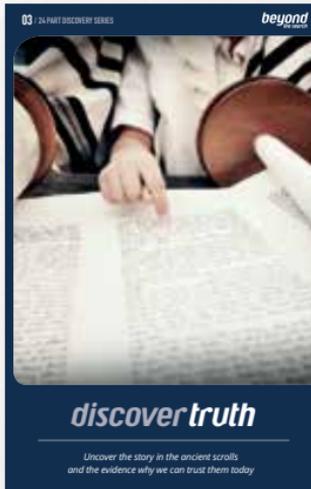
Evil will be eradicated, along with sickness, suffering and death. In this great controversy, good will ultimately win, and we along with the universe will see the goodness, mercy and justice of God in dealing with the misuse of the freedom God has given to all His intelligent beings.

The great controversy is a deep and crucial theme. It is the drama of the ages - the epic story. It is the biblical world view, and forms the entire background for understanding the world, history, the good and the bad we see all around us, the future, and our place in all of it.

Our journey through this series will illustrate that all of life is impacted by this cosmic drama.



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