

## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT IN 2024

People have always wanted to know the future.

Many a snake-oil salesman has gotten rich off their curiosity.

Palm-readers, mediums and astrologers all claim to be able to see into the future and reveal what's going to happen to you—in return for a little money.

But they're all phony baloney.

In any event, all we have to do to see what the future—in this case what 2024—holds is to look at the past.

In the beginning God created the universe.

Then He created our original parents, Adam and Eve, and gave them explicit instructions about what they were to do and not to do.

They were to multiply, to take care of the earth and to avoid seeking the knowledge of evil.

If they chose to acquire the knowledge of evil they would pay for it with their lives.

Well, we all know how that went.

Adam and Eve DID choose to acquire the knowledge of evil.

They chose death over eternal life and they passed that sin along to all their descendents.

What had been a perfect world—a paradise—was turned into a “vale of tears” filled with sin.

God, however, did not turn His back on this fallen world.

He is a God of love and so He put into action a plan to restore creation to its original, perfect condition.

He sent a Messiah, a chosen One, into the world to take upon himself the responsibility for all of mankind’s sin and pay for it with his own life.

This Messiah would be His Son—Immanuel or “God with us.”

His Name was Jesus, which means “salvation.”

Once Jesus had paid the price for the sins of mankind, mankind was set free from them.

All God asked of us is that we believe in this Messiah and place our trust—our faith—in Jesus and in what he came to do.

If we did we would be restored to the eternal life which God had originally given to Adam and Eve.

It was a gracious gift from a gracious God.

Jesus warned them, however, that He—and they—had a powerful enemy who would try to take this gift away from them.

This enemy's name was Satan.

Satan was an angel who had rebelled against God and had been cast out of heaven along with a multitude of angels who followed him.

He was called “the devil” and the angels who followed him were called “demons.”

Their sole mission was—and is—to prevent people from coming to faith in Jesus and what He came to do.

Spiritual warfare broke out between God and Satan and continues right up to the present day.

And that, in a few words, is the spiritual history and present condition of mankind.

It has been going on since the Garden of Eden, but it ratcheted up into high gear when Jesus inaugurated

the Kingdom of God among men by his death on the cross.

With that act of divine submission, Jesus declared war on the prince of this world and launched an invasion of his kingdom.

He created a church and commissioned it to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all mankind.

In response, Satan unleashed his demonic forces to do everything possible to attack the church and prevent the Good News from being proclaimed.

It was spiritual warfare between Jesus and Satan and it will continue to rage until all mankind has had the opportunity to hear and believe the Good News of eternal life which Jesus has offered to mankind.

Then Jesus, the Lion of Judah, will do away with Satan and his demons once and for all.

Jesus told his disciples on the night before he was crucified that this war was about to begin when he said to them: *“Now the prince of this world is to be cast out.”*

The war was on and the prize was men’s souls.

It was David vs. Goliath all over again.

Jesus' artillery is the truth and Satan's artillery is the lie.

Jesus' troops are Christian soldiers and Satan's troops are demons and church-haters.

The battlefield is the hearts of men and the prize is their souls.

So we can confidently predict that the year 2024 will continue to bring spiritual warfare.

It is a war which escalated at the cross and will continue to do so until Jesus returns and proclaims the victory.

Unfortunately, our side, the church, has a problem.

The problem is that in men's fallen condition they tend to be more attracted to Satan's lies than to Jesus' truth.

Their minds are clouded by sin and they don't see Satan for who and what he really is.

If they could they would flee from him in horror.

Knowing this, Satan comes to them in attractive disguises.

In Paul's words, he appears as an "angel of light" who dazzles their imaginations with illusions.

Solomon called these illusions: "*ways that seem right to a man, but whose end is death.*"

Satan tried to convince them that sin liberates them from tyranny and that death is nothing to worry about.

Do you remember what Satan's first and greatest lie was?

"You're not gonna die!"

But having told this lie, from the other side of his mouth he breeds in people a fascination with death.

Why is it that two of the seven wonders of the world are the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramids—both of them tombs.

Why else are violence and death the main fodder of the media?

Why is there a slogan among newspaper editors that goes: "If it bleeds, it leads."

Without being aware of what is happening to them, men's sympathies are drawn to the enemy's entertaining lies and the battle for their souls is fought

in the face of their active opposition to their own best interests.

They forget that what is at stake is their immortal souls and, like lemmings, they rush headlong toward a cliff.

But God knew this would happen and that is why the primary battle in this war is not fought by the armies, but by the two champions.

One is the champion of sin and death; the other is the champion of forgiveness and eternal life.

There can be no truce: the fight is to the death.

Tragically, it has become fashionable today—even in many churches that call themselves Christian—to deny that Satan and his legions even exist.

There are those who maintain that he is an outworn myth, something people in the past believed because they didn't know any better—a boogiemán that mothers used to scared their children when they were misbehaving.

That view, however, cannot be reconciled with the Scriptures, which clearly describe Satan as a living being.

Jesus himself referred to Satan as a living creature and calls him “the evil one.”

It was Jesus Himself who said that Satan was a “liar” and the “father of lies.”

From what the Bible tells us about Satan we can be sure of four things:

***Satan is greedy:*** He wants what is not his—namely the bodies and souls of men—and he will stop at nothing to get them.

***He is superhumanly intelligent and clever.***

Satan is an angel and he possesses powers which far outstrip human powers.

***He is driven by anger and hatred.***

***Finally, Satan is utterly opposed to God and all that God desires for mankind***

Put these all together and as Luther wrote in one of our hymns: *“His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, no one on earth his equal.”*

He mobilized all his resources to pre-empt the coming of our Savior and, having failed to do that, he did



everything he could to destroy him and hinder the work he had come to do.

He tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he corrupted one of his twelve disciples, he persecuted him relentlessly and finally he set enemies on him to murder him.

He is the champion of sin and death and hell, and he is a formidable adversary.

He is smarter than we are, he is stronger than we are, and he is fiercer than we are and if we try to fight him by ourselves we will lose.

That is why it was not God's plan that we should have to face Satan on our own.

That is why He sent a champion, His own Son, to do battle with him in our stead.

And how exactly did Jesus fight Satan?

What strategems did he employ; what power did he bring to bear?

Satan's strategy is very simple: he entices us to multiply our sins until we despair of ourselves and turn ourselves over to him.

Jesus' strategy was to use what might be called a "judo" technique on Satan: He took the momentum of

our sins upon himself, and paid the penalty for them by dying.

Then He rose from the dead and left all our sins in his tomb.

So now, when we have faith in Jesus we have no sins left to answer for.

In Luke's *Gospel*, there is account of how Jesus sent out his disciples, two by two, to go through the cities and villages of Israel proclaiming that the Kingdom of God has arrived.

When the seventy-two disciples return, rejoicing that people have believed them, Jesus says: *"I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning."*

Whenever and wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and believed, Satan is cast out of human hearts.

Such is the power of the Word of God.

So now you know what to expect in 2024.

To put it simply, you can expect war and you can expect peace.

The war will be between Jesus and Satan and the peace will be the peace that passes all human understanding that God puts into our hearts.

Amen.

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