

DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

3

Does My Life Really Matter to God?





LATE ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON, the deadliest tornado to hit the United States in this century tore into Joplin, Missouri. It killed 158 people, injured more than 1,100, and caused \$2.8 billion in property damage. In November 2015, in a series of simultaneous, coordinated attacks, terrorists in Paris struck a concert venue, restaurants, and cafes, leaving 130 dead, 368 injured—and the city and the world reeling.

During the Boston Marathon in 2013, two pressure cooker bombs exploded near the finish line, killing three people and injuring an estimated 264 others.

Some mornings, the world seems to be filled with sunshine, security, and joy. But other mornings, the world feels like a dark place of pain and unending misery. How can life be so beautiful at times and so hopeless at others? What does it all mean? What can you do when life appears to have no purpose and nothing seems fair? Does your life really matter to God? Does He have a plan?

1 | God Created a Perfect World

Let's start with the fact that God is the Creator—the Architect and Designer of everything from supernovas to butterfly wings. How long did it take God to perform His mighty miracle of creation?

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6-9).

God has only to speak, and the electrons, protons, and neutrons hurry off to obey His will. He is all-powerful and does not need long ages of time to accomplish His purposes. We limit His power if we say that God requires millions of years to bring about the evolution of the world or its creatures. He can take time if He chooses, or He can dispense with it altogether.

2 | Six Days to Make Our World

How long did God decide He would take to make our world?

“In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

The eternal, all-powerful Creator could have formed the world in a moment “by the breath of His mouth.” But He chose to take six days to do it. He didn't *need* six days—six minutes would have been sufficient, or even six seconds. The first chapter in the Bible, Genesis 1, describes what God created on each day of creation week:



Creation Week

DAY 1

Light;
sequence
of day &
night

DAY 2

Earth's
atmosphere

DAY 3

Dry land,
vegetation

DAY 4

Sun &
moon

DAY 5

Birds &
fish

DAY 6

Land
animals,
man

DAY 7

The
Sabbath

What crowning masterpiece of creation did God bring into existence on the sixth day?

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over . . . all the earth’. . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26, 27).

God decided to create individuals like Himself who could reason and feel and love. We are made in God’s “image.” This assurance from the Bible helps us understand ourselves and our worth in God’s eyes.

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

On the sixth day, the world was filled with plants and animals, and then God was ready to introduce His masterpiece of creation. The Almighty formed Adam’s body from the dust of the ground. So when God breathed “the breath of life” into his nostrils, man became “a living being”—that is, he came to life.

God named the first man *Adam*, a word that simply means “man” (Genesis 2:19, 20). And to complete His act of creating people in His image, God made the first woman, called *Eve*, which means “living” (Genesis 2:18-25; 3:20). A loving Creator saw the need for human companionship.

Fresh from God’s hand, Adam and Eve both reflected His image. God could have programmed them to love and praise Him on cue. But God wanted a real relationship. Animals make nice house pets, but they can’t carry on a meaningful conversation. Robots can perform useful tasks, but they can’t love.

That’s why God made people. He made us in His image with the capacity to think and choose and love. Adam and Eve were the crown of God’s creation. They were His children, and therefore inexpressibly dear to Him.

3 | Evil Comes to a Perfect World

When God created Adam and Eve, they had everything to make them happy. They enjoyed perfect physical and mental health, living in a beautiful garden home in a flawless world (Genesis 1:28-31). God promised them children, the ability to creatively think, and satisfaction in the work of their hands (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). They experienced face-to-face friendship with their Maker (Genesis 3:8). No trace of worry, fear, or sickness marred their perfect days.

We can still, on occasion, catch an echo of that original Eden during moments when life seems indescribably precious. But what about the other side of life? How did the world change so drastically into a place of suffering and tragedy? The second and third chapters of Genesis tell the entire story of how sin entered our world. Read them at your leisure. Here is a brief summary of their contents:



God limited
the devil's influence
to one tree
in the garden

Some time after God established a perfect world, the devil came to the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve into disobeying their Creator. God limited the devil's sphere of influence to one tree in the garden, the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." And He warned the first human couple to stay clear of this tree—that they should never eat its fruit, because that action would result in death.

But one day, Eve wandered near the forbidden tree. The devil quickly launched into his sales pitch. He claimed God had lied to her and that if she ate the tree's fruit, she wouldn't die but would become wise like God Himself, knowing good and evil. Until then, Adam and Eve had known only good. Tragically, Eve, and then Adam, allowed the devil to con them, and they sampled the forbidden fruit—thus breaking their bond of trust and obedience with God.

God planned for Adam and Eve to "rule" over our world as the stewards of His created works (Genesis 1:26). But because they broke faith with God and, by default, chose the devil as their new leader, the couple lost their jurisdiction. That was the first critical step that eventually led to a planet in rebellion against God.

Today, the devil claims the world as his turf and tries his best to enslave its people.

Many times we find ourselves doing something selfish or even cruel when we really want to do the opposite. Why? It's because there is an evil force at work in our world. The invisible enemy, the devil, works to make people fail morally. Many of the senseless, vicious crimes we read about with dismay are the result of individuals who have consciously or unconsciously given themselves over to the control of this evil power. They find themselves doing things they could not have imagined before.

As you read chapter 3 of Genesis, you will discover that sin caused Adam and Eve to hide from God in fear. Sin affected all of creation adversely (Romans 8:19-22). It was like throwing a wrench in a smoothly running machine. Thorns appeared along with the flowers. The soil suffered from drought, and labor became a burden. Disease began to strike at random. Jealousy, animosity, suspicion, and greed started multiplying human miseries. Most terrible of all, with sin came death!

4 | Who Is This Devil Who Infected Our World With Sin?

The New Testament mentions the devil, or Satan, nearly 100 times. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a real, personal devil. What insight does Jesus give us into the character of the devil?

“He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

According to Jesus, the devil is the originator of sin in the universe, the “father” of sin—and thus of murder and lying.

Thomas Carlyle, the great English philosopher, once took Ralph Waldo Emerson through some of the worst streets of London's East End. As they walked along, silently observing the wretchedness and evil around them, Carlyle finally asked, "Do you believe in the devil now?"

We might extend such a walk to the hospitals, prisons, and cities of today's world, or follow the TV cameras into battles that maim and kill innocent civilians, and then ask, "Do you believe in the devil now?"

5 | Did God Create the Devil?

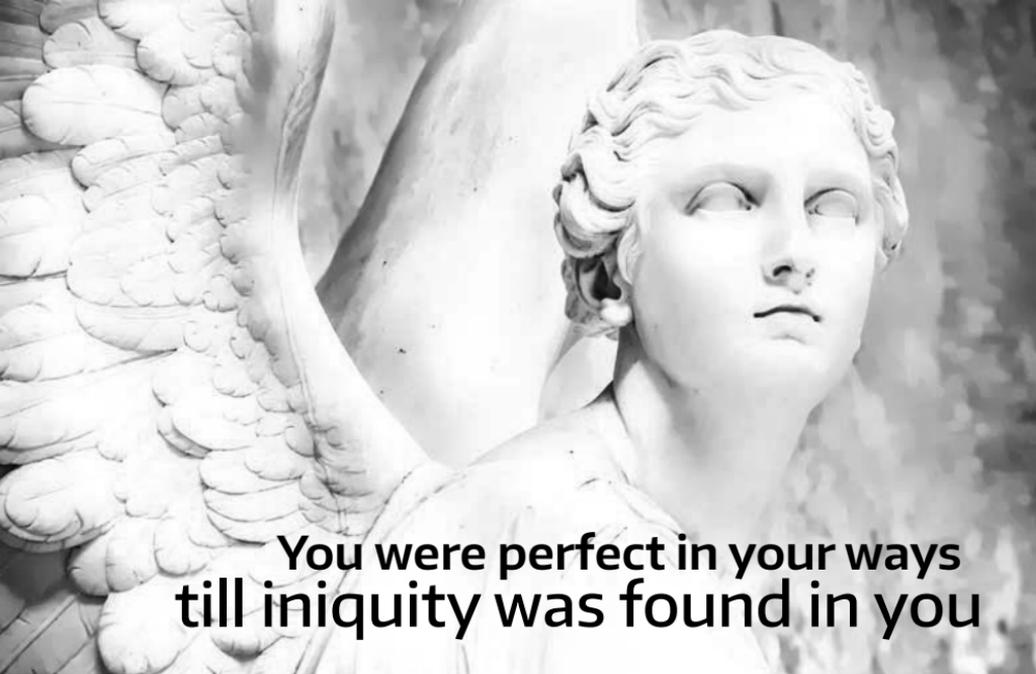
According to Jesus, where did the devil come from?

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

How does the Bible further describe the devil's fall from heaven?

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7-9).

Did God create the devil? No! Everything God makes is perfect. A good God would not create a devil. And yet the Bible states that the devil, along with the angels he had deceived, lost their place in heaven and came to our world where he carried out a successful coup, taking dominion of the world from Adam and Eve.



You were perfect in your ways till iniquity was found in you

Where did the devil come from? How did he get into heaven in the first place?

“You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you. . . . You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:14, 15).

According to this passage, God did not create the devil. He created a perfect angel, and this angel gradually turned himself into a devil. Satan was one of heaven’s leading angels, standing next to God’s throne. But then he sinned—“iniquity was found” in him. Expelled from heaven and posing as Adam and Eve’s friend, he became humanity’s deadliest enemy.

When you see cartoons portraying the devil with horns, a tail, and split hooves, remember this image is not from the Bible. In Scripture, we discover that God’s great enemy was once the most beautiful and wisest of the holy angels, a leading angel, standing next to God’s throne.

6 | Why Did the Devil Sin?

If God created the devil as a perfect angel, then how did this angel become a sinner?

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

The being who became the devil was originally called *Lucifer*, meaning “day star” or “shining one.” Somehow, in this angel’s heart, vanity and ambition began to take the place of devotion. The seed of pride grew into an obsession to actually take God’s place. God had already given him a very high position in heaven as a leader of the angels. But he wanted even more. Growing more and more jealous of God, he sought to seize God’s throne.

Lucifer must have worked very hard to persuade other heavenly beings that he had a better plan. It is easy to imagine Satan arguing that God was holding something back from them—the same argument he used when tempting Eve in Genesis 3. He might have claimed that the divine law was too restrictive, and that God was an uncaring sovereign. He slandered the name of the One whose character defines what love is.

How was this conflict resolved?

“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground” (Ezekiel 28:17).

When Lucifer’s heart became proud and lifted up, he chose to rebel. And God had to cast him out of heaven. Why? Because pride

and selfishness, which are the sins that lie at the root of all sin, cannot exist in the presence of God.

Lucifer twisted love for God into an unhealthy love of self. Jealousy changed the chief of angels into the devil, or Satan. And in order to preserve the peace and harmony of heaven, he and one-third of heaven's angels, those who joined him in rebellion, had to be expelled (Revelation 12:4, 7-9).

7 | Who Is Responsible for Sin?

Why didn't God create beings incapable of sinning? If He had, there would be no problem of evil in our world.

To answer that question, we must go back to why God created us in the first place. He wanted people who could have meaningful relationships. So God did something that only He would think of: "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). This means we are free and responsible. We can decide to love God or to turn our backs on Him.

What special ability did God give to people and angels that distinguishes them from animals?

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve"
(Joshua 24:15).

God gave the people of Joshua's day, as well as the angels and human beings of every generation, the capacity to make real choices.

He challenges the beings He created in His image to choose to do right because their reasoning powers tell them that God's way is best, and to turn from wrong because their reasoning powers warn against the results of disobedience and sin.

The Lord didn't have to make us free moral agents. But only beings with the power to reason and choose can experience real

love. God longed to create individuals who could comprehend and appreciate His character, freely respond to Him in love, and be filled with love for others.

God wanted to share His love so much that He was willing to take the enormous risk of creating angels and people with the power of choice. He knew it was possible that at some point, one of His created beings might choose not to serve Him. The devil was the first being in the universe to make that terrible choice. The tragedy of sin began with him (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8).

8 | The Cross Makes the Destruction of Sin Possible

But why didn't the tragedy of sin stop with Lucifer? Why didn't God destroy him before his "sin disease" could spread? It's important to remember that Lucifer had challenged the fairness of God's government. He had told lies about God. The idea of telling a lie had never entered the minds of the angels. Naturally, they didn't grasp all that lay behind Lucifer's deceptions.

If God had destroyed Lucifer immediately, the angels would have begun to serve Him from fear rather than from love. This would have defeated His very purpose in creating beings with the power of choice in the first place.

How did anyone really know God's way was best? No one had dared to try an alternative. God gave Satan a chance to demonstrate his alternative system. That's why he was given an opportunity to tempt Adam and Eve.

This planet has become a testing ground where the character of Satan and the nature of his kingdom are contrasted with the character of God and the nature of His kingdom. Who is right? Whom can we ultimately trust? These are the issues that the great controversy between Christ and Satan must resolve.

So deceptive was Lucifer that before all the universe could be fully convinced, the nature of his alternative system had to be fully exposed. It has taken time for everyone to really grasp how disastrous Satan's alternative actually is. But eventually, everyone will see that "the wages of sin is death" and that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Every being in the universe will then agree with the declaration:

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

After everyone understands the deadly nature of sin and the destructive nature of Satan's philosophy, God can destroy Satan and sin. He will also have to destroy those who stubbornly resist His grace and cling to Satan's alternative. (More about this in Guides 22 and 23.)

God is just as anxious to resolve the problem of sin and suffering as we are to have Him do so. It was never God's desire to see us suffer in the first place. He is waiting until He can do it on a permanent basis, and until He can both preserve our free will and permanently prevent evil from reappearing.

How can we be certain that God will destroy sin forever? When sin first entered our world in the Garden of Eden, God had a plan to eliminate sin (Genesis 3:15). This act of the permanent removal of sin is described in these words:



“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. . . . Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:10, 13).

When God does finally say of sin, “It is done!” (Revelation 16:17), sin will truly be finished for all time (Nahum 1:9). It will never again infect the universe. Sin’s tragic results will stand out so clearly that disobedience to God will seem repugnant for all eternity.

What makes the final destruction of the devil and sin possible?

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus Christ] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

At the cross, the angels and the unfallen worlds saw Satan for what he is—a deceiver, a liar, and a murderer. There he revealed his true character by compelling men to murder the innocent Son of God. The inhabitants of the entire universe saw how senseless and cruel sin really is. The cross fully unmasked Satan’s motives, and when God destroys the devil and those who persist in sin, all will acknowledge that God is just (Revelation 15:3).

Jesus’ death on the cross made the removal of sin from the universe a certainty, because it exposed Satan’s real intent before all created beings (John 12:31, 32). The cross also revealed Christ for what He is—the Savior of the world. At Golgotha, the power of love stood out in stark contrast against the love of power. It established beyond any question that it is self-sacrificing love that

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What was Jesus willing to do to show how much He loves you, and how much your life means to Him? (Matthew 1:21-23; John 10:11, 17)

2. (a) How does Peter describe your great adversary, the devil? (1 Peter 5:8, 9)

- (b) Can you successfully resist Satan's temptations? (James 4:7)

3. How did Jesus overcome Satan's fierce temptations when He was on earth? (Matthew 4:1-4, 10)

4. What will be the devil's final fate? (Revelation 20:7-10)

5. (a) When sin and sinners are completely destroyed, will sin ever rise again? (Nahum 1:9)

- (b) What will every created being in the universe realize about God? (Revelation 15:2-4)



motivates God in all His dealings with Satan, sin, and sinful men and women.

At the cross, Christ's eloquent demonstration of God's unconditional love overpowered the worst that men and Satan could do. The devil was decisively defeated. The battle had been about who should rule the world—Christ or Satan. But the cross settled it for all time. It must be Christ above all!

Have you discovered a relationship with the Savior who died to reveal His matchless, unchanging love? How do you feel about the One who came to our world as a human being and died in your place to save you from the results of sin? Will you bow your head right now and thank Jesus for His sacrifice, and then ask Him to lead in your life?

My Decision

- I thank God for having a plan to destroy evil forever.
- I choose to respond to God's love by inviting Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to live in my life and guide me each day.

My Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, I thank You for Jesus' victory over Satan in this world. Thank You for offering forgiveness so graciously from the cross. Please come into my life right now and fight for me against the evil in my own nature. Please take possession of my entire being. Help me to stay close to Jesus each day. I thank You for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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