

SKANDALON

CINDY SCHROPPEL

To Lori Vanta, one of the bravest, most valiant prayer warriors I've ever known. You fought your fight. You finished your course.

Enjoy your rewards. I'll see you at the gates!



Come to Me, all you who labor and are
heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

—Matthew 11:28

Beelzebub, the prince of demons, stood towering over the army under his vast domain of utter darkness and depravity. The darkness was his abode, and he, as well as his demonic forces, could see quite clearly in this caliginous underworld. It was the womb of iniquity, the place where every evil scheme was conceived. He reveled in the fact that the power of darkness was able to hide his well-spun lies from the truth. It was the light that made him tremble, for only in it could his lies be exposed and totally dismantled, causing great harm to his kingdom.

Before him stood a myriad of followers, lined in military fashion, enthusiastically waiting for his orders, and eager to do his bidding. It was his daily ritual to stand before this noxious group to spur them on, keep them focused on the urgency of their assignments, and make adjustments to their plans where needed. He knew the Word of Jehovah. He'd heard the prophecies. He knew time was short. Of course, no one knew exactly how much time he had left to vent his unabashed hatred out against Jehovah and His followers. Not even the dearly beloved Son was privy to that information. However, time was certainly coming to a

climax. Oh, he sensed it all right, but he did not fear, and he would never grovel at the feet of Jehovah or His beloved Son.

There was a time he'd loved and served the great Jehovah. He'd seen His power displayed in creation both of the physical world and the humans who occupied it. He had rejoiced over the great wonder of it all along with the holy angels. But Jehovah's demands for reverence and such single-minded worship proved to be more than he could bear. Jehovah simply could not, or would not, share His throne with anyone else, and it sickened Beelzebub to the core.

Jehovah had proclaimed that Beelzebub was *the* anointed cherub! His resplendent beauty was matchless...except to One. All of the holy angels had been aware of his position and power. He'd led the heavenly choir in such majestic worship, hitting musical notes the likes no human ear has ever heard or even imagined and no heavenly being could match. That should have made him worthy of worship too. He'd convinced at least a third of the angels to bow down in worship to him. They'd recognized his giftedness and were in awe of his beauty. They were ready to give him the homage he felt he too deserved. He'd convinced them that one day they would rule and reign with him for all eternity.

Jehovah was jealous to receive all the glory for Himself. He had labeled him a rebel, a liar and cast him out of the third heaven and onto this godforsaken earth realm where he'd made it his aim to see to it that every human would bow down and worship him and him alone. He had plenty of human followers who were enthusiastically devoted to him.

He would have to step up his game and ramp up his strategies against the children of Jehovah. Those shriveling idiots who chose to put their trust in a God they could not even see. How weak and ignorant they were. He was determined to destroy the faith of each and every one of them and make certain they did not reproduce after their own kind.

This army of demons cowering before him took great delight in manipulating humans to do their bidding. They were a skilled army having thousands of years of experience at their trade. Their nefarious tactics had worked well for them from century to fallen century. The human heart was so utterly predictable. Anger, greed, pride, lust, envy, and jealousy, as well as a multitude of other sins, have all found their place of habitation in the heart of man since he'd first succeeded in instigating the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Jehovah.

In the heart of every man and woman was the deep-seated desire to worship him, and he'd see to it that they had every opportunity to do so. Even if they worshipped themselves, lusting after their own power and preeminence, it was all the same to him. It was still a means to keep them from faithfully following and being blindly obedient to Jehovah.



Zoe scrambled around the house looking for her keys. “Oh, not again!” she moaned out loud though only Emma was in listening range. “Jeez, help me find my keys, Lord.” The baby had obviously gotten a hold of them and misplaced them. “Ahh...there they are,” she stated victoriously as she pulled the keys out from between the couch cushions where the baby had been playing the night before. She then lifted up a casual offering of thanks, “Thank You, Lord!”

She yelled a quick “Good-bye, we’re leaving!” to Michael, who was already seated at his desk in his office, without even giving him a chance to respond. She whisked Emma up into her arms, grabbed her diaper bag while at the same time doing a mental inventory to be sure that everything the baby needed for the day was inside of it before rushing out the door in her usual hurried state.

After strapping her thirteen-month-old daughter into her car seat, she quickly got into the driver side of her silver Lexus and made her way down the winding driveway and off for another

day at work, running late as usual. She hated rushing. *It can't possibly be good for little Emma*, she thought. "Thank God it's Friday," she muttered.

Her job as a receptionist at Dream Maker's Employment Agency wasn't a great job, but it earned a paycheck and helped her and Michael pay the bills. She often, though she'd never say it out loud, wished they'd heeded the wisdom of Michael's parents to buy a home in which they could afford to maintain all of their expenses on Michael's salary alone.

At the beginning of their marriage, they had made a wise purchase of a cute little two-bedroom fourteen-hundred-square-foot townhome in the Village. It wasn't brand new, but it was in a great area of town. She and Michael had enjoyed the time spent together fixing it up. At the time, it had seemed to be more than adequate to meet their needs. They had plenty of room and were proud to entertain friends and have church members over for fellowship or Bible studies.

They'd both agreed to live there for at least five years and hopefully gain a little equity so they could make a profit off of it to help with the purchase of something larger when they were ready to start a family. But she had to admit, she'd become green with envy when Kira and Brad Parker, their best friends, purchased their brand new three-thousand-square-foot home in the new, gated community of Windgate Terrace just north of downtown Houston. Suddenly, their modest townhome seemed too small and out of date. After having their church cell group at the Parker's, she was almost embarrassed to have the group meet at her home any longer. So despite warnings from Michael's parents, they'd purchased her dream home in Windgate Terrace just two streets away from the Parkers.

However, as much as she loved the new house, they'd failed to consider the endless expenses that go along with a house of that size in an upscale neighborhood. They had an electric bill that often equaled the mortgage on the townhouse, outrageous

subdivision dues and a water bill that was sky-high due to their pool. Unfortunately, between work and taking care of Emma, they barely had time to clean the pool, much less get in it.

Just two months into the new home, Zoe realized she was pregnant. In all of the hustle and bustle of moving and decorating a new house, she'd forgotten to take her birth control pills once or twice. They'd agreed to be in the house at least two years before starting a family in order to recoup some of their expenses and put a little money aside. Though Michael had appeared to be excited about the pregnancy, she wasn't aware of the many sleepless nights he'd spent worrying about how they were possibly going to make ends meet.

It'd always been her desire to be a stay-at-home mom, but the strain on their finances demanded she continue to work through her pregnancy, and even after Emma was born. She hated dropping her precious baby girl off at the day care. It grieved her that she wasn't there for all of Emma's "firsts." Her very first steps were taken at the day care. Ms. Tina, Emma's caregiver, had told her all about it, and even filmed it on her smartphone and texted it to her while she was at work. Though Ms. Tina had certainly meant well, she'd sat at her desk and cried while repeatedly viewing the video. It just wasn't the same as being there to see with her own eyes the wonder of her precious baby taking her first steps.

Well, there was no use crying over spilled milk. Today was Friday, and tomorrow she could spend quality time with Emma and Michael. They could enjoy a family day at home since they really didn't have the money to go anywhere or do anything.

She wondered how the Parkers were able to manage their finances so well. She didn't think Brad, a self-employed landscaper, made much more than Michael. Yet Kira was able to stay home with their two children, Simon and Rebekah. They never appeared to worry about money.

Michael, a self-employed contract computer programmer, made a decent salary when he was working. For the most part, he stayed pretty busy, but there were seasons when he could go several weeks in-between jobs. Unfortunately, they hadn't learned to save up for those seasons and often fell behind on their bills because of it. They were always playing catch-up with their finances, living paycheck to paycheck, and she hated it.

Her salary wasn't much, but without her job, there would be no medical insurance. It paid for day care and her car note as well as for any extras they were able to afford. The Lexus was a major splurge, but she'd argued with Michael that if she were going to get up every day and fight the traffic for an hour each way into downtown, she deserved to do it in style and comfort.

Financial worries were foreign to her. The word *budget* had never been in her vocabulary. Her dad was a prominent corporate lawyer, a member of Golden Heights Country Club, and very well known in their city. He'd provided well for her when she was growing up. He occasionally offered to help them out, but Michael was proud and didn't want to be dependent on her father. Still, her daddy would often slip her a couple hundred here and there so that she could continue to dress the way she was accustomed and see to it that Emma never went without. But that was just between her and her dad. She didn't want Michael to feel like he couldn't provide for her and Emma. Michael rarely noticed her new clothes, and when he did, her response was always the same, "I've had this hanging in my closet forever."

Admittedly, most of their financial mess was her fault. She was well aware that Michael, like her father, couldn't say no to her, and she often pushed him to make decisions quickly, knowing that he wouldn't deny her what she desired if she sweet-talked and pleaded with him enough. She supposed she had some of her father's lawyer genes in her too because she could make her case when she wanted something, wearing Michael down until he gave in. He would have been content to stay in the

townhouse, but she'd pleaded with him for the house in Windgate Terrace. She had dangled the idea before him of an extra room that could be used for an office, pointing out that it would be a tax write-off. She'd made sure to emphasize the large patio, deck, and backyard that would be great for entertaining as well as for children when they came along, not foreseeing that it would be much sooner than later. But the icing on the cake was the man cave. She'd seen how blown away Michael had been at Brad's sport-themed room, and she'd promised to make his even more spectacular. She could not be satisfied until she got what she wanted.

She had no one else to blame but her own selfish desires, so off to work she went after dropping her sweet Emma off at the day care into Ms. Tina's loving arms.



Ramiah waited patiently in the corner of the living room as Zoe searched frantically for her keys. As soon as she lifted up a short prayer petitioning God to assist her, he gently nudged her into the direction of the couch by whispering into her spirit a simple thought, *Wasn't the baby playing with them on the couch last night?*

Ramiah was thankful that Zoe had prayed for such an insignificant need. If only she would learn to spend more time in prayer petitioning God for His abundant promises, it would enable him to assist her more often. He was grateful that the Almighty would assign him to guard His most-prized possession. When Zoe was conceived, he'd been given charge over her. Since the day she came forth from her mother's womb, he'd never left her side. He stood vigil over her as she slept at night and dutifully followed her every move throughout the day.

Zoe's father and stepmom had never been churchgoers, however, she had a maternal grandmother who was a devoted worshipper of the Almighty. She'd prayed daily for God to protect her granddaughter and draw her into a relationship with

Him through His Son. As a child, Zoe would attend church without the accompaniment of her father or stepmom at the small First Assembly of God located several blocks away from her house. Occasionally, she would spend the weekend with her grandma and attend church with her. Though she'd enjoyed her grandma's church, she'd loved the praise band at the First Assembly over the hymns at her grandma's church.

Ramiah would accompany her to church and observe her listening intently to her Sunday school teachers with a hungry heart and entering into the worship service. She would sing the praise songs at the top of her lungs, clapping her hands in perfect rhythm, and beaming from ear to ear with joy. When Zoe was ten, he was there praising, along with a host of other angels, as she made the decision to make Jesus her Savior.

It was he who had gently prodded her to go on the youth retreat at Pine Country when she was sixteen, which was where she'd met Michael who'd been interning as a camp counselor. He knew that it was the Almighty's plan for the two of them to connect, and he'd done everything he could to assist in the connection, making sure Zoe was in the right places at the right times.

God, in all of His wisdom, chose Michael for Zoe. They were very different in so many ways, yet the Almighty knew that they'd be perfect for each other. Michael was shy and quiet. His often pensive demeanor was balanced out by Zoe's effervescent, outgoing personality. He was raised in a pastor's home filled with faith and love while hers was filled with greed and jealousy. But they had two things in common, their faith in God and their love for each other.

Michael loved God with all of his heart. He'd made the decision to give his life to Christ at the age of seven. Though he was very young, Michael understood what it meant to become a Christian and had surrendered his life totally over to the Lord. His greatest desire was to be a pastor just like his father.

He'd determined to honor God and remain a virgin until the day he married the woman God had chosen for him. Oh, he'd been tempted on many occasions. The enemy had often whispered in his ear, "Since you know she's the one for you, you might as well have sex together." But His love for God was strong, and by His grace, he'd been able to resist the temptation every time. Deuel had fought the battle against the enemy so Michael could stand against the war raging between his body and spirit.

Michael was Deuel's charge, which often kept Ramiah and Deuel united in their combat for both Michael and Zoe against the enemy of their souls. They kept a relentless vigil, loved and protected them, helped them to make divine connections, and sought the guidance of God for them constantly.



Michael sat staring at the program on his computer screen. With Zoe and Emma now gone, the house was silent. He'd been working on the same line of his program for the last hour with no real progress. He was finding it difficult to focus. The weight of the finances was heavy upon him, and he was concerned that there would not be enough money to pay the bills coming due at the end of the month. For the first time ever, Michael had even thought about holding back their tithe. *Surely God would understand the predicament we're in*, he thought. He felt himself slipping into a familiar funk.

Michael and Zoe had been married five and a half years. She was the love of his life. He adored everything about her. He'd known the moment they'd met at summer camp that she was the one God had fashioned for him. Her blond hair, sparkling blue eyes, cute little figure, and infectious personality had instantly won his heart over. They'd fallen, almost instantly, head over heels in love during that memorable summer, and their affection for each other had only grown when they'd returned back home. Though he'd lived a good fifty-minute drive from her house, they

had devoted all of their free time to each other on the weekends and talked incessantly on the phone for hours at a time every day and, often, well into the night.

Though his parents adored Zoe, her father tolerated Michael. He thought Michael and his family were too radical in their religious beliefs. Amos Richards, Zoe's father, also wished that Michael had better aspirations for his future and disapproved of the fact that he didn't have a degree from an Ivy League college.

They married as soon as he'd graduated from computer tech school. He was twenty-two, and she'd turned twenty a month before they'd married. They were kids with a fairy-tale idea that their love for each other and faith in God would be enough to help them overcome any obstacles they would ever face as a couple.

He certainly did not regret their marriage or Emma coming much sooner than he'd planned, however, reality was showing him that love and faith were simply not enough to carry them to that place of happily ever after. If they were going to make it financially, he would have to heed the wisdom of God a whole lot more, and his wife's determined pleading a little less.

He and Zoe had begun to argue regularly about finances. They'd had a very heated argument the night before, and she'd gone to bed angry. She was never content with what they had but always wanted more than he was able to give to her, and she couldn't understand why it bothered him that she'd run to her daddy to meet her needs when he wasn't able to.

Though he enjoyed the challenge of his work as a contract programmer and the freedom of working from home, he felt the call of God on his life to pastor a church. Unfortunately, he had no choice but to continue working at secular employment because, sad as it is to say, it paid a whole lot more than most pastors' salaries. For the time being, he was trying to remain content with being the assistant youth pastor at his church.

He felt blessed to be a part of New Zion Fellowship, the church they attended. Pastor Steve, though fairly young, was very learned in the Scriptures and a captivating speaker. He was gifted in presenting the Word of God in such a way that anyone could understand it. He was the type of pastor you could touch and easily get to know, very humble, loving and caring. Michael had known the first time they'd attended that he wanted Steve to be their pastor. His father's church was forty minutes away from their new home, making it difficult for them to attend there except for on special occasions. He'd also wanted to experience being in a church other than his father's since it was all he'd ever known.

Michael enjoyed and even looked forward to his personal study and prayer time with God every day. Nothing could compare to the times when God would speak and make His presence real. He loved when the Word came alive, and he received nuggets of revelation as he studied. On several occasions, he'd even heard God's audible voice, which drove him to seek Him that much more. Yet, he knew that he'd slipped in his spiritual walk, and he was not happy as he reflected on some of the ways he'd allowed the world to creep into their home. Television shows that he'd once considered off-limits from watching due to the language, sex scenes, and violence were now recorded if there was a possibility they might miss them. He and Zoe rarely prayed together anymore. When they were dating, they had made it their habit to pray together on the phone before hanging up each night. Life kept them both so busy that it had somehow crowded out what had once been so important to them. And then there was the debt, which kept him filled with anxiety every month when the bills were due, and was the cause of the knot in his stomach and the oppression he was experiencing this morning.

As he sat at the desk staring at his computer, he heard the Holy Spirit gently whisper into his spirit, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*”

He felt the urge to pray. He realized this financial burden was more than he could bear, and though he felt responsible, he knew he really needed the Lord’s help.

“Father,” he began his prayer, “I’ve made a mess of our finances. I’ve made poor financial choices, and I realize that Zoe and I have not sought You on many of them. I’m ashamed, and I ask You to forgive me. Help me, as the spiritual leader of my home, to make right decisions. Give me wisdom and direction. I desperately need Your help and Your grace. Show me what to do to get us out of this bind. Father, please give me a desire to seek You above all that the world has to offer. I ask you to draw Zoe into a deeper relationship with You. I don’t see that hunger in her anymore. I ask all of this in Jesus’s mighty name. Amen.”

He was unaware that Deuel, his guardian angel, had one hand on his shoulder for strength while he raised his powerful sword high in his right hand, ready to thwart any enemy opposition assigned against Michael as he prayed. If he could have seen and heard in the spiritual realm, he would have also known that a host of angels were immediately dispatched to bring forth the answers to his prayer.

Michael felt as if an elephant had been lifted off of his chest. A peace washed over him. He would have prayed sooner, but he felt to blame because he had such a difficult time standing up to Zoe. He wanted to give her everything she wanted and needed. He’d always feared he might lose her once she realized that he’d probably never be able to lavish her with the lifestyle her father had made her accustomed to.

He knew, however that he couldn’t blame Zoe for the mess they were in. It was his responsibility as her husband and spiritual leader to use the wisdom he’d learned from the Scriptures as well as the example of good stewardship his father had mirrored to

him. If he were totally honest with himself, he'd have to admit that when he first saw the house, he had wanted it just as much as Zoe. It was nice having an office in the house instead of working off the kitchen table, and, he had to concede, his man cave was totally sweet.

However, if they were going to keep this house, he would have to learn to say no to Zoe when it needed to be said. "Lord, help me," he muttered.



Beelzebub began his address to the sea of demons arrayed before him. It was the same message he'd spoken over the countless eons to his workers of iniquity with only a slightly different twist as the evolution of technology had afforded them incalculable opportunities and effective methods to entice man to sin.

"It is imperative that we secure the gates of Hades! We know that to lose our battle against Jehovah and His hosts must not even be considered, for the loss to us would have eternal consequences. You are all aware of Jehovah's plans! He is determined that your end will be the lake of fire. But I, your wise master, will not let that fate befall you as long as you listen to me and follow my instructions precisely. We have made great strides against the kingdom of light. We can, and must, win this battle against the forces of Jehovah. You need only to remain my faithful, loyal followers and heed my advice, and we will see the victory." The hideous crowd cheered uncontrollably. Panting like a pack of ravenous dogs, they hung onto every word spoken by their prince of lies.

Spurred by their enthusiasm, he continued his mantra. "We know that humans are weak creatures who can be easily ensnared. By a simple whisper in their ear, they will readily follow the power of your suggestions. You need only listen when they speak and watch their habits and routines so that you can discern the bait best suited to ensnare them."

“Don’t preoccupy yourselves so much with those who’ve chosen to worship me nor with those who have set themselves up as gods of their own lives. They are not a threat to our kingdom as long as they remain entrenched in their lifestyle of destruction. Most of them are so deceived they’ll never find their way to Jehovah as long as you keep the saints from praying for them. Beware, it only takes one devoted, praying child of Jehovah to untangle them from the web of deceit we’ve so painstakingly woven.” The demons wagged their heads in a show of delirious agreement.

“Those who are religious because it satisfies their guilty souls are not a major concern to us either. Leave them to their rituals and pious prayers. They’re not bothering us. It’s those pesky praying Christians you must target.” He shouted with venom spewing from his mouth. “Target the ones who claim to be devoted followers of Jehovah. Seek to destroy those who’ve sworn allegiance to Him and grovel at His feet. It’s their hearts that I desire to corrupt with every fiery dart hell can throw at them.” Again, an uncontrollable cheer went up. An immense hatred, the likes of which no human has ever experienced, filled the atmosphere.

“Keep them so preoccupied with their lives that they’ll be too distracted to seek after their God. Busyness will lead them to spiritual barrenness. Make sure their jobs, families, children’s activities, and their hobbies are so demanding of their time that they have none left at the end of the day for worship of Jehovah. I don’t even mind if they follow after godly well-meaning pursuits as long as they stay too busy to pray.” He bellowed.

“Convince them that there is more than one way to their God and that to think otherwise is hateful and narrow-minded. Utilize the perceived freedom of other religions to draw and entice them away from the truth of their God. Convince them that they must embrace the beliefs of others in order to walk in love, and that to do so pleases Jehovah.”

“Bait them into sexual sin through the use of multimedia that now spans the globe. I am the prince of the power of the airwaves and have been using it to my advantage for years. Continue using the medium of television, Internet, and radio to break down the biblical idea of the family—that marriage should be solely between a man and a woman till death do them part. Persuade them that homosexuality is normal and accepted by Jehovah and that those who practice this lifestyle were merely born that way. Entice them to commit adultery and introduce them to their lovers through social media to which they’ve become addicted like a drug.” Those before him knew the power of media and the damage it could do against Jehovah’s kingdom. Many had worked themselves into such a frenzy of excitement, hooting, and hollering their adoration of the one they worshipped that Beelzebub had to quiet the rabble before he could continue.

“Since the television was invented, we have used it to occupy their time with endless hours of mindless entertainment as well as corrupting their beliefs and feeding their lusts. I revel in the fact that their children have been duped into using it for the play of their graphically violent and often deliciously vulgar games, which enforce the sins of promiscuity, hate, rage, and murder. What a wonderful medium of destruction this invention is to us. Keep them mesmerized by it!”

“Draw them to lust after money and captivate them with an overwhelming craving for the latest gadgets and inventions, the largest houses, and the finest cars. I want materialism to be their god. Sow seeds of lust for food, drugs, and alcohol, making them entirely dependent on something other than their beloved Jehovah.”

“At all cost you must keep them from walking in love with their fellow man. Utilize the weapons of accusation, offense, bitterness, and unforgiveness. It will hinder their prayer life and give you entrance to cause great havoc in their lives. Jehovah cannot bear unforgiveness.” A smile spread across his diabolical

face, the mere thought of making Jehovah unhappy brought immense pleasure.

“Fear will diminish their faith! A fearful Christian is a faithless, powerless Christian.” He spoke the title as if it were poison on his lips. “Your assaults against them must be so strategic and well timed that they become insurmountable in their eyes. Even the smallest of their problems must appear like a mountain before them so that they get their eyes off their God.”

Rage and loathing spewed forth from the prince of darkness as he proceeded with his diatribe. “But above all, discourage them from speaking the truth of God’s Word in faith, for when they do, your assignments against them are broken. His Word has power that even I cannot stand against. When the Word dwells in their hearts and they speak it from their mouths, we have lost the battle. Angelic host are summoned into battle when they pray and speak the Word. Induce them to talk about how sick and broke they are, speaking defeat, failure and fear. Persuade them to talk about their problems so that they loom before them like a giant, impenetrable fortress.” They chattered agreement. The one thing they feared the most was the Word of Jehovah spoken in faith. There were no weapons strong enough to fight against it.

“Remember,” he said as an uncontrollable shudder went through his being, “even the strongest and fiercest of demons tremble at the name of Jesus. Confuse their understanding so that they do not grasp the power of that name nor utter it from their lips. Do you want to cower down to that name?” He shouted with disgust at the very thought. They stood before him paralyzed with fear. “No! Then you must use your wiles to coax them to use the name of Jehovah and His Son as a curse word for that derails it of its power in their life.”

“Your mission is to steal, kill, and destroy everything and anyone that is dear and precious to them. You have many

weapons in your arsenal, and you've had years of experience at your trade," he ranted.

"Some of you are dispatched over geographic locations and rulers while others are assigned to individuals. Whatever your assignment, do it well, for the welfare of our kingdom depends on each and every one of you. And never ever underestimate the power of a human who has the understanding of his covenant relationship with Jehovah."

Completely satisfied with himself and his speech, he let out a roar like that of a ferocious lion, then disappeared into the darkness, leaving his minions to go forth to do his bidding against his adversaries.

Those set over countries, rulers, and authorities quickly departed with their legions following in order to defend their acquired domain against the heavenly forces. Many of them conspired to plot large-scale systematic attacks against churches, ministry leaders, evangelists, and intercessors. Others collaborated on their strategies against single individuals in order to ensure that they were successful in their efforts against Christianity. They understood the power of unity and the need to work together to accomplish their destructive goals.