**What On Earth Is God Doing? Satan’s Conflict With God**

***Lesson Four***

***THE CONFLICT***

***FROM THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY***

***THROUGH THE ASCENSION OF***

***CHRIST***

**The Babylonian Captivity**

Once the Jewish people were captive in Babylon, Satan attacked again. Nebuchadnezzar decreed that all his subjects should worship an image of himself (Dan. 3:1-7). Jewish obedience to this decree would have involved God’s people in apostasy again. God countered this satanic move by miraculously preserving through their punishment the first Israelites who refused to obey the king’s decree (Dan. 3:8-27). As a result, the Jewish people were released from any obligation to worship anyone except God.

**Dan. 3:28-30 28 *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” 30 Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.***

After Babylon fulfilled God’s purpose for her – the chastening of Judah – God no longer needed her for His service. As the end of the Babylonian Captivity drew near, Babylon fell suddenly to Medo-Persia in 539 B.C. (Dan 5). In fulfillment of Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a decree in 538 or 537 B.C. permitting the Israelites to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple. This decree ended the Babylonian Captivity.

**The Persian Period**

The majority of Jewish people decided to remain in Babylon after the captivity ended. However, nearly 50,000 did return to their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1 – 2). Upon their arrival, in the homeland, the returning Jews built an altar and reinstituted the feasts and offerings prescribed in the Law (Ezra 3:1-7). In the second year of their return they began to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 3:8-13). At this juncture, Satan attacked again.

Inasmuch as it would be easier to lead the Israelites into apostasy if they didn’t have a permanent place to worship God, Satan desired to prevent the rebuilding of the Temple. Samaritan enemies of the Jews resisted the rebuilding of the Temple so severely that all building activity ceased for at least sixteen years (Ezra 4:1-5, 24). God countered this satanic move by raising up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to exhort the people to continue rebuilding the Temple. As a result, the building activity began again in 520 B.C.

**Ezra (5:1-2) 1 *When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, 2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.***

Satan threatened to stop the building again through a letter sent to King Darius of Persia by more enemies of the Jewish people (Ezra 5:3-17). God countered this move through the king. Darius found Cyrus’ decree concerning the Temple, then ordered the Jews’ enemies not to interfere with the building activity but to give the Jewish people material assistance for the Temple. Darius even threatened to execute anyone who hindered the project (Ezra 6:1-2). Thus the Jewish people finished the Temple in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-16).

During the reign of King Xerxes (486-465 B.C), Satan attempted again to annihilate the people through whom the Redeemer was to come. Haman, the prime minister of Persia, persuaded the king to decree that all Jews should be executed on a certain day (Ester 3:7-15). God countered this attack by bringing the king to authorize a new decree permitting the Jewish people to defend themselves at the prescribed time of execution (Esther 4 – 9). Thus God’s people were preserved.

Satan was determined to get the Jews in the Promised Land involved in apostasy again. Inasmuch as Israel had gone apostate on a grand scale several centuries earlier through the marriage of Israelite men to foreign, pagan women, there was good reason to believe that the same method could work again. In violation of the Law numerous Jewish men, including Temple priests and political leaders, married foreign, pagan women. These forbidden unions led the nation into idolatrous practices once more.

**Ezra 9:1-2 1 *Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 “For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness.”***

God countered this new outbreak of apostasy by sending Ezra, a teacher of the Law, to the land in 458 B.C, with a decree from King Artaxerxes I. This decree commanded Ezra to establish a centralized government in Jerusalem, teach God’s Law to the Israelites in the land, and punish any Jewish people who refused to obey it (Ezra 7). Ezra ordered the Jewish men to repent of their sin and to put away their pagan wives (Ezra 10). Thus the spread of apostasy was stopped.

In 445 B.C. Nehemiah received from Artaxerxes a decree granting permission and aid to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. As long as the walls remained broken down, the Jews in the land remained subject to great affliction and reproach; therefore, it was to Satan’s advantage to keep the walls down. Thus the Israelites’ enemies tried to prevent the rebuilding of the walls through derision and threat of armed aggression. But God used Nehemiah to urge the Jews to build with weapons in hand. Next, the enemies laid traps to get rid of Nehemiah, but God gave him wisdom to avoid them. Thus the walls were rebuilt in fifty-two days (Neh. 1 – 7).

Satan continued to persist. After awhile, pagan people were allowed to live with the Jews in the land. A former pagan enemy was given a Temple chamber in which to live; the Israelites stopped paying the tithe, thereby casing the Temple to be deserted by its minsters; merchants were allowed to desecrate the Sabbath by conducting business on that day in Jerusalem; Jewish men married pagan women again; the people offered blemished sacrifices to God; the priests dishonored God by their actions; the Jewish men divorced their wives; and the people called evil good and concluded that it was useless to serve God (Neh. 13; Mal). God countered all these evil tendencies through the preaching of the Prophet Malachi and the reformed instituted by Nehemiah.

**The Message of the Prophets**

The Old Testament prophets foretold many things concerning the coming Redeemer. They pictured Him in two major ways: as the suffering Servant who would die to pay the penalty of man’s sin (Isa. 52:13 – 53:12), and as the glorious King who would establish the theocratic rule of God’s kingdom over the world again:

**Isa. 9:6-7 6 *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.***

**Dan. 7:13-14 13 *“I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven, One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.***

The prophets revealed that, when the Redeemer would establish the future theocratic kingdom, He would begin to reverse all the tragic consequences of man’s sin. For example, He would change animal nature, so all animals would be completely tame again (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25); He would reverse the effects of death by healing all diseases and deformities (Isa. 33:24; 35:5-6), eliminating hazards (Ezek. 34:25-29), and increasing man’s lifespan (Isa. 65:20, 22). He would restore the fertility of the earth to such an extent that there would be a great growth and fruitage of trees (Isa. 55:13; Ezek. 47:12; Joel 2:21-22), a huge multitude of fish (Ezek. 47:9-10), an abundance of grain and wine (Joel 2:24: Amos 9:13), and such a superabundant supply of food in general that famine would be abolished (Jer. 31:12-14; Ezek. 34:27-29; 36:29-30; 47:12; Joel 2:24-26; Zech. 8:11-12). He would control the environment for the benefit of man (Ezek. 34:26-27), even healing its pollution (Ezek. 47:1-12); and He would abolish war and injustice (Isa. 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:2-5; Jer. 23:5; Mic. 4:1-3: Zech. 9-9-10).

The prophets called the coming Redeemer the Anointed One (Ps. 2) or Messiah (Dan. 9:25-26) and indicated that He would rule God’s future, theocratic kingdom as a descendent of David, sitting on David’s throne (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-17; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). Thus He would fulfill the Davidic covenant (Jer. 33:20-26).

Finally, the prophets declared that the coming theocratic kingdom would not be set up until Israel would repent or turn back to God (Dt. 30:1-10; Jer. 31:16-40; Ezek. 36:32-38; Hos. 3:4-5; Zech. 13:9). Thus, the nation of Israel is a key to the establishment of the earthly, political form of the kingdom of God.

**The Grecian Period**

Persia served God’s purpose for her – the restoration and reestablishment of the Jewish people to their homeland. Once that purpose was fulfilled, God no longer needed her for His service. Thus in 334 B.C. the Persian empire was invaded by a Greco-Macedonian army under the leadership of Alexander the Great. By 331 B.C the Persian Empire had been totally consumed by the new empire from Greece.

Alexander pushed his armies as far east as the Punjab area of India. When his soldiers could not keep up the intense forced marches, Alexander discharged them in groups. Many of the men “settled where they were discharged, married native women, and raised their families.” As a result, a common language and culture were established “from east to west and down into Egypt,” and they were the Greek language and culture.

After Alexander died suddenly in 323 B.C., his empire experienced internal struggles as his generals and their successors fought for control. Eventually Ptolemy and his successors gained control of Egypt and Israel, while Syria, Babylonia, and Asia Minor went to the House of Seleucus.

The Jewish people fared well under the Ptolemies. But after the Seleucids of Syria captured the Holy Land from the Ptolemies in 199 B.C., their situation changed drastically. Satan attacked the people of the Redeemer again. One of the Seleucid rulers, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.), was determined to impose a common Greek culture and religion upon his whole kingdom. This involved an attempt to stamp out the Jewish worship of God. To accomplish this goal, Antiochus abolished Jewish sacrifices. He entered the holy of holies of the Temple and desecrated it, sacrificed a sow on the altar of burnt offering, and outlawed circumcision and Sabbath observance. He erected heathen altars, enforced pagan sacrifices, instituted the worship of Zeus and other Greek deities, and executed any Jews found with a copy of the Law. Compliance with these policies involved God’s people in apostasy again.

One party of Jewish people accepted the policies of Antiochus enthusiastically. This party received its leadership from the priestly aristocracy. Eventually this group became known as Sadducees. God counteracted this move toward apostasy through the Orthodox party of Jews. Under the leadership of a family of men called the Maccabees, this party fought Antiochus and his forces until religious freedom was won and the Temple worship fully restored in 164 B.C. Eventually the Orthodox group became known as Pharisees.

**The Beginning of the Roman Period**

Greece fulfilled God’s purpose for her – the provision of a universal language for the Mediterranean Sea world. Later this common language would facilitate the spread of the gospel and the New Testament Scriptures. After the Greek Empire completed her service, she fell to Rome. In 63 B.C. the Holy Land came under Roman domination. Eventually the Romans appointed Herod the Great to be king of Juda for them. Herod began his reign in 37 B.C.

**The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ**

Although Satan tried repeatedly either to destroy Israel or to make her totally apostate throughout Old Testament times, God continually preserved a faithful remnant of His people. Finally, through a young woman who was a member of that remnant, the Redeemer came. An angel announced to Mary that her Son was to be called Jesus, the Son of the most High, and that He would receive the throne of His father David and a kingdom that would last forever (Lk. 1:26-33).

Jesus Christ was born around 5 or 4 B.C. Thus, “when the fulness of time came, God sent forth” the Redeemer, “born of a woman,” just as He had promised in Genesis 3:15 (Gal. 4:4). Despite his many frantic attempts to prevent the Redeemer from coming, Satan had failed. The Person who was the key to the fulfillment of God’s purpose for history was now present on earth. He had become human flesh for the purpose of putting away man’s sin by the substitutionary sacrifice of Himself so that He could crush Satan and the works of his kingdom.

**Jn 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word as with God, and the Word was God.***

**Jn 1:14 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

**Jn 1:29 *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”***

**Heb. 2:14 *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil…***

**Heb. 9:26 *Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.***

**1 Jn. 3:8 *…the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.***

Now that the Redeemer had come, Satan’s goal was to prevent the Redeemer from dying the substitutionary death and from establishing God’s theocratic kingdom. Satan tried several methods to accomplish his goal. For one thing, he tried more than once to destroy the Redeemer before He could finish His work. Not long after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod, in an attempt to kill the new Davidic King, ordered the slaughter of infants in that city.

**Mt. 2:16 *Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.***

God countered the move by forewarning the Redeemer’s stepfather to flee with Him to Egypt.

**Mt. 2:13-15 13 *Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.” 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”***

When Jesus preached to His hometown people for the first time, they became so enraged that they tried to kill Him (Lk. 4:16-29). Jesus countered that attempt by miraculously walking through their midst unharmed.

**Lk. 4:30 *But passing through their midst He went His way.***

On at least two other occasions some Jews attempted to stone Jesus to death, but He escaped.

**Jn. 8:59 *Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.***

**Jn. 10:31 *The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.***

**Jn. 10:39 *Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.***

The Redeemer recognized that these attempts on His life were prompted by Satan’s kingdom (Jn. 8:37-47).

A second method of attack that Satan used against the Redeemer was apostasy. If he could get Jesus to depart from God’s purpose for Him, he could accomplish his goal. Apostasy had worked well with the human race and Israel; he hoped it would work with the Redeemer. To this end, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-11). In one of his temptations Satan offered to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down and worship him.

**Mt 4:8-9 *Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”***

This was Satan’s way of offering Jesus the rule of the world system without the sufferings of the cross. Had Jesus accepted the offer, Satan would have disrupted God’s purpose for history. In response to Satan’s offer, Jesus rebuked him and refused to become apostate.

**Mt. 4:10 *Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord Your God, and serve Him only.”***

Satan tried more than once to make the Redeemer abort His mission.

**Lk. 4:13 *When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.***

Once he used Peter to try to persuade Jesus to avoid the cross, but again Jesus rebuked him.

**Mt. 16:21-23 21 *From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” 23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”***

In spite of all his efforts, Satan could not make the Redeemer become apostate. As a result, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus could say that the prince of the world had nothing in Him.

**Jn. 14:30 *I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.***

Jesus had rejected every scheme that would make Him a party to Satan’s cause. Thus it was only a matter of time until Satan would be cast out of his sphere of authority in the world.

**Jn. 12:31 *Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.***

During His earthly ministry, Jesus offered the promised theocratic kingdom to Israel. As noted earlier, the prophets declared that the theocratic kingdom would not be set up until Israel would meet the spiritual requirement of repentance. For this reason John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the coming of the redeemer, Jesus, and the disciples all preached the same message: “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:1-2; 4:17; Mk. 6:7-13). Since Israel was a key to the establishment of the kingdom, Jesus commanded His disciples not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but only to Israel.

**Mt. 10:5-7 5 *These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’***

For the same reason, when Jesus was approached by a Gentile woman for help, He said, “I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:21-26).

Through His miracles Jesus demonstrated that right then Israel had in her midst the One who possessed the powers necessary to establish the kingdom. When He cast out demons, He demonstrated His ability to devastate the kingdom of Satan (Mt. 12:22-30). His miracles of casting demons into pigs and causing a fish with a shekel in his mouth to come to Peter displayed His ability to control animal nature (Mt. 17:24-27); Mk. 5:1-20). His healing of all kinds of diseases and deformities (Mk. 3:1-6; 7:31-37; Jn. 5:1-9; 9:1-41) and raising of dead people to life (Mt. 9:18-26); Lk. 7:11-17; Jn. 11:1-44) revealed His ability to reverse the effects of death. When He cursed a fig tree and caused it to die (Mt. 21:18-22), produced huge multitudes of fish (Lk. 5:1-11; Jn. 21:19), turned water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), and expanded small amounts of food to feed crowds of 5000 and 4000 (Mk. 8:1-9; Jn. 6:5-14), He demonstrated His ability to produce the great fruitage of trees, multitude of fish, abundance of wine, and superabundance of food that the prophets declared would characterize the theocratic kingdom. His calming of storms and walking on water displayed His power to eliminate hazards and control the environment for the benefit of man (Mt. 14:24-33; Mk. 4:35-41).

It is interesting to note that, when Jesus sent out His disciples to preach repentance and the kingdom to Israel, He gave them power to perform miracles characteristic of conditions to come in the literal, earthly, theocratic kingdom (Mk. 6:7-13; Mt. 10:5-8). The purpose of Jesus’ and the disciples’ miracles was twofold: first to point out Jesus as the One who could establish the theocratic kingdom with its regeneration of the earth (Mt. 19:28) and, second, to substantiate the declaration that the kingdom could be set up if Israel would repent as a nation. Thus the Jewish people who saw these miracles were receiving a foretaste of the miraculous powers that will be characteristic of the future Millennial age (Heb. 6:5).

Satan hated the preaching of the kingdom message. He knew that if Israel were to believe the declaration and repent, he and his kingdom would be crushed. Therefore, it was imperative to him that the nation reject the offer of the kingdom. To this end he worked diligently in the hearts of Jewish people to prevent the message from taking root and bearing fruit in them (Mt 13:18-22). The end result was that the majority of Jews did not believe the declaration concerning the kingdom. They wanted the literal, political, theocratic kingdom (Mk. 11:8-10), but they didn’t want to meet the spiritual requirement necessary to have it. They felt that, because they were Abraham’s descendants, they didn’t need to repent (Mt. 3:7-9). Thus the nation of Israel rejected the offer of the theocratic kingdom.

By prompting Israel to reject the offer of the kingdom, Satan ironically sealed his own doom.

**Jn. 12:31 *Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.***

**Jn. 16:11 *…and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this would has been judged.***

In accordance with His sovereign plan for the world, God used Israel’s rejection as His means of providing the substitutionary sacrifice for man’s sin (Jn. 12:37-40; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28). Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom by rejecting the Redeemer who made the offer.

**Jn. 12:37 *But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.***

In its rejection of Jesus as its King, Israel cried for His crucifixion (Jn. 19:13-16). When Jesus was crucified, He died as “the Lamb of God, [that] taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn.1:29). His death paid the price that satisfied or propitiated diving justice.

**Rom. 3:24-25 24 *…being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.***

**1 Jn. 2:2 …*and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.***

**1 Jn. 4:10 *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

In light of this, Jesus’ statement, “It is finished,” at the end of his cross experience, was most significant. John stated that He made this statement after knowing that all things were finished (Jn. 19:28-30). This statement meant that, through His crucifixion, the Redeemer had finished the work that was necessary for God to fulfill His purpose for history – the crushing of Satan and his kingdom, the establishment of the theocratic kingdom, and the reversal of the tragic consequences of man’s sin. This statement must have sent a shudder through Satan. In spite of all his efforts to prevent the Redeemer from coming and doing His work, he had failed. The sovereignty of God had overruled.

On the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose bodily from the dead (Mt. 28:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). His crucifixion was significant for several reasons.

1. It was evidence that His death, as a substitutionary sacrifice for man’s sin, had satisfied the divine justice of God. Had God not been satisfied, He would not have raised Jesus (Acts 2:24).
2. It proved that the Redeemer had won for man a victory over death and over Satan, who has the power of death. **Heb. 2:14 *“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil…***
3. It was assurance that the establishment of the theocratic kingdom had not been abandoned by God. When Jesus died, His disciples lost hope that He would establish the theocratic kingdom (Lk. 24:13-21). The resurrection made the Redeemer available again to set up and rule the kingdom at God’s appointed time. **Acts 1:3 *To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God…6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;…”***

For forty days Jesus gave proof of His bodily resurrection by making numerous appearances (Lk. 24:36-43; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:3-7). At the end of those days He ascended into heaven (Mk. 16:19; Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:9-11), there to remain until Israel would repent (Mt. 23:37-39).