

The background is a dark, atmospheric scene. A large, glowing blue figure, possibly a giant or a creature, is visible in the upper half, with glowing eyes and a bright orange and yellow light source on its chest. The scene is set in a dark, rocky landscape with a small figure in the foreground, possibly a person or a small creature, standing on a path. The overall mood is mysterious and ominous.

The Victor

By Gary Ray

THE VICTOR

**I Am A Watchman
Publications**

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THE VICTOR

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The I Am A Watchman ministry desires to equip and encourage believers, reach the lost, and see individuals prepared for the return of the King.

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***“Thanks be to God, who gives us the VICTORY
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

(1 Corinthians 15:57)

ABOUT THE VICTOR

THE VICTOR is a work of speculative fiction inspired by Frank E. Peretti's 1980's works, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. In THE VICTOR, the epic struggle of good versus evil in the spiritual realm is imagined, particularly during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

As a backdrop to the story of Jesus, THE VICTOR presents a fictionalized account of fantastic clashes between angels and demons. The story is action-packed, true to the spirit of the Word, and designed to embolden and encourage faith.

THE VICTOR references Satan's fall from heaven, humanity's fall from grace in Eden, and follows the story of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Luke. Quoted Scripture passages are in *italics* font.

THE VICTOR reminds the reader that though there are battles yet to fight, Christ has already won the victory. It is my hope that THE VICTOR will inspire, encourage, and embolden you on your spiritual journey.

Note: To aid in your spiritual walk, links to study resources on the ministry of Jesus and the Christian faith are listed in the appendix of this book.

God bless!

-Gary Ray

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Ray is a teacher, preacher, writer, and Watchman for the Lord. The term *Watchman* is used more than a dozen times in Scripture, most notably in (Ezekiel 33:1-8). A Watchman is committed to growing in spiritual knowledge and service. He has a particular concern for the spiritual welfare of others and watches for signs (fulfilled Bible prophecies) which announce what God is about to do in these last days.

Gary has served on staff of Christian churches for more than 30 years, and since 2019, has served as President of the *I Am A Watchman* ministry (IAmAWatchman.com). *I Am A Watchman* is an international Christian ministry that makes available free evangelical and discipleship resources on a variety of Online platforms.

Gary is a lifelong learner, knows and appreciates the grace of God, and enjoys both teaching and inspiring those whom God loves. His passion is to ensure all are aware of, and prepared for, the promised return of the Lord. His aim is to present spiritual truths in ways that are interesting and relevant – particularly for those with limited or no church background.

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PROLOGUE

In the beginning, humans lived in paradise and walked blameless before God. Lucifer, a demon of unspeakable power, took note of the affection God had for His creation and determined that to strike against humanity was to strike against God. Malicious and cunning, Satan looked for, and then found an opportunity. He attacked in Eden—the humans fell. Sin entered the world and disrupted the pure bond between God and His prized creation. The battle for humanity had begun.

God confronted Satan in the Garden and announced His plan to redeem humanity and win the war. Satan laughed; confident he had the advantage. Nothing humans could do would wrest them free from his clutches, or overcome the power of his sting of death.

Surely God's plan would fail, Satan reasoned. He knew humans could easily be led down dark paths. Malevolent ideas swirled in his mind regarding how to infiltrate, manipulate, and corrupt the laws and systems God might give to help the pitiful creatures. In pride he resolved that he could thwart God's plans—he *would* thwart God's plan. He would watch for and destroy the Father's attempts to redeem humanity.

Satan lost the battle in heaven; he was determined not to lose again. At all costs, he would not let God be, **THE VICTOR.**

Chapter 1

The Fall: Based on Genesis 3

A strange heaviness shrouded the Garden. Demons danced in the cool of the evening. A myriad of darting orange eyes glowed in the twilight, giving tell-tale evidence of dark, distorted bodies lurking in the shadows. Captains tried to maintain order in the ranks but with little success. It was a time of celebration, and rising waves of shrieks and cries overwhelmed orders.

“This is a day of victory!” shouted a minor demon with peeling gray skin. His claw-like hand grasped an odd brass cup filled with steaming liquid. Raising the cup skyward, he offered a toast, “To our victory!”

“To our victory!” echoed the horde.



On the other side of the beautiful Garden, a demon clutched a piece of fruit, pretended to eat it, then threw himself to the ground as though dead. Wicked laughter filled the air.

“Death to humans!” several from the ranks shouted together.

“Death to Adam and Eve!” cried another.

“For today, they have fallen,” shouted their Captain.

It was echoed repeatedly by thousands of *his* troops as they celebrated in the now darkened Garden of Eden.



"It is time," came a voice that rumbled through the heavens.

Michael the Archangel nodded and made a grand sweep of his mighty sword, ending the motion by pointing in the direction his troops would begin the advance.

The heavenly court shook from the force of the Father's simple reply, "It is good,"

Immediately, thousands of angels of every station and order appeared before the Father. They assembled in twelve columns, at the head of each stood a mighty General, and in front of them stood the Archangel Michael. All knew there had been a disturbance in Eden— all wondered what the Creator would do to set things right. Was that even possible?

The angels chosen to join the Father in the journey to Eden expected a fight. They knew demons would outnumber them at least ten to one, a sobering thought. But they would have the element of surprise. The demons would not expect the army of God in Eden, a place they now controlled. Nor would they expect a confrontation on the day of their remarkable victory. Each angel drew his sword, brilliant sabers of pure light. They stood confident, courageous, and ready to meet the enemy who had once shared their kingdom but was banished long ago.



A flash of light announced the arrival of the Archangel, Gabriel. He stood beside Michael. The two angels were radiant. Their iridescent robes sparkled as waterfalls of diamonds, flowing gracefully across one shoulder and majestically to the ground. The trains of their robes constantly moved, set in motion as a wind-blown sail from the sheer power that radiated from the magnificent heavenly beings.

There was excitement in Gabriel’s deep voice: “I bring word that all is ready.”

“Good,” Michael said the word slowly, considering the profound significance of Gabriel’s message. He unfurled his wings and noted with pleasure the gleam of his sword. “Today, demons,” he said with anticipation, “we *will* meet again.”

Gabriel smiled, raised a golden trumpet to his lips, and sounded the call; the angels began their advance.



Incense and smoke from the demon celebration hovered over the trees in the western realm of Eden. The cold cloud darkened the once beautiful land, which added to the ambiance the mutated beings desired. Myopic and drunk with pride, the demons were too preoccupied with celebrating to notice the trumpet of heaven—the same sound that marked the beginning of their route and exile long ago. They were too busy to notice their angelic visitors, until it was too late.



Suddenly hundreds of angels with glowing swords appeared and pushed back multitudes of demons. Michael's Generals searched for the demon Commander, but he was no longer there.

Celebrations across the massive region stopped abruptly. Cries filled the air as surprised demons, unprepared for a fight, were routed and had to fall back to the outskirts of the Garden.

“There,” said Jonas, Michael’s first General, pointing his sword to the west. After a blinding flash of light, a dozen swords surrounded a cowering demon. Heavenly light pulsed from their impressive blades, which made them appear to be afire.

The bulky demon Gog saw the advancement and tried to hide in an earthy pit, but his massive size betrayed him. He had once been an angel of authority, stunning, but now his form was shockingly mutated. Still, he had a formidable presence. He was a Commander, a demon of great authority who struck fear in the hearts of his subordinates.

Gog cursed Jonas; hatred spewed from his gnarled, brown lips. The General responded quickly by placing the tip of his gleaming white sword directly in front of Gog’s fang-toothed mouth.

“We meet again, Gog,” said General Jonas. “Are you given charge of this place?”

“It is mine,” snapped the demon as he spat on the ground.

“And what of *him*?” probed Jonas, gripping tight the hilt of his enormous sword as he spoke.

The demon snarled. With guttural tones he replied sarcastically, “Whom do you seek, angel?”

Jonas moved with lightning speed. A streak of white light marked the path of his blade, less than a quarter inch above the sweating demon’s head. The General grabbed Gog by the breastplate and lifted him off the ground. He questioned him again. “Where is he? The Praetor, the right hand of the Dragon? Where is he?”

Gog cursed. “He is here, in the Garden.”

“You lie! We have searched. We know your master is not here.”

Gog cursed again, this time clenching his fists and shaking with rage. He knew he must speak the truth, the thought of which made him feel sick deep within. After a long pause, the demon spat, “My master is in the abyss; his master is with the humans. Soon, I will have complete charge of this place for we have won. You are too late; the humans are ours.”

Jonas moved close to the demon, their faces almost touching. “We will send you with a message for your master. Tell him that our Master comes, and He has a plan.”



In the eastern realm of Eden, Adam and Eve heard an unmistakable noise. It was the sound of the Lord walking in the Garden in the cool of the evening. It was not the sound of footsteps; it was a unique sound, similar to the rushing of mighty waters. Equally unique was the way God moved. To say He walked would be to describe all vegetation in the Garden as simply being green—there was so much more. Yes, there was a semblance of a walk, but His movements were much more graceful, fluid, gentle, powerful, awesome. A cloud of energy surrounded Him—radiated out from Him. It was the source of the sound—thunderous like the crashing of waves but melodic and soothing at the same time.

In the mist that surrounded Him, flashed countless hologram-like images, lasting only a fraction of a second, bursting forth with brilliant color and clarity, but then fading with the ever-churning rise and fall of the iridescent cloud. The humans came to understand that these images were prophetic flashes of the future; every outcome—every human choice throughout time—all constantly before the watchful eye of the Father. Though knowing this, amazingly, the humans attempted to hide when they heard the distinctive sound of God approaching.



Jonas and his company also heard the Lord. Gog panicked. “Let me go!” he cried. “I must return to my master at once.”

Jonas touched Gog’s scaly shoulder with the tip of his sword. The demon cringed but remained silent.

“You will hear this, demon,” said Jonas with authority. “And you will report it, word for word, to your master.” Gog’s look of defiance spoke volumes. To ensure compliance Jonas skillfully moved his sword toward the demon’s chest, leaned in, and whispered something in an angelic language, “*Upoj 9j mj0j hlt7&g Yij9ki PypEgg LpUjohg 6diz5dfgA.*”

Gog winced, not from any wound, but from Jonas’ message. The angelic language was forbidden in the underworld but not forgotten. Jonas’ stern look conveyed the truth that the word of God would forever echo in his mind and be as an unrelenting pounding drum if he delayed in reporting the message to his superiors. Both Gog and Jonas knew that even after he spoke as ordered, the words would haunt him, particularly if he dared speak of victory over the humans.



The Lord Almighty was speaking. Having already addressed the humans, God now addressed the Serpent: “*...and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He shall crush evil’s head, and you will wound His heel.*”

The heavenly Father drew out and emphasized the words, *head*

and *heel*. The Serpent let lose a horrible scream. “Nooooooo!”

God’s pronouncement was not merely a prophecy regarding what will be; it was a tacit reminder of what was. Long ago, the Dragon had been a prince in the heavenly Kingdom, graced with beauty, power, and authority. But being endowed with unimaginable blessing and privilege was not enough. The Dragon, who in those days was called Morning Star, wanted more. Pride took root; resentment festered; bitterness followed.

One day, Lucifer met with God. The grand angel demanded further elevation in power. “Certainly, my beauty and wisdom are deserving of respect and adoration,” he said with boldness. “Surely,” he continued, “You would benefit from my counsel. My friends Ro-Tearp, Song-thal, and many others agree that I should be head of all in the Kingdom.”

The Father’s reply was spoken in love, but Lucifer did not hear it that way. The Father noted it was for the created to worship, not to be worshiped. The mysteries of the universe flow from the love and plans of a sovereign Lord; no other could lead and care for the things of creation except the One who created them. The Father affirmed his love, and the angel’s value, and noted that his position of honor was secure, as long as he accepted and yielded to His word on this matter.

But that is not what happened. Lucifer and Ro-Tearp told all who would listen that God was capricious, unfair, and frightened. Again and again, Lucifer pronounced that he was the head and deserved formal recognition as such. “I am the chief Cherubim,” he told his brothers. “No one is my equal! The Father feels threatened by my counsel because he knows I can lead us to a new and better way. He wants us to be His slaves—His puppets. Follow me, and I will set you free.” His words were smooth—his actions cunning and shrewd. With the deftness of a master farmer, he sowed doubt, half-truths, and dissension.

The mantra, “I am the head—I deserve to sit on the throne,” burned, then blazed in him like an unquenchable fire. Discontent metastasized

into a plan to lead a rebellion. Cruelly sown innuendo and rumor drew many to his side. In time, Lucifer's lies swept up the entire heavenly realm in turmoil.

One day the Father called His creation to gather before Him. Most of the glorious beings stood with their order: the four living beings, mysterious and marvelous, held their position near the throne. The Seraphim gathered to the west. Majestic and powerful, their iridescent golden wings shimmered in the rays of light that emanated from the throne. To the east stood the twelve Generals, girded with ruby breastplates and emerald headbands. To the south were the Hues, brilliant angels exuding extraordinarily radiant colors. Beyond these stood an endless sea of sparkling lights, which were the heavenly hosts.

The Father sat on the throne and waited patiently for all to move into position. All fell silent as He looked to the east, west, north, and south. He stood. Like the effect of a stone cast into a pond, the Father's movement sent ripples of energy through the assembly—only the strongest of the angels were not rocked by it. Still silent, the Father then held out a hand, palm down, and lowered it, inviting the spectacular gathering to sit as He stood to address them. It was an incredible honor.

The Father's eyes communicated compassion; His voice was heavy. He warned that sin was crouching at the door. He pleaded and urged all to trust and follow Him. The Father spoke of how angels must make a choice—to choose whom they would serve. In a last attempt to reach those poised to reject Him, the Lord cautioned that a severe and permanent judgment awaited those who opposed Him. Strangely, after the passionate entreaty, the Father sat down, bowed His head, and closed His eyes. It was not the posture of one who feared a coup; it was as if the Lord could not bear to watch what He knew was about to happen.

With the Father's head bowed, Lucifer sensed an opportunity. He looked to Ro-Tearp, put his hand on the hilt of his sword, and moved

to attack. He leaped into the air and, in one fluid motion, drew his sword and sliced one of his brethren in two. The angel faded into a sparkling wisp of smoke.

All created beings in the heavenly realm knew their present forms were not eternal—their spirits were, but their forms were not. The Father told them there would be a great resurrection and time of judgment at some point in the future. “During this time,” the Father said, “all would be made new.” No one, save the divine Three, fully understood those words, but all sensed they were filled with hope.

For now, those who lost their mighty forms due to divine decree, injury, or battle, dissolved into wisps of beautiful, sparkling flickers of energy—the spirit or essence of their being. These wisps were drawn by the power of God to rest in a beautiful cabinet under the throne, known as the Ho-tereo, meaning, *the kept*.

For the good, it was a place of comfort. They could hear the songs of heaven, smell the sweet aroma of the Spirit, sense the close presence of the Father, and know the day would come when they would be resurrected, renewed, and rejoin their brethren.

Later, the demons would find it was a place of torment, for they too would hear the songs of heaven and feel the presence of God. For them, there was only swirling rage and the foreboding thoughts of a final judgment and being cast into a place too terrible to contemplate.

Tears flowed from the throne—for Lucifer, they were like fuel to the flame. He mistook them for weakness rather than love and shouted for his followers to hurl themselves toward the throne in a desperate effort to topple the One they deemed unwise, unreasonable—a tyrant. The archangels, Michael and Gabriel, were stunned that so many stood with Morning Star, whose skin color was already changing from dazzling white to a dull gray.

The violent spectacle surprised most, but not Adin, one of the Hues. She wore a shimmering golden-yellow garment and moved with such speed the attackers saw only a blur of light, before it was too late.

Intercepting the larger angels leading the rebellion, she crashed into two and sent them reeling. Simultaneously rolling to her feet while drawing three silver arrows, Adin quickly drew her bow and felled three attempting to attack Gabriel from behind—they dissolved into wisps of smoke. Gabriel turned quickly to see what had happened. He cast Adin a quick nod of appreciation, then returned to his mission of fighting his way through to the far side of the throne.

Lucifer, Ro-tearp, and a thousand of their best led the assault. They advanced slowly, slashing their way through scores of angels. Their newly fashioned blades were curved, unlike their brethren's long, straight swords. And unlike the glowing white blades most angels brandished, Ro-tearp's and Lucifer's blades were blood red. The mere sight of their weapons distracted dozens of angels long enough for the merciless leaders of the rebellion to do the unthinkable. Ro-Tearp's and Lucifer's moves were quick and vicious. The more they killed, the more blood-thirsty they became. Scores of white wisps drifted in the air and in solemn ceremony, slowly making their way toward the beautiful cabinet beneath the throne.

Thousands upon thousands joined in the coup—Michael called for the Generals to surround the throne. Lucifer screamed as an angel clipped his arm with a sword—Ro-tearp swung around and ran Lucifer's attacker through. Praisor, the beautiful angel of melody, was no more.

Hadar, one of the generals who, following Michael's order, had just moved into position on the corner of the raised crystal stage surrounding the throne, saw the horrific scene and leapt forty feet from his station down into the fray below. Lucifer flashed an evil grin—exposing a new set of fangs. Ro-tearp quickly maneuvered himself so he and Morning Star could attack Hadar from opposite sides. Under the command of Ro-tearp's friend, Jag, Six rebellious angels quickly joined their leaders in surrounding Hadar, swords drawn. Though outnumbering Hadar eight to one, the attackers were hesitant to advance—all were well aware of Hadar's legendary skill with a sword.

Gog, a mighty angel whom Lucifer had put in charge of a hundred

of their followers, was forty feet away but caught the unfolding situation out of the corner of his eye. With brute force, Gog smashed into an angel from behind, knocking him off balance and sending him rolling into the feet of Lucifer. Morning Star grinned then kicked the angel with such force that he crashed into General Hadar, who instinctively reached out to catch his brother. Ro-tearp immediately slashed through the air—a red streak of light noted the path of his blade. General Hadar turned toward the throne above and whispered, “I’m sorry,” as he dissolved into a wisp.

The Father never raised his head. Tears of sorrow flowed as the battle raged. For a moment, it seemed the way was clear to storm the throne. Morning Star nodded to Ro-tearp, who ordered Gog and Jag to quickly gather all held in reserve and follow them to glory, but before anyone could take a step, a trumpet sound pierced the air.

The Archangel Gabriel rallied a legion and was now advancing fast from the far side of the throne. In moments he met Lucifer’s forces. Brilliant swords with blades, shimmering as diamonds, checked the advance, though at great cost. Finally, the Archangel Michael and four of his Generals surrounded Ro-Tearp and Lucifer. The rebellious angels would not stand down—they wildly slashed through the air while spewing vile curses, daring anyone to draw near. Determined to be defiant to the end, Lucifer was about to attempt powering his way through the line of angels who dared restrain him when the Father, with head still bowed and eyes still closed, said, “Hold.”

His voice rumbled like silent thunder across the vast expanse. An invisible power forced Lucifer and his followers to release their swords and fall to the ground. The struggle stopped.

The Archangel Michael and two of his Generals unceremoniously dragged Lucifer and Ro-Tearp before the throne of God. Lucifer’s frame, only moments ago proud and defiant, now lay trembling on the floor. His followers quaked in fear; all knew they had ignored God’s warning, made their choices, and now must bear the consequences.

The Father first directed his comments to Lucifer: “You are to leave this Kingdom for there is no place for unrighteousness here. Because darkness is in you, you will be bound to a realm marked by darkness.”

Looking to Ro-Tearp the Father said, “You have responded to My love with hate; you seeded darkness where there was purity. You have twisted My words and My plan. You will now be banished a realm which is the opposite of what I intended for you.”

Defiantly, Ro-Tearp spat on the ground and said, “Good! I choose to start right now, with the name You gave me. I hate it—I hate You! I choose to oppose you—I choose the opposite of what You offer—of what You gave. I choose my new name. I choose, Praet-or. Henceforth, call me, the Praetor.”

He looked to his master, Lucifer, who nodded in appreciation. The Father shook his head in sorrow. “So be it.” Looking out to all who shared in the rebellion, God declared, “Your forms will change to reflect the nature of the one you follow.”

The cloud of glory surrounding the throne flashed the image of Lucifer, the Praetor, Gog, Jag, and the faces of those who shared in the rebellion. The amazing sight reminded all that the Father was omniscient.

Addressing those who participated in the attempted coupe, the Father began, “My children.” His words were melodic but sad, like a song in a minor key. He continued, “I created you with the freedom to choose, and you chose to reject Me. You elevated the created over the Creator. Lucifer speaks lies—is the father of lies—his path leads to death and destruction.

Suddenly the Father’s weeping stopped. He looked straight into Lucifer’s eyes—the prideful Morning Star saw righteous indignation; the force of the Father’s words shook the Kingdom. “Morning Star, you have sought to be the head, but you are not and never shall be. Henceforth you are brought low, humbled. Your work shall not be associated with the head, but with a heel—Your abode will be under all.”

Anger burned in the heart of the disgraced angel, his once piercing blue eyes now fiery red. His beauty was fading, and in subtle defiance to God's words, Lucifer gathered himself to his knees, then staggered to his feet as God said, "I decree that even the words to describe your realm shall serve as reminders to you. The grave, Sheol, the pit, the underworld—these terms shall remind you that you are not the head but the heel. Your plans will not prevail. Now go!"

For a moment, Lucifer just stood there, stiff in defiance. Michael took a step forward, but before the Archangel could take a second, the Father bowed His head again and whispered, "Go." At the Father's word, Lucifer's followers, led by the Praetor, Gog and Jag, turned to leave.

Eleven Generals escorted Lucifer and a hundred thousand of his followers out of the Kingdom. Gabriel ordered angels to line the streets of Zion. They stood at attention, dazzling swords in hand, watching those who shared in the rebellion pass by. One by one, the followers of Lucifer disappeared from the heavenly realm.



Head...heel. Head...heel. The words were burned into Lucifer's mind. Through the ages, God's pronouncement played like a broken record, but with perfect clarity and full potency. Day after day, Satan sought to prove God wrong, and today, so he thought, he had done it. The humans fell. The eternal destiny of God's prized creation was now in jeopardy. It was glorious.

But God's deliberate reference today to the word *heel* troubled him. He replayed God's pronouncement in his head:

"...and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He shall crush evil's head, and you will wound His heel."

The way God emphasized and lingered over the word *heel* was particularly disconcerting. Satan pondered this while the Father spoke

privately to the humans. Lucifer knew he had but a few moments before He returned and so sought the perfect parting statement to put the Almighty in His place.

But try as he might, Lucifer could not understand why God spoke of *his* humiliation and failure. Certainly, what happened in Eden today was the opposite of failure. For today, he said to himself, I bested the Great One.

He repeated the phrase, *I bested the Great One* a few times, but it brought little satisfaction. Something gnawed in his mind. He tried to comfort himself by thinking that perhaps God's statement was in error—ill-timed for clearly, today, *he* had won. Still, though he would not admit it, deep down he knew God's words were never in error,

Then, like a hurricane wind, the force of God's proclamation hit him. Lucifer realized that God was not just speaking of his humiliation in the past, God was announcing His plan for victory in the future. There would be a struggle between good and evil—a struggle enveloping spiritual and physical realms. And in this struggle, so He says, I will not prevail but will once again be humiliated and be the heel. Satan spat on the ground and cursed, "To You, tyrant, I say, it will never be!"

Satan was livid by the time the Father returned. Before God spoke, Satan charged, "You are a liar! I am the head, and You, Mighty One, cannot stop it. It was Your plan to give creation free will—what a mistake. My plan to lead humans away from your puppet strings was masterful; it was all too easy. The humans have fallen. My sting of death will grow more potent with each generation. Your empty prophetic proclamations mean nothing to me."

Satisfied, Satan glared at the Father and said sarcastically, "I will now leave *Your* Garden, for I no longer have need to be here. My plan prevailed. I was victorious."

And then God spoke: "**But you will *not* be the victor!**" An ear-splitting clap of thunder served as an ominous exclamation point. A flash of light and God was gone; the conversation was over.



Gog's eyes darted about, his body language now showing panic as the sound of the Lord speaking to the Serpent echoed across the valley. He looked for a way to escape but thought better of it when he moved and the tip of Jonas' sword burned through his breastplate. The angel said wryly, "It's impolite to leave before the Father finishes speaking."

The ground shook at the voice of God. *"...and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and..."*

"NO!" shrieked the demon, writhing now in the dirt. "Let me go. His voice! I cannot stand it. My ears are full of fire. Let me go!"

Jonas leaned in toward the demon and spoke in a slow, deliberate manner. "The Serpent may deny what you just heard the Father proclaim; I challenge you to share what you know to be true. Begone!" commanded Jonas.

Gog tried without success to salvage some semblance of dignity as he screamed orders in an attempt to reorganize his troops. He muttered threats against Jonas as he fled. One last look over his shoulder let him see Michael the Archangel place a guard with a flaming sword at the edge of the Garden. "Looks like the humans are banished as well," he muttered to himself. "The idea caused one corner of his brown lips to raise ever so slightly, but a jolt of searing pain, the result of a brush with Jonas' sword, replaced the smile with his usual scowl. He alternated rubbing the wound on his shoulder and his throbbing ears, which were still ringing and burning from hearing the voice of God. In disgrace, he led the retreat to the fall-back position. "There will be no celebration tonight," he grouched.



Gog slowly made his way to his master's fortress. He felt great trepidation having to report to the Praetor, the demon prince second in power only to the great Dragon himself. Somehow though, he knew this marked a beginning and not an end. His master would never give up. The humans would remain theirs. The Praetor and Dragon would know how to counter any plan the God of heaven introduced. He looked forward to a fight. "Yes, this is the beginning of a grand war," Gog said to himself, "and we will win. Just as we won the humans in the Garden, so we will win the war. We will win. We will win, we will win!" he shouted as he approached the dark stronghold.

Gog entered the dark chambers of the Praetor and bowed low. "My lord, I bring you word from Eden."

Jesus

FOR UNTO US A CHILD
IS BORN A SON IS
GIVEN (ISA. 9:6)

Chapter 2

The Birth: Based on Luke 2

It had been many years since anyone dared proceed down the eerie corridor leading to the Praetor's chambers, but Seeker, a demon Captain, was driven by an unquenchable lust for power. With saber in hand, he moved slowly down the long passageway, his eyes constantly drawn toward distant cries and groans, but he saw nothing beyond glimpses of shadows through the dank fog.

Seeker was powerfully built and well proportioned—more human-like than beast, which for him was a curse, for in the demon realm, human attributes were viewed as weakness. After the fall, an event the Dragon ordered demons to refer to as *the escape*, most demons mutated into barely recognizable echoes of their former selves. Arms bent, shriveled or significantly enlarged. Legs often became frog-like, making the underworld creatures walk strangely bow-legged or like the dinosaur raptors of old. Torsos and the back portion of skulls elongated, making features oddly out of proportion. Some grew scales, others spikes and claws. Fangs were common. More than half of the fallen now had cloven feet, and most eyes looked reptilian, with vertical pupils and yellow or green irises.

As for Seeker, somehow he retained much of his former angelic form, though dull-gray scales now covered most of his body and his wings were bat-like. It took thousands of years of ruthless violence for him to overcome his perceived disability. He rose to the rank of Captain a few centuries ago and now enjoyed the respect of his peers. His long dark hair was encrusted with mud, and that which was not stuck to his brass armor hung wildly past his shoulders.

The air was thick, damp, and smelled of rot and decay. The odor pleased Seeker, still, he was uneasy. As he walked, he had the sense the walls and ceiling were closing in on him. He was not sure if

that was reality or simply his fear. Thin lines of slow-moving bubbling lava spider-webbed their way down the sides of the rock walls, following barely visible paths to the deepest layers of the underworld kingdom. The lava was the only form of light; it cast a deep red glow in the cavernous passageway. A gray mist hovered over the floor. It enveloped Seeker's feet and provided cover for a myriad of hideous slithering creatures. The setting was foreboding, but Seeker, resolute in his mission to speak to the Praetor, pressed on.

As he rounded a corner, he saw a row of imposing cabinet officers standing at attention along the outer chamber walls, guarding their master. No one could remember when one raised a saber against the Praetor; but the guards were a prudent precaution as assassinations were commonplace and the usual path to power and position in the underworld.

The guards were giant bulky creatures. Each of their six arms rippled with strength to crush anyone in their path. Their muscular pillar-like legs disappeared into the mist. They seemed immovable, invincible. In unison, they flexed and tightened their grips on huge battleaxes fashioned in the depths of the Dragon's lair. They glared at Seeker with small eyes that burned deep red, wondering how it was that he had an audience with their master, the Praetor, the ruler of all demon forces in the upper realm. Seeker quickened his pace as he neared the end of the corridor. Surprisingly, the chamber doors opened before guards had a chance to open them.

Seeker entered the cold chamber and bowed low. His lungs filled with putrid smoke that was rising from somewhere deep beneath the floor, but he dared not move until the Praetor acknowledged him. Though he could not see the Praetor while bowing in homage, Seeker felt the heavy gaze of the sinister demon master carefully appraising him. Just when the vile fumes were about to overcome him, a high-pitched voice hissed, "Rise and step forward."

"My lord, my name is..."

"Silence!" screamed the Praetor. Despite his massive size, the Praetor lunged forward with unbelievable speed and pressed the tip of

a glowing red saber to Seeker's throat. "I did not grant you permission to speak," he growled. Greenish spittle now covered one side of Seeker's face, but he was too gripped with fear to flinch.

Seeker fell prostrate on the ground. "Pardon my lord."

The Praetor slowly sheathed his weapon. With a clawed hand, he motioned for Seeker to stand. "I know who you are, Seeker. And I know that you have done well. Tell me, from where have you come?"

"From roaming the Earth to and fro, my lord."

"Report then!"

"The Caesar, he is ours, my lord. His generals are ours."

"The Roman Senate?" asked the Praetor.

Seeker smiled wickedly and hissed, "Ours, my lord."

"And the taxes on the Jews?"

"Heavy and burdensome, my lord. Even now the Caesar has ordered a census to levy a new tax."

"Yes, Seeker. You have done well," said the Praetor.

Seeker bowed his head, acknowledging the rare complement. The Praetor walked around his massive desk and took a seat in an elevated chair—it was draped in scarlet fabric and accented with human bone. Seeker's stare was interrupted by the Praetor's unexpected question, "And now, what of your request of me?"

This was the opening Seeker hoped would come. He bowed again and said, "If my work has pleased my lord, I ask for the right to challenge." Again, Seeker felt the Praetor's piercing gaze. There was a long silence. Sweat dripped from Seeker's pronounced brow; it seemed the Praetor was looking into his dark soul.

"Challenge, Seeker? You challenge? Not since the Eden..." the Praetor paused, searching for a non-incriminating word, "*incident*," his eyes narrowed in anger at the memory, "has the right to challenge been offered. How is it that you challenge Gog, my servant over the Roman Empire?"

Seeker took a deep breath and tersely stated, "It is my right to challenge, my lord!"

"On what claim? Gog *did* fail me at Eden but redeemed himself

at a Challenge Festival long ago. He has served me well these last thousand years by cultivating mythology and paganism in Greece and Rome. I don't believe he has done anything to merit another challenge."

Pride moved Seeker to speak boldly. "My lord, Gog has done nothing! I have won over our followers. The Caesar, Herod, the Senate, the bloodshed—all this has been my doing. By right, the kingdom of Rome should be mine!"

The Praetor cast a wicked smile. "Careful, little one. Remember, your strength comes from me. Your victories are mine, and the Dragon's. We have our plan in place, and you are only a small part of it. Nevertheless," he scratched his chin with a pointed finger, "I see you are driven by hate, greed, and pride."

The Praetor's eyes seemed to glow a bright red now. Seeker hoped this indicated he was pleased but was not sure. Suddenly, in motions both fluid and violent, the Praetor rose from his chair, crossed the colossal, mist-filled room, and stood directly in front of him. The Praetor, who was a full 10 feet taller, stooped to bring his face within inches of Seeker. The stench from what seemed to be rotting flesh was overpowering. Seeker wanted to recoil but knew better. Through a toothy smile the Praetor said, "hate, greed, and pride, I like that."

Seeker released a sigh of relief.

The Praetor took a step back and continued, "but a challenge Festival is a risk. To withdraw all troops in the Roman Empire could be dangerous. It might give that Michael a foothold." He spat the angel's name as if he had tasted something most foul.

Seeker looked for an opportunity to cut off the Praetor's train of thought and begin an appeal. He found one.

"My lord, the right to challenge has long been our way. The weak must prove themselves or die."

Searing hate emboldened Seeker as he stood before his master. Yes, he mused, *this was worth the risk*. He continued to press: "My lord, Michael is nothing compared to you. The so-called prophets have spoken of a Christ, but Jehovah is afraid to send him."

Even the lowliest demon knew it was forbidden to mention

Jehovah's name, but the crazed tantrum continued. "We own the Roman Empire. The cities are ours. The religion is ours. The leaders and schools are ours. Judah is ours. The blood of the prophets flow through her streets. The angel Michael fears you. We have not seen him for more than 500 years—since our enemy sent him to aid Daniel. I demand the right to challenge!"

The Praetor was expressionless as he considered his options. Seeker knew his master's next move would be exultation or execution.

Finally, the Praetor's mouth opened slightly, revealing not one but two rows of jagged teeth. Thinking out loud as if no one were in the room, the Praetor said, "Perhaps it is true that Gog has become too comfortable these days, resting too much in his creation of Roman mythology."

The Praetor stood tall, displaying his powerful form. He released a billow of smoke from his nostrils. "So be it! Guard!"

The chief guard entered the room and bowed low. Seeker noticed blood dripping from his arm and the blade of a dagger protruding from his right bicep. The guard held his position and waited for permission to stand—it did not come. The Praetor moved briskly over to the guard. Appraising his humble deference, he sneered, "I see you have learned your lesson. I expect you to *remember* to bow and wait to be acknowledged when you enter these chambers. You *will* remember proper protocol from now on. Is that understood?"

Evidently, there was an incident earlier that day. The guard said nothing but subtly nodded his horned, ox-like head. The Praetor snorted and roughly pulled the knife from the guard's arm saying, "I'll just take this back now." Without wiping the blade, he put it back into a sheath hidden in his breastplate.

Content that the object lesson had sufficiently emphasized his dominance, the Praetor motioned for the guard to rise. With great force, he barked out an order, "Send word to Gog and the army in Rome. Have *all* the troops assemble in the arena at once."

The guard was astonished, and before he checked himself, asked, "*All* the troops of the Empire, my lord?"

The Praetor cast a threatening look toward the guard and took a step toward him. Seeker inched back. The only sound was the sizzling of lava dripping onto the stone floor.

The Praetor whispered in a threatening tone, “Do you question me?”

Fear enveloped the guard. “No master! No, my lord! Of course, it shall be done! *All* troops will assemble in the arena immediately!”

The Praetor took a step back and tension in the room eased. After a moment, the Praetor growled, “Guard, summon Gog. I want to have a word with him.”

The guard bowed, acknowledged the order and left. The Praetor walked back to his ostentatious chair, seemingly unaware that Seeker was still in the room. He muttered to himself, “Yes, a Challenge Blood Festival will be refreshing.” A haunting laugh echoed in the clammy, stone chamber.

Seeker thought it best to exit as soon as possible. He glanced nervously at the doors. He summoned his courage and asked, “My lord, may I have your leave?”

Without looking at his subordinate, the Praetor made a dismissive wave with a clawed hand. The tall chamber doors mysteriously opened and Seeker moved quickly through them. The doors slammed behind him, silencing the hideous sounds of the inner chamber, and none too soon as far as Seeker was concerned.



Jonas and the Archangel Gabriel noticed the swift departure of demon ranks from across the Roman Empire. Though not of the physical plane, their sheer numbers cast shadows across the land of Judea as they exited in great clusters. Humans looked up to identify the origin of the shadows, but only clear skies were discernible. For days the strange phenomenon was the talk of the towns.

General Jonas pointed a shimmering finger down toward the City of David. “It is happening, just as the Father said it would.” Jonas paused a moment, considering the remarkable prophecies that were about to unfold. The thought was overwhelming. Turning to Gabriel, Jonas said, “It’s time to send word to Michael that the way to Bethlehem will soon be clear.”



Countless demons gathered at the enormous arena known as the Slaughterhouse to share in the Blood Challenge Festival. Many troops arrived early to enjoy prefight entertainment. Warriors prepared to recount victories at Sodom, Gomorrah, and Babylon. Commanders were ready to offer ritual sacrifices and report on the growth of prostitution, mythology, and the occult. Everyone anticipated that the rare celebration would be a spectacular event.

The Praetor nodded approvingly as two scouts reported that the arena was ready for the celebration to begin. The Praetor was about to dismiss them when one of the scouts, hoping to move up in the ranks, audaciously pointed out that though preparations were in place, proper precautions were not. “I believe it is customary,” the small demon began, “to leave small contingents of troops throughout the human realm during Challenge Festivals. But Praetor, per your orders, this was not done. *All* troops were recalled. Perhaps you should order that some of our forces be sent back to key locations across the realm.”

The scout knew better than to offer an unsolicited opinion to a superior officer, especially the Praetor. However, on this special day, the hope for a promotion trumped discretion.

It did not take long for his thoughts of reward to wither and die. It quickly became clear his ill-timed advice offended the Praetor. Sensing danger, the first scout took a step back to put some distance between himself and his partner.

The scout who commented was dull and, at first, did not realize

his grave mistake. He just stood there, enamored by all that was happening in the arena—proud, expectant, and completely unaware. When he made eye contact with the Praetor, abject fear swept over his small frame. In a sinister tone, the Praetor hissed, “Come here.”

The small demon trembled but knew he must comply. He whimpered as he slowly crept toward his master. The Praetor taunted, “Closer, closer, closer.” When the pitiful creature could not summon the courage to move any closer, the Praetor hunched over in his chair until a claw-like hand reached the floor. With one of his long dark nails, the Praetor snagged and pulled the rug the scout was standing on. The scout tumbled backward. The Praetor’s nail pierced the carpet and made a grating noise as it scraped against the stone floor beneath. It was a sadistic game; the Praetor slowly pulled his prey forward, a few feet at a time. The panicked demon realized what was happening, but every time he rose to his feet, the Praetor tugged again, knocking him off balance and to the floor. Soon the frantic demon flailed about as if he was trying to swim away and escape a powerful riptide. This amused the Praetor, but only for a moment.

When the small demon found himself at the feet of his master, he began to plead for mercy, but with great speed, the Praetor clutched him by the throat, lifted him off the ground, and said, “You are not to speak, ever again.” As the Praetor said the words, he pressed his fingernail, recently sharpened by scraping against the stone floor, into the center of the scout’s tongue, then jerked his hand forward, splitting the tongue down the middle. The demon squealed and thrashed about but could not escape the vice-like grip of his master. “Listen to me,” the Praetor hissed as he shook his victim. “I ordered all forces removed from the realm above because we control the realm above. Do you understand?” The demon winced in pain but shook his head to acknowledge that he did. The Praetor threw him to the ground. “Leave my sight, and be grateful I am in a good mood, for today is a day of celebration!” He yelled the last words. Nearby drunken troops shouted, “Hail!” and raised their cups in tribute.

“Yes, this will be a long season of celebration,” thought the

Praetor. He sat smugly in his ring-side seat. “Yes,” he assured himself, “the Roman Empire can get along without us for a time. After all, tens of thousands of our proxies are there. They do our bidding and can carry on without us for a time.”



Michael led his twelve Generals and five thousand angels to fortify the blessed city of David. “Not one demon must penetrate!” he ordered. Angels raised their swords in assurance. Michael smiled at the sight—the luminescence of radiant swords sparkled as brilliant lights in the night sky.

“Tis the advent, said “Michael to the angelic army. His voice was powerful and melodic. “Tonight, he comes. The Dragon must not know.” The band of angels quickly acknowledged that they understood the importance of their mission.

“We will not fail!” affirmed General Sol.

The Archangel offered an appreciative smile then departed—a shooting star across the sky.



Two weary travelers made their way through the streets of Bethlehem. “The weary woman turned to the man leading the donkey on which she sat. “Joseph, the baby will come soon, We need to stop.”

Joseph led the donkey into the courtyard of an old inn. “Wait here, Mary.” He was smiling, but his voice communicated concern. While making sure his few coins were still in the pouch hung about his waist he said optimistically, “Maybe this inn will have a room.” He tied their donkey to an old post attached to the adobe-type walls of the humble structure. As he secured the reigns, he smiled and said, “I’ll speak to the innkeeper and be back soon. Hang on, my love.” Joseph pushed aside the nagging thought that neighboring inns had already turned them

away, and this inn, on the edge of town, seemed to be their last hope. With a sense of desperation, Joseph approached the entrance of the inn. He knew the hour was getting late and Mary's labor had begun. He whispered a quick prayer, managed to cast his Mary an assuring smile, then disappeared through the entrance door. He was determined to be strong for her.

Joseph returned a few minutes later; he strained to offer a smile. "Mary," he sighed, "there's no room here either, but the innkeeper said there is a small stable behind these buildings. It's not much, but it will provide shelter from the cold, and we can stay there for a while if we wish."

Mary felt a pain rising in her throat. She swallowed her tears and nodded bravely. Together they moved slowly toward the stable.



Seeker and Gog prepared for battle in the lower chambers of the Slaughterhouse arena. The crowd was anxious to see a fight between worthy competitors—a violent fight to the death. Most were in a frenzied state, thirsty for blood, and went wild when the two competitors walked into the area with oversized weapons in hand. A dozen sycophants trailed each competitor, regaling the crowd with stories of battles won and foes vanquished in centuries past. Shouts and shrieks filled the air when the two warriors raised their sabers and shook them at the crowd.

The Praetor smiled at the spectacle. When the competitors looked to him, he gave the nod, and the battle commenced. The fighting was fierce. Blow after blow—counter blow after counter blow, the incredible battle raged on. Each slice or new wound brought the blood-thirsty crowd to their feet.



“Come Mary, you can do it. Just a bit more and a new life will be here.” Joseph spoke with a calm and assurance that surprised himself. He was out of his element but felt a peace that surpassed understanding. In between contractions he took her hand, looked into her eyes, and said, “I know you can do it. Tonight is a night of miracles. His plan is unfolding before our very eyes.”



Time seemed to stand still as the warriors in the underworld battled. There were no rounds or rest. The ferocity of the fight captivated the attention of all in the area. Cries and blasphemies filled the air. The Praetor smiled in his ringside seat, obviously pleased.



The light of a brilliant star shone through the gaps in the roof of the simple stable. The cry of an infant broke the stillness of the crisp night air. Mary wrapped the baby boy in swaddling cloths. Eyes were filled with tears of joy as Mary and Joseph looked into the face of the newborn King.

Far overhead, Gabriel appeared before Michael. “It has begun. The Christ has come, behold.” Michael turned to see a glowing choir of angels singing of the Savior’s birth.

Michael’s Generals, stationed at twelve points encircling the city of Bethlehem, drew their swords, radiant against the night sky. Their troops watched for any sign of the enemy’s return, but all was clear. At the sound of the heavenly choir, angels about the city fell to their knees and praised God, with heads bowed and swords pointed skyward toward the brilliant star.



Seeker stood in the center of the arena; his hoofed feet straddled

one point of a pentagram drawn in sticky red liquid. His eyes burned into Gog, who stood some thirty feet away on the opposite side of the five-point star. Seeker screamed at Gog, "Bow before me and I may make your death painless." Gog had no intention of bowing to anyone except his masters, the Praetor and the Dragon. Both combatants were tired and unofficially taking a brief respite. Their bodies were slick with sweat and blood; their lips curled back in toothy sneers. Both were exhausted and slow to resume the fight. The mob of a crowd tried to encourage them by chanting, "Kill, kill, kill," while stomping their feet. The sound was deafening. Both weary, Seeker and Gog were slow to move.

The Praetor stood. His voice sliced through the arena. It was clear he was displeased with the lull in the action. The chanting grew quiet.

"We have come," the Praetor screamed, "to determine by challenge the rightful ruler of the Roman Empire!" The demons in the stands burst into cheers.

"The challenge will last until one is no more." The stadium roared in approval. "There is to be no rest; there is to be no mercy. Challengers, resume the battle!"

With that, Seeker and Gog charged towards each other with weapons drawn. Blade struck blade; sparks flew skyward. Their curved sabers cut through the damp, thick air with furious speed as contorted muscles rippled and snarls rose from the arena floor. Throngs of demons howled and stomped their feet in excitement.

Suddenly, the arena shook violently. The fighters were startled. Not sure what was happening, Seeker and Gog moved to their respective corners just as the ground beneath them began to split apart. Something was coming up through the floor. No longer could screams of ecstasy be heard in the grandstands. Cries of fear now filled the arena as the ground bulged and cracked. Red smoke from a new gaping crevice wafted up and filled the arena.

An explosion rocked the stands; waves of putrid-smelling smoke boiling across the bloodied floor; a horrifying screech split the air; several

pieces of the pentagram etched into the floor fell into the abyss. Flashes of orange and red light lit up the stadium. And when the smoke cleared, *he* stood before them—the Dragon, Lucifer, the Serpent, their master. The throng of demons fell silent, afraid to make a sound.

The Dragon pointed a thin wicked finger toward Gog. “You,” he screeched. “This is your fault. If you had held your post with honor, this challenge would not have come. Now, now!” he screamed, “*he* is here.”

The stadium was silent. No one dared do anything to invite Lucifer’s gaze to fall on them. After a dramatic pause, the Dragon slowly moved his scepter through the air in a particular pattern. Though he stood on the opposite side of the pentagram from Gog, Gog’s body was dissected in the exact shape of the scepter’s movements. A slash and zig-zag slice severed Gog into several pieces; the last cut removed his feet at the ankles. Though decapitated from his body, Gog’s head retained the expression of a creature dismantled alive. The pieces all hung suspended in the air, sliced, yet not falling. Then the Dragon rotated his left hand to a palm down position, and with a flick of his fingers, the pieces of Gog splattered on the ground then dissolved into smoke.

The Dragon changed forms. The new horned beast picked up Gog’s torso and swallowed it; fluids seeped from the creature’s huge mouth onto the dirt floor. He changed forms again, now a mutated creature with the face of a lion. It pointed toward Seeker, his clawed hand still dripping with the remains of Gog. “*You* are now ruler of the Roman Empire.” The beast then waved his scepter across the crowd and yelled, “And you will follow him!”

“Hail,” the crowd cried in unison.

Seeker smiled when tens of thousands of demons shouted their allegiance to him, but winced in pain when Satan placed the tip of his scepter atop his right shoulder. Immediately his flesh began to melt and he crumpled to the ground. Seeker looked up to see the Dragon glaring at him. “Just a little reminder of this day, and what happens to those who...” Satan paused for effect, then leaned in uncomfortably close and said, “disappoint me.”

“I will not fail, my king,” Seeker said while trying to ignore the pain and get to his feet.

Satan offered a nearly imperceptible nod then turned to speak to the crowd. His gravelly voice boomed throughout the arena. “In our absence,” he said as he shook with fury, “a cancer has been born. The fight has begun; so be it. I have waited a long time for this moment. Yes, revenge is sweet. I will kill His beloved.” He transformed again, now a great dragon.

“Troops!” he bellowed, his forked tongue flashing.

Every demon stood at attention.

“I know *he* has come. I have felt his ugly presence. Find him! Find him so that I can kill him. I want him dead before the moon is full.”

The Devil screeched in anger—his cry boomed with such force it shook the pillars supporting the roof of the massive arena. Amidst a flurry of threats and the exclamation, “I am the head,” the prince of demons disappeared in an explosion of fire. Acrid smoke filled the dark void where he had stood moments before.

The Praetor moved from his place of honor and motioned for his Captains to prepare their troops. He summoned Seeker to his side. “You, Commander, will find him.” The words were more of a threat than a statement.

Seeker bowed. “Yes, my Lord.”

Brandishing his saber for effect, the Praetor ordered, “Do not let it end without pain.”

Chapter 3

The Flight to Egypt: Based on Matthew 2

Jonas gave Michael a knowing look.

Michael nodded. “Yes, demon forces will return soon and in great numbers.” His voice was solemn. He looked over the heavenly court; twelve Generals stood before him, awaiting orders.

The Generals were hardly able to contain their excitement over the recent event. The time for the plan, which they had protected and nurtured through the ages, had finally come.

“We will fight!” a mighty angel shouted in a voice like thunder. He raised a glowing sword toward the starry canopy. “We will fight for the Father and for the Son!”

Michael rested a shimmery hand on the excited angel’s shoulder. “No, my brother. It’s not time. The prince of the air is to reign for yet another season.”

Gasps filled the court.

“Michael, how can that be?” questioned Adin, who was elevated to the station of General following the fall of Hadar during the rebellion.

Adin, whose name means beautiful, was one of the Hues, an order of angels like the Seraphim, but graced with feminine beauty. To describe the Hues as striking would be an understatement. In fact, as Hues were always surrounded by pulsating rainbows of light, most would be hard pressed to describe a Hue at all—no human could come close.

Seldom were physical characteristics mentioned when describing Hues. Even when angels looked upon them, eyes were drawn to their piercing green eyes and the thousands of colors that radiated from them. Though it would be true, one would not describe a Hue as having long flowing red hair, slender arms, narrow shoulders, porcelain-type skin, or wearing a fiery yellow garment that crossed over one shoulder and gracefully flowed across their breasts and gathered at the waist. Almost always were Hues described with terms like graceful or beautiful.

The Hues understood that some gifts of the Father transcended

words. A nod from a spirit in the heavenly realm, acknowledging their exceptional beauty, was always met with a smile and a kind word of thanks to the Father.

Adin looked like many of her sisters but distinguished herself with a silver bow that was always in hand. She exuded a special quality of gentleness, but also, the heart of a lion, exceptional speed, and remarkable wisdom. The new General was respected by all, and though smaller than the other grand angels of authority, Adin was a formidable warrior and deceptively powerful.

With words laden with concern Adin said, “Surely the enemy will make the Christ suffer, just as he did the prophets.”

The others murmured their agreement.

The Archangel’s eyes shone with love and wisdom. He held up a hand to call the assembly back to order. He continued, “The Father has made part of His plan known to me, and I will now share it with you. In fulfillment of prophecy, the child and his parents will find refuge in Egypt.

The Generals nodded in agreement but clearly had questions about how this could be possible; all knew demon forces would arrive soon, and the first thing they would do is monitor movement in and out of the city of Bethlehem.

Michael looked to Jonas. “Take a handful of our strongest warriors and escort Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to safety in Egypt. Gabriel has spoken to Joseph in a dream. They will be ready for travel soon. Take only a few troops so as not to draw the attention of our enemy. The mysticism in Egypt is rampant; Lucifer believes he has control over that land so will not look for him there. General Sol, your presence, and a company of angels will draw most of the demons to Bethlehem. Diminish your ranks to appear most vulnerable. This will further entice the enemy to come to you. When the time is right, you will engage demon forces in battle to create a diversion so Jesus, Mary, and Joseph can escape unnoticed.

The angels stood at attention, absorbing every word. Michael continued, “Friends, you will likely be outnumbered fifty to one, but you are to hold that city at all costs. Hold the line and engage the enemy

until Gabriel sounds the trumpet announcing that the Messiah has safely made his escape to Egypt. Even now, our swiftest are luring enemy scouts toward Bethlehem so they will report our presence to the Praetor. You will engage the enemy but not seek a victory. That is for another time. Your task is to keep the enemy occupied, busy, and confused.”

Michael looked to Adin: “You are to send messengers to those in Bethlehem’s district that have young male children. A time of sorrow is coming. You and your troops will comfort the parents who will soon be caught-up in an attack of the enemy. Prophecy will be fulfilled.”

Adin nodded her head, acknowledging her assignment.

“Keenan,” Michael continued, “lead 100 to protect to the families who will play a role in the Messiah’s ministry. Just as the family of John is protected, assign your best to protect those in the land who will become disciples and followers of the Christ at the appointed time. The Spirit will make them known to you. And friends,” Michael said as he looked at the mighty twelve, “have every angel under your command help the humans understand that the Christ has come. Let the good news start a fire of revival that will sweep across the land.”

The Generals moved into a circle formation. One after the other, they drew their swords and pointed them toward the center of the circle until the tips of twelve glowing blades touched in solemn ceremony. As Michael’s blade touched the others, a great flash of light exploded from within the circle. It was a custom that brought them into special union with the Father. They praised His name. One by one, they vanished. It was time to begin.



In the desolate desert sands of north of the Dead Sea, Seeker inspected the horde of demons assigned to him. Captains and troops stood at attention, waiting for the order to begin their attack. But the question for Seeker was, *attack where?* Scouts had been sent out in every direction while the bulk of the army waited impatiently news that the boy and his parents had been located. Each demon hoped for the

honor of finding and murdering the child. Surely such actions would bring unimaginable reward.

Seeker was not yet comfortable in his new command position but did not want others to sense his anxiety. In a display of bravado, he slammed his scepter down and angrily questioned his advisors: “Have the scouts brought back word?”

A Captain stepped forward and bowed. “Commander, our forces have not found anything yet, but they will.”

“Very well,” Seeker said slowly. Patience was not his strong suit, nor did he see it as a virtue. He longed to attack but needed information on enemy troop strength and location. The Commander paced back and forth as he considered his options.

Just then, Commander Seeker noticed a small scout flittering across the sky. The scout’s path was jagged, bat-like. To the impatient Commander, the scout took forever to travel the last 200 yards to get to him. The scout landed, smiled, then bowed before his master.

Seeker correctly discerned that the messenger carried good news, and this pleased him. Nevertheless, his new position of power required that he maintain a particular persona—which he was glad to do. When the scout bowed before him, the much larger Seeker seized him by the wings and lifted him toward his mouth. Drool flowed as he bared his fangs and growled, “Report!”

“Bethlehem...the cancer is in Bethlehem,” the shaking demon managed to cry.

Seeker released the frightened demon and he fell to the ground with a thud. The assembly snickered. The scout, driven by the hope of reward, quickly stood and boldly sneered, “I found him! I craftily discovered an angel and followed him all the way to Bethlehem, I stayed and studied their movements even though hundreds of angels were there.”

“Hundreds?” questioned Seeker.

“Yes. About 200 pathetic angels.”

Seeker's sneer turned into a slight smile as he reflected on the more than 20,000 troops under his command. He liked the odds. The small demon continued, "I even observed Michael's Generals about the city. It is as if they have become *his* guardians." At the mention of Michael and his Generals, the assembly grew silent.

"*Guardians,*" growled a particularly vicious Captain named Viper. He said the word slowly and with great disdain. His body shook with hate as he remembered a humiliation by their hands long ago. Drawing his crooked sword, he made an impressive sweep in the air. "I request the right to lead, my lord." His words were laced with malice.

The red glow from Viper's raised saber drew attention to several deep indentations in Viper's cheeks. Scars crisscrossed both sides of his face. The old wounds gave the demon an intimidating look, and his dark eyes spoke volumes. Commander Seeker saw in them the pain of a past defeat and a hunger to even the score. Their eyes met for a moment in a cold stare.

"Granted! Go! Order the troops to Bethlehem. Seeker turned to his assembly and shouted, "Follow Captain Viper. Attack the Guardians. Defeat them. Make them suffer. Push them away from our target just as we were pushed out of Eden. And when they are out of the way, kill the child. Kill him first and make his parents watch, then kill them too. Do not let things end without pain. Do it and bring me word."

"It shall be done, my lord."

Seeker smiled when hearing his title. The anticipation of victory swelled within him. Relishing his position, he raised his new scepter and gave them their leave.



Joseph walked the dusty road, holding the reigns of the donkey upon which his precious Mary sat, holding her newborn. They had been walking for days. "This road is difficult," Mary said with a deep sigh.

Joseph could see the effects of travel weighing heavily on his Mary. She was tired, exhausted, barely able to hold the infant Jesus

and maintain her position on the gentle donkey. Joseph looked about, searching for a place to rest, a bit of shade, but the desert road they traveled was stark and unforgiving. The old abandoned trade route to Egypt had not been used much in the last fifty years; since the Romans established a shorter route. The old trail was now well-known as a road for thieves or those on the run. It was desolate; to Joseph, each new mile looked just like the one before. He could offer few words of comfort but pulled the slack on the tether attached to the bridle and signaled a stop. Stepping beside the donkey, he said with love in his voice, "Mary, the angels are with us. I know they are." He held her small dirt-streaked face in his hands and looked into her large brown eyes, thankful to find love and a spark of life there. "We are almost there. In Egypt, we will be safe. Jehovah will see to it. Just a little farther."

Mary sat up a little straighter, kissed her son on the head, and tightened her grip on the reigns. She leaned in to kiss Joseph and said, "To Egypt then."

Joseph smiled.

Overhead, Jonas was smiling too.



In the early hours of the morning, a messenger demon appeared before Commander Seeker. "A report, my lord" His words lacked the excitement of success Seeker expected.

"Report then!" snapped the Commander.

"My lord, Captain Viper has staged his troops high above the city of Bethlehem. He reports that Michael's Generals are there with about 120 angels. Captain Viper believes they guard the child we seek."

"It is as I expected," lied Seeker. Doubling down, the arrogant Seeker continued: "His family has fallen into my trap. Their end will be terrible and glorious." The lie was not believable, but the messenger

knew better than to question the Commander.

Seeker was angered that his key officers were not impressed with his lie. Desperate for respect, Seeker turned on the messenger and in a gruff voice, shouted, “What of my other Captains? Where are they?”

Believing he had good news to report, the messenger responded quickly, “Captains and their troops are in position. Viper is ready to launch the assault. Our combined forces greatly outnumber those with the Guardians. The attack will begin soon.”

Seeker grimaced; it was his version of a smile. “Good,” he said as he rubbed his hands together. “Today, I will make my mark as Commander of our forces in the Roman Empire. It will be a day long remembered by our enemies.”



The messenger’s report was correct—by the time he returned to his Captain the attack was in progress. The angels were outnumbered but held their positions and braced for the assault. On Viper’s command, wave after wave of demons descended on the dome-like wall of angels as black rain. Curved red sabers met brilliant white swords. In the spiritual realm, trails of light painted the sky like comets. Multi-colored flashes exploded across the horizon as demons tried, without success, to break through the angelic line.

Viper noted the limited number of angels over Bethlehem and anticipated his flank would be attacked by a larger contingent of the heavenly host at any moment. Accordingly, he held half of his troops in reserve. He was pleased to contain the angels and keep them from calling for reinforcements, but frustrated he could not break through their line. After a series of onslaughts were rebuffed, Seeker called for all troops held in reserve to prepare to join the attack. Concentrating all his troops was a risk, but he was confident his superior forces would quickly overwhelm the Guardians.

The heavenly army fought to hold their position. The order was

to hold the line, keep the enemy engaged, and buy Jonas and the Christ time. All listened intently for the anticipated trumpet signal. As the battle raged on, many hoped the signal would come soon. Angels knew they would not be able to hold the line when all enemy forces descended upon them.



“Mary, we’re here,” said Joseph, his voice ringing with happiness despite his exhaustion. “Now, we can rest and regain our strength. God has preserved us! He has seen us through our journey as He promised!”

Mary reached and grasped Joseph’s strong, calloused hand; squeezing it gently she whispered, “We are blessed.”

“Let us pray,” Joseph said as he and Mary fell to their knees.

Jonas sent a messenger to give the word to Gabriel.



The demon troops held in reserve joined the front lines and prepared to strike. Wanting to savor the moment, Viper momentarily drew back all forces and ordered an ominous spearhead formation far above the city. Tens of thousands of demon forces regrouped and waited for the signal to come crashing down on the angelic cover.

“We will cut through them like fire!” screamed Viper. His impressive demon army cheered. It seemed to Viper to be a perfect moment. Wanting to extend the euphoric feeling as long as possible, He considered, *how much better his victory would be if he could hear angels beg for mercy before he destroyed them.* Filled with pride, he decided to delay the attack until he met with the Guardians. He longed to hear them plead for mercy, and he wanted his troops to see his mastery over Michael’s best.

Viper turned to his troops and shouted, “Hold!” Many of the captains were astounded at the order. The writhing troops were more than ready to strike. They sensed a vulnerable prey and desperately wanted to hand the Guardians a bruising defeat, but all knew better than to question the order. Once again, Viper bellowed, “Hold! I will speak with their leader first. Watch and learn. Wait here until I return.” Angry demon captains fought to hold their troops in position while Viper haughtily headed toward the angel’s front line.

There was a definite swagger in Viper’s movements as he approached a dozen angels guarding one sector over the city of Bethlehem. “I am Viper! I will speak with your lord!” he demanded.

General Sol, a friend of Jonas and leader of that sector of the city, stepped forward. “I am not Lord, merely one of His servants.” With the hint of a smile, General Sol said, “I speak for us. Have you come to surrender?”

“Surrender? Surrender!?” Viper was insulted and incensed. “I am about to destroy you!” He bellowed. “Behold.” With a crooked finger weighted down with a gaudy brass ring, he pointed to the great concentration of demon forces high overhead. “These are under *my* command. We outnumber you. We are more powerful than you. We are about to destroy you. I have come to see if you wish to beg for mercy.”

“We are aware of your position,” Sol said with a tight smile. Then he leaned toward Seeker and whispered, “Perhaps you are not fully aware of ours.” Sol aimed to be coy and keep the conversation going as long as possible. He needed to buy his friend Jonas time.

“Remember what happened at Eden,” Sol said provocatively. “Your master would not be pleased if that happened again, would he?”

Viper took the bait and played right into Sol’s hand. At the mention of Eden, Viper’s ears burned. He tasted bile and shook with rage. Forgetting his goal of maintaining a composed, authoritative disposition,

he stamped his foot and screamed, "I want the child!"

Viper's words dripped with hatred. "Give him to me now, and I may spare some of you."

General Sol showed no fear or indication he was intimidated by the self-important demon. But at the mention of Jesus, his expression suddenly changed, and Viper saw a flash of righteous indignation. Sol said sternly, "You will *not* harm the child."

"I will have him," snapped Viper. "I will have him, and I will destroy him." Viper's pride prompted him to take a step toward Sol.

With unexpected speed, Sol drew his sword and cut through Viper's black breastplate. The heat of the blade cut through the metal, exposing a new wound. The demon jumped back in shock. He wanted to raise his sword toward Sol but thought better of it. He screamed in anger, then slowly began to withdraw. "We will destroy you! All of you!" the demon shrieked as he flew skyward to rejoin his forces.

"Let us prepare; it will not be long now," Sol said to his brothers.

Viper shrieked curses as he tore a breastplate off one of his captains. His blood smeared across the back of the new armor as he fastened it over his wound. Amidst a string of blasphemies, he raised his saber and shouted, "Destroy them!"

The angels raised their swords, ready to meet the assault.

Viper led the strike. The demons began their approach from high in the stratosphere, they descended toward Bethlehem, gaining speed with each quarter mile. Viper's lips peeled back in a war cry.

Five miles...two miles...one mile. The demons were falling like a cloud of dark missiles. A half-mile...a quarter-mile...



Near the throne in heaven, Gabriel lifted a golden trumpet and sounded the call, it echoed across the horizon. The Messiah was safe.



In the spiritual realm, there was an explosion of light high above the city of Bethlehem. The light of a thousand suns and the sound of a golden trumpet filled the sky. Demons roared in pain, temporarily blinded from the flash and petrified at the sound of the heavenly trumpet call.

When the sting of the tremendous flash of light faded, the first thing the demons noticed was that the angels were gone.

“Where are they?” wailed Viper, rubbing his orange eyes. No one answered; all eyes burned from the brilliant light.

Viper panicked. He screeched orders incoherently. “Find him! Find the child! Find him now!” The frantic Commander paced back and forth along the city gate while his troops searched Bethlehem. “Where could he be?” Fear and rage kept trading places in his mind.

Suddenly there was the sound of movement behind him. It was a messenger with small black ram-like horns curving down the sides of his face, protruding outward on either side of his jaw. The messenger was fidgety. He bowed low and said, “A report, my lord.”

“Proceed!” hastened Viper.

The messenger hesitated. Viper took a step toward the odd demon. Unable to escape the blows that were sure to come, the messenger blurted, “Captains have searched the city. The cancer is not there, nor are his parents. It appears the battle was a ruse—a diversion. We now believe the family left in the night and has been gone for some time. And my lord, the people are praising Jehovah for the birth of a Savior.”

There was a moment of silence.
Viper's eyes flashed with fury.
A wicked blade cut through the air.
The messenger was no more.

Chapter 4

Herod's Order: Based on Matthew 2

A frustrated Seeker returned to his new command office, leaving Viper and the other captains to continue searching for the child and his parents.

Seeker ordered the cavernous chambers gutted after Gog's unceremonious exit, but tell-tale signs of the former Commander's long tenure remained. A gash in the east wall evidenced where he pinned a messenger to the wall with an ax after delivering bad news. Helter-skelter claw marks covered the bottom half of the west wall, where a coven of demons that attempted a coup were chained and tortured for Gog's entertainment.

However, as attractive as his new office and title were, the failure at Bethlehem plagued his mind. Yes, he would blame Captain Viper for the failure, but he knew his superiors would likely do the same to him. Beads of sweat bubbled on his reptilian-like skin as he thought about the punishment for failure.

The demon commander was distraught, agitated, frustrated. He grabbed a large chair made of wood and bone and threw it across the room. It splintered into a thousand pieces. He paced back and forth like a caged animal and kept questioning how the attack failed when victory was so sure?

Suddenly, the massive doors to his quarters crashed open; the large iron hinges gave way under the force of the blow, sending pieces of wood flying across the room. Dust and splinters rained down. Seeker could see someone standing in the sagging door frame through the haze that now filled the office. His heart thudded in recognition. The particular odious stench confirmed his fear. It was the Praetor.

The Praetor pointed a clawed hand toward Seeker and hissed, "You have failed me." The high-pitched icy words paralyzed Seeker; his words seemed to be more of a death sentence than a mere statement.

In movements intended to intimidate, the Praetor moved toward the stricken Commander.

Seeker instantly fell to his knees. “No! Wait! Please! Master, we were deceived. The angels at Bethlehem were but a decoy. It was all a deception—the child was not there. But we believe he is nearby. We *will* find him.”

After an uncomfortably long silence, the Praetor spoke. “They play your game well, do they?” He stood threateningly close to Seeker. The new Commander wished he hadn’t. Rotting flesh on the Praetor’s face was difficult to look at, yet he dared not turn away. He focused on a piece of decaying skin just above the Praetor’s left eye and did his best to swallow his rising fear and bile.

“Where are your troops?” the Praetor snapped.

The question jarred Seeker to attention. “Searching, my lord. We *will* find him.”

The Praetor gave Seeker a cold, piercing, stare. “You *must* find him; our time is short. Our master the Dragon is not as patient or forgiving as I am.”

The Praetor studied Seeker for a moment, contemplating. “This is what you will do,” the Praetor began. He turned his back to Seeker and drug a clawed hand across the stone wall as he worked out a plan in his mind. The grating sounds his claw made caused Seeker to flinch. After a few minutes, the Praetor hissed, “Put pressure on King Herod. Work through him. Feed his fear of a rival king. See to it that Herod orders the execution of all young male children. Let terror sweep the land. Ensure that Judah’s streets run with tears and blood.”

The Praetor was large—his movements were jerky, aggressive, violent. He turned around to face his charge and as he did, showed his double set of teeth and multiple fangs. Seeker recognized the attempted smile as satisfaction in his plan.

The Commander sighed in relief. Without thinking, he said, “It is good, my lord. It shall be done! Just as we killed the children in Egypt in the days of Moses, so shall we bring death to the land of Judah.”

The fist that slammed into Seeker’s face came without warning

and sent him tumbling across the floor. When Seeker was able to look up, he saw the Praetor standing over him, pointing an accusing finger. His strange, shrill, piercing voice hissed, “You will never mention Egypt or Moses again! Is that clear?”

Dazed, but fearing execution, Seeker forced himself to his feet and somehow summoned the strength to say, “Yes, my lord.”

“Carry out my orders immediately!” One last sinister gaze, a cloud of smoke, and the Praetor was gone.



King Herod was restless. He hadn't slept well in weeks; it felt as if insects were crawling all over his body. He had no peace since the voices in his head became his constant companion.

Standing on the balcony of his palace, he gazed out over his kingdom, irritated—lost in deep thought.

He was afraid. There were whispers of a rival king, but was there really a threat? How should he deal with the possibility of an insurrection? Rome was watching. If Caesar thought he was indecisive or weak, he would be removed from power.

His skin crawled. He reached to scratch an itch that was like a thirst that could not be quenched. What was wrong with me? What should I do?

Sinister voices immediately responded to his thoughts. “Kill the children. Kill the children. Kill the child...”

Herod nervously ran his fingers through his thick hair, dyed black from a mixture of leeches and vinegar. He usually took great pride in his appearance, but now, despite his regal robes the elderly but dignified king looked haggard. Demons pressed on his mind. “Perhaps,” he thought aloud, “I should kill the children of Judah. I will please Rome by showing initiative. I will deal with the rumors, make a preemptive attack, and destroy the threat.” He pondered possibilities as he looked east toward his impressive Temple restoration project. It irritated him that religious leaders complained about the multiple rounds of heavy

taxes the project required, but the suffering of his people was of no great concern. His job was to please the Romans, not the Hebrews. Though the Temple project came with many challenges, Herod's tactic of pacifying the troublesome Jews by giving them just enough to keep them from rebellion had been successful. There were a few uprisings in recent decades, but all threats were put down quickly. *This one will be no different*, he muttered to himself.

Demons dug their talons in deeper and Herod's disposition soured even more. With a wicked edge in his voice, he sneered, "They dare welcome a new king? Never!"

"Scribe!" he shouted.

In just a few moments, an attendant stood before Herod.

"What is your desire, my King?"

"Take a letter. You will personally take this new order to the Roman Commanders in the region of Bethlehem. Have them implement the order immediately. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my king."

"Then let us begin. From King Herod, the favored of Caesar. Concerning the children of Bethlehem in Judah..."



Michael stood in the heavenly court, appraising his Generals who gathered for this meeting. Hushed tones filled the warm, roofless room. Michael's expression was solemn as he raised a hand and called the meeting to order.

"Gabriel brings word," he began, "that a new season of sorrow has begun. Lucifer has worked through King Herod. The streets of Bethlehem run with the blood of the innocent, and the cries of mothers fill the night. It is a time of great mourning. The fulfillment of prophecy spoken through Jeremiah is unfolding, but the Christ is safe."

The court was silent. Finally, General Jonas spoke, his voice heavy with sorrow. "Michael, what are we to do?"

The Archangel's eyes shone brightly with righteous indignation.

It was clear he desired to leap into action, but that was not the Father's will. His voice was strong and resolute as he spoke to Jonas. "You will take three sections of our best warriors and guard the Christ. Gabriel will bring word to you when it is safe to return to Nazareth." Jonas nodded in agreement.

Michael looked to Keenan and Adin. He saw in their eyes a shared longing to battle the enemy. Michael offered a knowing smile and said to Adin, "Please report."

"The sorrow in Bethlehem is great, but many ministering spirits are providing comfort. The parents know that one day they will see and hold their precious little children again."

"And the Spirit has shown us the families that will play a role in the ministry of the Christ at the appointed time," said Keenan. The twelve, whom the Christ will call to be his disciples, the seventy, and many other supporters have been assigned angels to watch over them. They will see that hearts are well prepared to serve when the Christ calls them."

"Well done," smiled Michael. "None of those families can not imagine what their children will do for the glory of God in the days to come."

The Generals nodded in agreement, but none fully grasped the meaning in Michael's words.

Michael, paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts, silently praying the Spirit would prompt his next words. The Generals waited patiently. Finally the Archangel spoke, his words heavy and serious. "Friends, it may seem that with the Christ child safe in Egypt and the enemy humiliated, we can now rest. We must not! While it is true it will be years before the Christ begins his formal ministry, we must remember that the enemy will not slow or pause their search for the child Nor will they hesitate to destroy anyone or anything they believe may support the ministry of the Christ. Over the next decades, the enemy will step up attacks on religious leaders and on the weak; they will oppress and possess whom they can. We must remain vigilant. We must not let the

enemy gain any advantage.”

Michael’s eyes were bright with righteous indignation as he spoke of what the enemy will attempt in the days to come. “Generals,” he said, “We have some time. Let us bring hope even as the enemy attempts to bring despair. Let us point to the Father’s promises when the enemy wants humans to focus on the pain. Comfort the mourning, care for the hurting, spread joy, and assure the people that the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

The more Michael spoke, the sterner it became. “You must closely monitor the enemy’s activity throughout Israel,” warned Michael. “Surely, he will strike again. We must not engage him, for it is not yet time for victory. But his day will come. Yes, his day will come!”

Michael paused again, lowering his voice he continued, “My brothers, the task before us is great. The success of each of our assignments will advance the plan of the ages. At the perfect time, the Father will reveal His plan, and all of our assignments will come together like merging streams that become a mighty river. The coming years will be difficult. Do not falter; the Spirit will give you strength.” Michael rose from his chair, a smile slowly spread across his radiant face. He unfurled his wings, raised his sword, and asked the Generals: “Shall we fight for His glory?”

“For His glory!” they shouted in affirmation.

The angels moved into a circle formation, knowing it would be years before they would stand together again. The Spirit fell upon them and brought a welcomed sense of peace, purpose, and union with the Father. Yes, a great evil was raising its ugly head, but God’s plan was in motion. All knew that the enemy’s death-grip on humanity was about to be broken. Each General raised his sword high. The swords glowed with the glory of God and the fire of the Spirit. In solemn ceremony, they touched the tips of their blades; there was an explosion of wondrous light, which strangely lingered for several minutes like a radiant fog. When the rainbow of colors finally dissipated, only Michael remained in the court.