

“God’s Eternal Purpose”

God’s intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . Even angels long to look into these things (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:12).¹

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*In the Beginning . . . was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>2</sup>*

In the beginning of all things, there was no universe. There was no multiverse. There was only God . . . eternally Three-in-One and One-in-Three.

Because God is infinitely joyful and infinitely creative, there came a time in the dim recesses of the past, long before what you know as “The Big Bang,” or the moment when your universe was created, when God created the hosts of heaven, vast armies of beings who are in relationship with God and who share in the management and governance of the Cosmos. In your language, you call these beings, “angels,” a term that simply means “messengers.”<sup>3</sup>

God invited the angels to form a “Divine Council,” a gathering in which God and the angelic beings enjoyed relationship. In this Council, God also allowed the angels to participate in some of the decisions related to other aspects of Creation.

If you don’t know to look for it, it’s easy to miss the references to this Divine Council in the Holy Scriptures God has given to you; but once you know to look, the Council is not hard to find. Here are a few examples:

*God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the “gods” (Psalm 82:1).*

*Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened (Daniel 7:10).<sup>4</sup>*

*The heavens praise your wonders, LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. . . . In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him (Psalm 89:5, 7).*

As I’ve told you, angels are created beings, certainly not equal to their Creator, and most certainly not perfect, though they are perfectly wonderful. There came a time when this imperfection took a nasty turn, though, and you have some hints about it in your Scripture. Here are some of those hints:

*You were the perfection of wisdom and beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire. You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you; so I banished you from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire (Ezekiel 28:11-19).*

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on December 24, 2018, CHRISTmas Eve. While the narrative presented here goes beyond what is clearly taught in Scripture, it is one defensible compilation of the information we have available.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 148:1-6

<sup>4</sup> Another important reference is in Job 1:6.

This mighty angelic guardian, sometimes called “the dragon,” reacted to his expulsion with rage. He recruited many other angels to join his rebellion . . . and there was war in heaven.<sup>5</sup> Michael, the archangel<sup>6</sup> who was now Chief of the Council, fought the dragon and his angels, and the rebellion was put down.

The dragon, whom you also know as “Satan,” or “the accuser,” was thrown out of heaven and imprisoned in a small part of God’s vast Creation. It was this ejection to which our Lord Christ referred when He said, “*I saw Satan falling from heaven as a flash of lightning.*”<sup>7</sup>

Satan’s prison is a small planet that orbits the star, Sol, near the edge of the Milky Way galaxy. This planet is called “Earth.” I expect that you’ve heard of it. Planet Earth is Heaven’s Alcatraz, cut off from the normal communication and commerce of the universe. Out of all God’s Creation, Earth is “the Silent Planet.”<sup>8</sup>

After the rebellion was quelled, peace reigned once more in the Divine Council and throughout the Cosmos. Uncounted eons passed, and then God said to the Council, “*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.*”<sup>9</sup> The Council did not respond well to this idea: “With all due respect, Sir, the last time you created beings with real freedom to choose whether or not to serve you, things didn’t turn out so well. Are you sure this is a good idea?”

Well, as you know, God did proceed to create mankind “*in his own image,*” and, though the entire Cosmos was available, God put you humans right here in Satan’s prison camp. This was the ultimate “in your face” from God to the dragon. It’s as if God said,

“I’m going to show you, you whose heart was filled with pride because of your beauty. I’m going to create free beings once more, and I’m going to put them in your back yard, where you have access to them all the time. Then I’m going to love them so much and so long that they will be freely drawn to me. I’m going to recreate the earlier fellowship that you tried to destroy, and I’m going to do it right under your nose.”

From that day to this, it has always been God’s purpose for you humans to be *a little lower than the angels, to participate in the divine nature and to be crowned with glory and honor*,<sup>10</sup> but the dragon, having unlimited access to those first humans, beguiled and deceived them, tricking them into joining his rebellion. By this means, the dragon’s yearning for dominance found new life, and the Battle for the Cosmos was joined once more. This time, though, God’s response took a surprising turn.

The first hint of God’s response came right after that first deception in Eden. God told the dragon that “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*”<sup>11</sup> That is, far in the future, the dragon would harm a particular descendant of the woman, but that descendant would destroy the dragon. You know this descendant as God’s Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus of Nazareth.

The truth of the matter is that there were many hints of what God was up to, but these hints were given piecemeal through many prophets over many centuries. It is really only in

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<sup>5</sup> Revelation 12:7

<sup>6</sup> Jude 1:9

<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:18

<sup>8</sup> See C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out\\_of\\_the\\_Silent\\_Planet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Out_of_the_Silent_Planet)

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:4; Psalm 8:5

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:15

hindsight that it becomes possible to trace the trajectory of God's Purpose. There was a reason for that, as I will tell you in a moment.

Unfortunately, after that first deception in Eden, things got worse. The problem now was not just that the first humans had rebelled against God, because as generation followed generation, every human in every generation joined in that rebellion, as has every one of you in this room tonight. God's justice must punish rebellion; but God's love took that justice in a most unexpected direction.

The only way that God's Justice and God's Love could be reconciled with God's Eternal Purpose was—and what I'm about to tell you is nearly unbelievable—for God to enter Heaven's Alcatraz as a human Himself. The eternal God chose to become fully human and to live as you live, to be tempted as you are tempted, and yet to resist every temptation, living a perfect human life without Sin.

The reason for this was that if a Perfect Human chose to take upon Himself the justly-deserved penalty for humanity's rebellion, then, and only then, would God's Love and Justice be able to work together for God's Eternal Purpose. Then, and only then, would the way become open for humans to return Home to God. Then, and only then, would humans be able to experience eternal life and join the Divine Council on a transformed and renewed planet in a transformed and renewed Cosmos.

As amazing and unexpected as this strategy was, it had actually been God's plan from the beginning. The Bible reveals—after the Fact—that this Lamb of God *was killed before the world was made*.<sup>12</sup> That is, God had determined this plan for human redemption “*before time began*,” but the plan was kept hidden from humans and angels alike. “*None of the rulers of this age understood it*,” the Bible says, “*for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*.”<sup>13</sup>

If you read your Bible carefully, you'll see that the spirits in league with the dragon's rebellion clearly understood that Jesus of Nazareth was the Creator God in human flesh; but they were clueless about what it was He had really come to do.<sup>14</sup> Had the dragon and his minions understood how Messiah's sacrificial death would bring about their own undoing, they would never, ever have brought about that death.

And it wasn't just the demonic powers that were blindsided. The leaders of the Jews, who knew their Scripture extremely well, had not seen it; and Jesus' own disciples only understood what had happened after the fact.<sup>15</sup> When you read Isaiah 53 today, you can't read it without seeing the outline of this very strategy; but that strategy only becomes visible in hindsight.

Only by becoming human as you are could God ensure that a human being from the promised line of King David would live a real human life without falling into sin. Only if that Perfect Human then voluntarily died in the place of those who deserved death and then conquered death itself, could God judge human Sin and Rebellion while also providing the Way for human salvation at the same time. Only by Jesus' vicarious death and victorious resurrection would you fallen humans become able to join the Divine Council at last, ruling in the renewed Creation as God had always intended.

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<sup>12</sup> Revelation 13:8

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 8:28-29; Luke 4:31-35

<sup>15</sup> Luke 24:44-48

Well, by now you may be wondering what in heaven's name all that I've told you has to do with CHRISTmas Eve. And you may be wondering how I know all these things. I'll tell you.

You actually know the Story well: *So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."<sup>16</sup>*

Because of what I've told you, you now know that this tiny baby's birth was actually a clandestine invasion that would eventually take back control of this planet from the rebellion. And I know all this because I was that angel. I am Gabriel, whom God sent to Zechariah to announce the birth of John, the forerunner of Messiah.<sup>17</sup> I am Gabriel, whom God sent to Mary to announce Messiah's conception.<sup>18</sup> I am Gabriel, whom God sent to the shepherds to announce Messiah's birth. And I am Gabriel, sent by God tonight to encourage you to have the same mindset as our Lord Jesus,

*Who, being very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>19</sup>*

But there's more. Do you remember the challenge that the members of the Divine Council posed to God when they heard about God's proposed creation of humans: "With all due respect, Sir, the last time you created beings with genuine freedom, things didn't turn out so well. Are you sure this is a good idea?"

That first CHRISTmas Eve was God's response to that challenge. The Bible tells us that while God had necessarily kept this mystery hidden for ages, *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to this eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our*

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 2:4-14

<sup>17</sup> Luke 1:19

<sup>18</sup> Luke 1:26

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 2:6-11

*Lord.*<sup>20</sup> Your life in Christ and in His Body, the Church—even here, tonight—demonstrates the wonder of “God’s Big Idea.”

But it’s important that you also realize that while Satan was defeated at the Cross, he continues to subvert God’s reconciliation of individual humans and of groups of humans by every means possible. Satan knows he’s “going down,” and he wants to take as many of you with him as he can. If you’ve been born again,<sup>21</sup> Satan can’t affect your salvation; but he can surely make your life miserable, and he can render you of little use to God’s Divine Invasion.

CHRISTmas Eve is a “feel good” time, and it’s a beautiful season; but the truth of the matter is that you’re not here to celebrate a baby so much as to prepare the way for the King.

*So . . . be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For [your] struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*<sup>22</sup>

My friends, the Babe in the Manger is really the King of kings and the Lord of lords.<sup>23</sup> He is the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Very God of Very God, and He is worthy, not just of your worship this night, but of your worship forever and ever. If you devote your life to Him, then one day you will join me in the Great Celebration I’ve briefly left in order to be with you here tonight. I’m headed back there, now, and I hope I’ll see you there one day:

*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:*

***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”***

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:*

***“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”***<sup>24</sup>

Amen, and Amen.

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<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 3:10-11

<sup>21</sup> John 3:3

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 6:10-13

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 19:16

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 5:11-14