

The Struggle Through the Ages

The battle for freedom has continued through history. From the earliest days, the true followers of Jesus have faced persecution. Emperor Nero, it was said, lit his gardens with the light of burning Christian martyrs. The Roman Colosseum became a theater of cruelty. And yet, *“they did not love their lives to the death”* (Revelation 12:11). The dragon was enraged—but the gospel could not be chained.

The fiercest assault came not from pagans, but from a professed Christian power. As centuries passed and the church merged with the state, the true church of Christ was driven underground. Revelation 12 gives a sobering picture: a woman—symbol of God’s faithful people—is pursued by the dragon and *“fled into the wilderness... for 1,260 days”* (Revelation 12:6). This prophetic period, echoed in Daniel and Revelation, marks the long age when truth-seekers—Waldenses, Albigenses, Lollards—preserved the gospel in hidden valleys and secret manuscripts, often at the cost of their lives. Many died as martyrs, burned at the stake for refusing to give up their consciences. The truth of God’s Word was shut away from the people. Those like Wycliffe, Huss, and Jerome

This saga of cruelty defined this era of Europe’s history, known even to this day as “The Dark Ages.” Those who protested tyranny were labeled heretics and burned. Yet from their ashes rose a cry for freedom: *sola Scriptura, sola fide*. The Reformation broke the iron grip of religious absolutism—but not without blood. The woman in the wilderness was wounded, not destroyed.

That cry for freedom crossed the ocean. The Pilgrims fled not for land, but for liberty—freedom to worship without the dictates of kings or popes. America was carved from that longing. But even here, liberty is fragile.

This war against freedom has also targeted not just Christians, but the Jewish people as well. Antisemitism, festering through the ages, reached a horrific climax in Hitler’s Holocaust, when six million Jews were systematically murdered. Yet through the horror have arisen beautiful stories of courage, faith, and God’s sustaining grace.

Through this history of struggle, God has preserved a faithful remnant—those *“who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (Revelation 12:17). The struggle for freedom is not over. It falls to us to carry forward the legacy of freedom.

For those who embrace the liberty that God gives us, no human authority can take it away. In this land, for a little while, we live in a time of relative liberty. Will we use our liberty to serve self—or to glorify God? How will we stand when those civil liberties are taken away? Will we bend to convenience—or stand for conviction? Will we silence our voice—or lift it in truth and compassion?

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free” (Galatians 5:1). In the end, the greatest freedom is not political—it is spiritual, and no earthly power can take that away. The greatest freedom is the power to love, to choose, to follow Christ—freely, fully, and forever.

ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 9

by Pastor Daniel McFeeters

The Struggle for Freedom

There is a longing within every human heart—a restlessness, a cry—that refuses to be silenced. It is the desire to be free. Free to think, to believe, to choose. Free to worship. Free to live without coercion. This longing is not a product of culture or circumstance—it is something deeper. It is the imprint of the Creator on the creature he has made—a lasting legacy of a Father who desires you to be free.

But what is freedom, really? Is it simply the absence of restraint? Is it a costly luxury to be granted only to those responsible enough not to abuse it? Or is freedom an essential ingredient in what it means to be fully human and fully alive?

From Eden to the final judgment, Scripture reveals a profound tension: God is perfectly holy and just—yet He allows moral creatures to disobey Him. He commands righteousness, but never forces it. He pleads for obedience, but permits rebellion.

Why? Because *love* cannot be programmed. True loyalty cannot be forced. Worship cannot be automated. For love to be real, it must be *chosen*. And for it to be chosen, there *must* be freedom.

This study is about that freedom. It is about the great struggle that lies beneath all others: the struggle to be free, and to use that freedom rightly. It asks hard questions: How does God balance justice and mercy, holiness and liberty? Why does He tolerate disobedience? And what kind of freedom does He ultimately offer?

Could it be that freedom is not just a privilege—but a prerequisite for love itself? Let us open Scripture and explore the God who risks everything to make us free.

A Cosmic Struggle

If God is all-powerful, why does evil exist? The answer to this question lies in the very nature of God Himself. God is love (1 John 4:8). True love requires freedom—freedom to respond, to trust, to serve, or to walk away. That means God created His intelligent creatures not as automatons but as moral beings, capable of loyalty or betrayal. This was no small risk. To grant freedom is to open the possibility of rebellion. Yet God took that risk.

Long before Eden, Scripture reveals that sin originated in heaven. Lucifer, once a covering cherub in the very presence of God (Ezekiel 28:14), was “*perfect in [his] ways from the day [he] was created, till iniquity was found in [him]*” (v. 15). Pride led to rebellion: “*I will ascend into heaven... I will be like the Most High*” (Isaiah 14:13–14). Revelation 12 describes a war in heaven in which “*the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail*” (v. 7–8). Lucifer’s choice to let pride rule his heart had corrupted his very nature, and he became “Satan,” the adversary. Deceit and a desire for destruction now rules his heart (John 8:44). The rebellion spread to the other heavenly angels, and ultimately Satan was cast out to the earth.

Why not destroy him then and there? Because the universe needed to see God’s justice and mercy. If God had annihilated Lucifer instantly, fear might have silenced questions—but it would not have answered them. Instead, God allowed the great controversy to unfold so that the truth could be revealed, and love preserved.

So Satan came to earth—not by accident, but by permission. Why would God allow the serpent into Eden? Why would he place the tree of knowledge in the garden? The same reason he allowed Lucifer’s rebellion to spread in heaven: to preserve the reality of choice. God wanted Adam and Eve to love Him freely—not out of ignorance or inevitability, but because they chose Him in the face of alternatives.

He did not desire their fall—He warned them in advance: “*In the day you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). But He did not enclose the tree in barbed wire. He allowed the choice, because without choice, love cannot exist.

And when they fell, He did not abandon them. At that moment, a plan already prepared was set in motion. The promise came in Eden: “*I will put enmity between you and the woman... He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*” (Genesis 3:15). This was the first whisper of the gospel: One would come to crush the serpent’s power, but at great personal cost.

That One was Jesus Christ. The very God who gave freedom to His creatures bore the penalty of their rebellion. He “*humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2:8). He did not revoke our freedom—He redeemed it.

This is the heart of the gospel: God’s love is so deep that He would rather suffer and die than live without us. Yes He still refuses to force us—he only invites our choice. The invitation remains: “*Choose you this day whom you will serve*” (Joshua 24:15).

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

SCRIPTURE: “*So the great dragon was cast out... he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ... And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*” — Revelation 12:9, 11
(See also Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20)

REFLECTION: God risks everything to give us freedom, because love must be free. How does this shape the way you view your choices?

EXPERIENCE: Have you faced struggles or persecution as you seek to follow Christ? What gives you courage to follow your convictions?

QUESTION: How does God’s kind of freedom differ from the world’s version of freedom?

QUESTION: Do you think that the Christian church should try to shape the laws of the country in favor of Christianity? Why or why not? Should churches advocate for a “Christian” government, or support a secular one?

QUESTION: If love requires freedom, what kind of person must you become to truly love as God loves?

RESPONSE: Have you embraced your freedom in Christ, as a child of God? Will you love others by giving them the same freedom He gives you?

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