

Chapter 1

Days of Darkness

For millenniums the entire human race had been moving deeper and deeper into a dark cavern. The walls were closing in. The last traces of illumination were fading. The forces of darkness hovered malevolently in the shadows, watching, waiting. Waiting to seal the exit, and to finally extinguish all light and hope.

Error had been so long mated with truth that the bastard twin offspring of distortion and delusion abounded. Mankind was losing its last feeble grip on reality and reason, sinking inexorably downward toward an abyss of no return.

Many had become so blinded that they were no longer capable of discerning light from darkness, good from evil. There was no vision splendid. There were no champions of justice. All the heroes were gone. No one was standing tall.

There was no light left behind the eyes of men and women - that mysterious sparkle that animates and humanizes people. Each person carried the burden of his or her existence like a private cross, for few could discern any high and holy purpose to living. Mankind's spirit had become trapped aboard a powerless, rudderless ship that languished in the doldrums of meaninglessness.

Humor and genuine laughter had disappeared from the land, though one could hear the cackle of a crone, the snicker of conceit, the titter of lust, the outburst of drunken mirth. But the deep, delightful peal of pure laughter that wells up from a man's solar plexus in an uncontainable celebration of the joy of life was not to be heard.

These were perilous times. It was a struggle for most just to survive, just to function, in a world approaching the bottom of the long slide from perfection to disintegration.

The finer things of life, which man so desperately needs to feed his spirit, were forgotten. Literature, music, creativity in all its forms - that marvelous urge fired by the Spirit and inherited from divine parenthood - languished. Energy waned. Lethargy prevailed. Knowledge was not increasing as it is today. Rather, it decreased with every passing year.

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Can you imagine a society where each generation sank to a lower level intellectually, morally, physically, and spiritually than the one preceding it?

The ennobling characteristics of Divinity that had once been stamped so clearly on mankind were becoming all but indistinguishable. The noble features, the quiet dignity, the calm confidence and self-assurance, the gentleness, the sensitivity and tenderness for others, had almost disappeared. Most men lived exclusively for self.

Distorted bodies.

People were shrunken in stature to the smallest and frailest in the history of the race; diseased to the point that illness was more the rule than the exception. Middle-aged at thirty-five, most were in their graves by forty.

Distorted minds.

The human psyche cannot endure without purpose and meaning. Mental illness was epidemic in the late years B.C. Those who could not care for themselves physically, combined with those who could not function mentally, placed an impossible burden on the minority who still struggled to maintain the weak economic and social order.

The powers of darkness delight in taking advantage of men's aimlessness and weakness. The mind that has no star to steer by, no inclination to align itself with something or Someone higher than itself, eventually becomes a ready prey for the eager forces of evil.

The devils had a field day. They gathered like vultures over the carnage of a battlefield. Demons boldly flaunted their dominion over weakened humanity. They stalked the vacant halls of men's minds and raged in the dark night of their despair.

Distorted religion.

For millenniums error had been piled on error by the prince of liars. Two monstrous delusions had come to universally corrupt all religion. Men thought of God as a distant, uncaring tyrant whose only interest in people was to punish them for their wrongs. And people everywhere had come to believe that somehow their own works were the appeasing element necessary to win divine favor and the right to eternal life.

Masterful plot! If the heart of genuine spirituality is an intimate, loving friendship with a heavenly Father who cares supremely for every human being, then the whole foundation of true religion may be destroyed by thinking of God as churlish, distant, and unforgiving,

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making Him out to be more concerned with law and punishment than with people. As a finishing touch, if man's only possible hope of restoration from evil and death lies in trusting Someone beyond himself, then how clever it would be to persuade him that his own persistent efforts were his only key to eternity. All desire, all need for a Saviour would be destroyed!

As distorted as people's religious views were, as flawed as their bodies and minds were becoming, the ultimate tragedy lay in what was happening to their hearts. The human spirit had sunk to its lowest point. For it is, after all, in the fragile realm of the spirit that every person truly lives. Here lies the source of his unique personhood. Here is the fountain of his creativity, the citadel of his reality. A man can have his body broken and still really live, but when his spirit is weakened, his body and his mind begin to decay. Indeed, the spirit of man was made to be the candle of God, designed to be Divinity's tabernacle with humanity. The spirit is the most sacred element of personhood. Above all else, the spirit makes a man more than an intellectually superior animal. It is the part of every person made most uniquely in the very image of God.

After breaking down the external barriers of men's bodies and minds, the forces of evil finally focused their fiendish efforts in this vital arena to obliterate the last trace of God in men. If the bastions of the human spirit could be stormed and that fragile flame extinguished, reality would finally be evicted from the world. Every dream would die. All high and holy meaning would be lost. All purpose for human life as God created it would vanish forever.

And it was working. Peace had been conquered by fear; faith lay shattered by doubt and uncertainty. Serenity had been destroyed by guilt, and hope had been abandoned to despair. The most tragic effect of all was the growing absence of love. Evil's ultimate passion brought about a world without love. Such a place would thrive as a paradise for devils, its atmosphere the exact opposite of heaven's. Selfishness, the ultimate antilove, was about to reign as the supreme principle.

Love, the fuel that fires the flame of the spirit, is the breath and energy of the soul. If love could be eliminated, the very meaning of life would be gone, for to live is to love, and to love is to live. This special love that has its source only in the sacred fountains of true spirituality is really a simple, childlike thing. It persistently chooses to do or say what is for the best good of another, quite apart from the feelings one has or does not have for that person. Love expresses love, not in order

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to be loved back, but just because a need exists. Such love goes beyond emotion and passion to emerge as a high and holy principle of action. It always says, with a gentle voice, "There is nothing, absolutely nothing you can do or say to me that will make me stop loving you."

This special love is nothing less... than God, Divinity come down to walk on earth again and lighten the world through the hearts of men.

This holy love, this bright fire, was fading toward its final glimmer in the final years B.C. Dark shadows crept closer around the hearts of men.

As love vanished from the earth, it became clear that humanity could not elevate and enlighten itself. It could not even prolong its own life force indefinitely. Some dramatic new element from beyond the human sphere must be introduced, or the book on the human race would close with a final, bleak chapter.