

The War Behind All Wars



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:7–9, Ezek. 28:12–15, Isa. 14:12–14, Gen. 3:15, John 17:24–26.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Revelation 12:7, 8, NKJV*).

If God is so good, why is the world so bad? How can a God of love allow so much evil to exist? Why do bad things happen to good people? In this week's lesson, we will explore the age-long conflict between good and evil. Beginning with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, we will examine the origin of evil and God's long-suffering in dealing with the sin problem.

God is a God of incredible love. His very nature is love (*1 John 4:7, 8*). All of His actions are loving (*Jer. 31:3*). Love can never be forced, coerced, or legislated. Ellen G. White states it well when she writes, “Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. To deny the power of choice is to destroy the ability to love, and to destroy the ability to love is to eradicate the possibility of being truly happy. God wins our allegiance by His love. He is dealing with the great controversy between good and evil in such a way that sin will never arise in the universe again. God's purpose is to demonstrate before the entire universe that He has always acted in the best interests of His creatures. Looking at the world through the lens of God's love, in the light of the great controversy between good and evil, reassures each of us that right will triumph over wrong and will do so forever.

* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy*, chapters 29–30, to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.

War in Heaven

Read Revelation 12:7–9. What does this passage reveal about the freedom existing in heaven and the origin of evil? When Lucifer rebelled, in what ways could God have responded?

These verses describe a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Satan and his angels warred against Christ and, eventually, were cast out of heaven. It seems extremely strange that war would break out in such a perfect place as heaven. Why did it happen? Did a loving God create a demonic angel who initiated this war? Was there some fatal flaw in this angel that led him to rebel? The Bible clearly explains the origin of evil. It draws the curtain aside in this conflict between good and evil.

Compare Ezekiel 28:12–15 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What went on in the mind of this angelic being called Lucifer that led to his rebellion?

God did not create a devil. He created a being of dazzling brightness named Lucifer. This angelic being was created perfect. Included in his perfection was freedom of choice—a fundamental principle of God’s government, which runs by love, not coercion. Sin originated with Lucifer in heaven itself. There is no logical explanation why this perfect angel should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator.

Lucifer, a created being, desired the worship that belonged only to the Creator. He attempted to usurp God’s throne by questioning God’s authority. His rebellion led to open warfare in heaven.

Although God bore long with Lucifer, He could not allow him to spoil heaven with his rebellion. “The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness, and the justice of the Creator, and the sacred, unchanging nature of His law. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 494, 495.

What lessons can you draw about God’s character in His dealing with evil?

Lucifer Deceives; Christ Prevails

There is no logical explanation for why Lucifer, this perfect angel, should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator. Satan's pride ripened into open rebellion. He accused God of being unjust and unfair. He infected the angels with his doubts and accusations.

Read Revelation 12:4. What does this passage reveal about Satan's ability to deceive? How many of the angels fell for his lies about God?

When war broke out in heaven, the angels had to decide—would they follow Jesus or Lucifer? What was the nature of this war in heaven? Was it a physical war, or a war of ideas, or both? We don't know the details, but the conflict was physical enough that Satan and his angels eventually were "cast out," and a place was not "found for them in heaven any longer" (*Rev. 12:8, 9, NKJV*). This war obviously includes some kind of physical element.

One thing is certain about the war in heaven. Every angel had to decide for or against Christ. Whom would they follow? Whose voice would they listen to? The loyal angels chose to be obedient to Christ's loving commands, while one-third of the angels listened to the voice of Lucifer, disobeyed God, and lost heaven. We, too, in this critical time of earth's history, are called to decide for or against Christ. We, too, are to declare whose side we are on—Christ's or Satan's.

Read Genesis 2:15–17, Exodus 32:26, Joshua 24:15, 1 Kings 18:20, 21, and Revelation 22:17. What fundamental principle in the great controversy do these verses teach us?

When God created humanity, He embedded deep within our brains the ability to think, to reason, and to choose. The essence of our humanness is our ability to make moral choices. We are not mere robots. We were created in God's image, distinct from the animal creation, in our ability to make moral choices and live by eternal spiritual principles. After Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, and after the Fall, God has called His people to respond to His love and be obedient to His commands by choosing to serve Him.

What lessons can we learn from the battle in heaven that relates to our own personal battle with evil? If Satan was able to deceive these righteous, holy heavenly beings, what does this say about his evil attempts to deceive us?

Planet Earth Becomes Involved

When God created the earth, He created it perfect. The Bible says that He “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV*). There was no stain of sin or evil anywhere. But He gave Adam and Eve the same freedom of choice He had given to Lucifer. He didn’t want robots on earth any more than He wanted robots in heaven.

In fact, He went out of His way to make this freedom clear. He planted a tree in the Garden and called it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He made a point of telling Adam and Eve about it because He wanted to make sure they knew they had a choice.

Satan came to the tree, and as Eve lingered there, he told her: “ ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, 5, NKJV*). In other words, if you eat of this tree, you will enter a new sphere of existence. You will have excitement. You will have a thrill that you’ve never known before. Eve, God is keeping something from you. Here, take the forbidden fruit and eat it.

When Eve and later Adam made that choice, they opened a door that God wanted to keep forever closed. It was the doorway to sin—the doorway to suffering, heartache, sickness, and death.

Read Genesis 3:1–3 with Romans 3:23 and Romans 5:12. What do these texts have in common? Describe the ultimate results of sin that plague the entire human race.

At its very core, sin is rebellion against God. Sin separates us from God. Since God is the Source of life, separation from God leads to death. It also leads to worry, anxiety, sickness, and disease. The suffering in our world is ultimately the result of living on a sin-ravaged planet. This certainly does not mean that every time we suffer, we have sinned. It does mean that every one of us is affected by living on this planet.

Read Genesis 3:15; Leviticus 5:5, 6; and John 1:29. What promise did God give Adam and Eve in the Garden after they sinned that would give them hope in their despair? What service did God initiate in Eden that would point them forward through the centuries to the solution to the sin problem?

Love Finds a Way

Adam and Eve have sinned, and God has told them that they must leave their garden home. From now on, toil and suffering will be their lot. Will they have to suffer and finally die with no hope? Is death the end of everything?

It was at this point that God gave them the promise recorded in Genesis 3:15. Looking directly at Satan, the serpent, He said: “ ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’ ” (*NKJV*). They may not have fully understood at that moment exactly what this meant, but they knew they could hope again. In some way, through the “Seed of the woman,” their redemption would come.

The “Seed of the woman,” of course, is Jesus Christ (*Gal. 3:16*). At the cross, Satan bruised His heel. But Jesus’ victory is our guarantee that one day the serpent’s head will be crushed. The door of suffering and death that Adam and Eve opened will one day be closed.

Read Hebrews 2:9, Galatians 3:13, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do these verses tell us about the immensity of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross?

Do you ever wonder if God really loves you? Look at the Cross—look at the crown of thorns, look at the nails in His hands and feet. With every drop of blood that Jesus shed on Calvary, God is saying, “I love you. I do not want to be in heaven without you. Yes, you’ve sinned; you sold yourself into the hand of the enemy; yes, in and of yourself you are unworthy of eternal life. But I’ve paid the ransom to get you back.” When you look at the Cross, you never have to wonder again if you’re loved.

The Bible speaks of a Jesus who came to this world and experienced heartache, disappointment, and pain in common with all humanity. It reveals a Christ who faced the same temptations we face—a Christ who triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell both in His life and through His death on the cross—all for each one of us, personally.

Think about it: Jesus, the One who created the cosmos (*see John 1:3*), stepped down from heaven and not only came into this fallen world but suffered in it in ways none of us ever will (*see Isa. 53:1–5*). And He did it because He loved us—each of us. What a powerful reason to hope!

How did Christ answer Satan’s charges on the cross? In the light of the great controversy between good and evil, what did His death accomplish?

Our High Priest

What Jesus did for us on the cross enables Him also to intercede for us in heaven. Our resurrected Lord is our great High Priest, providing everything we need to be saved and to live in God's kingdom forever.

Read Hebrews 4:15, 16 and Hebrews 7:25. How do these verses give us assurance in a world of temptation, suffering, disease, and death?

The text says that He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (*Heb. 4:15, NKJV*). And it adds, “Let us therefore come boldly”—that means confidently—“to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (*Heb. 4:16, NKJV*).

To state it very simply, Jesus presents us before the universe as clothed in His righteousness, saved by His death, and redeemed through His blood. Everything we should have been, He was. In Christ there is no condemnation for the sins of our past. In Christ our guilt is gone, and through His mighty intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. The chains that bind us are loosed, and we are free.

Read John 17:24–26. What is Christ's longing desire in the great controversy between good and evil?

“When the great sacrifice had been consummated, Christ ascended on high, refusing the adoration of angels until He had presented the request: ‘I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.’ John 17:24. Then with inexpressible love and power came forth the answer from the Father's throne: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ Hebrews 1:6. Not a stain rested upon Jesus. His humiliation ended, His sacrifice completed, there was given unto Him a name that is above every name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 501, 502. Jesus wants more than anything else for us to be with Him in heaven. The desire of His heart, the reason for His death and intercession, is to save us. Do you have a special need in your life? Tell it to Jesus. Where there is sorrow, He brings comfort. Where there is fear, He brings peace. Where there is guilt, He brings forgiveness. Where there is weakness, He brings strength.

Why do you think Christ sacrificed Himself for us? What makes us so valuable to Him?

Further Thought: “In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 500, 501.

“The cross of Calvary, while it declares the law immutable, proclaims to the universe that the wages of sin is death. In the Saviour’s expiring cry, ‘It is finished,’ the death knell of Satan was rung. The great controversy which had been so long in progress was then decided, and the final eradication of evil was made certain. The Son of God passed through the portals of the tomb, that ‘through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’ Hebrews 2:14.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 503.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If God knew that Lucifer was going to rebel, why did He give him the power of choice in the first place? Or when Lucifer rebelled, why didn’t God just annihilate him immediately? What kind of reaction might the unfallen universe have had if God had immediately wiped Lucifer out? Why is the concept of the universe’s interest in the plan of salvation (*1 Pet. 1:12, Rev. 5:13, Rev. 16:7*) so important to understanding the great controversy?
- 2 What reason or reasons can you think of for Christ’s death on the cross? Was it only to reveal the character of God? Was it to pay the ransom price for sin? If so, to whom was the ransom paid? Share your thoughts and give biblical reasons for them.
- 3 When we use the term “the great controversy,” what do we mean? Discuss the various aspects of the great controversy and how this week’s lesson applies to your own life.
- 4 What Bible texts talk about the reality of the great controversy? (*See, for instance, Job 1, 2; Eph. 6:12.*)
- 5 How is the Seventh-day Adventist understanding unique among other Christian denominations? What is it in this great controversy theme that sets Adventists apart?

Volcano, Fires, and COVID-19

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Cuban missionary Misael Delgado Rodríguez faced a major challenge on his first Sabbath in the Canary Islands. Only five people came to worship.

Misael dove into mission outreach work, visiting former church members and others on La Palma island. A month later, he rejoiced with a first baptism. But then COVID-19 suspended outreach efforts, and his problems seemed to multiply. A fire broke out in the north of the island, leaving some members without homes. Then a fire broke out in the south. Then a volcano erupted for 85 days, leaving islanders grappling with earthquakes, toxic gas, and ashes. Two church families lost everything.

Amid the storms, something amazing happened. Faith blossomed. Three years after Misael's arrival, 45 people were regularly worshipping on Sabbath. In addition, seven people had been baptized, five were preparing for baptism, and 15 were taking Bible studies. What happened?

Misael said intercessory prayer was key. "We pray every day at 7 A.M., 2 P.M., and 9 P.M.," he said. "Each member prays for five people."

Each church department also embraced practical evangelism. One project, an initiative of the Spanish Union of Churches Conference, saw church members calling contacts over the phone and offering Ellen White's *Steps to Christ* and related Bible studies. Other projects included educational courses on the church's Facebook page aimed at the needs of families, young people, and little children; musical evangelism in which Adventist young people held mini-concerts on the street or while visiting the sick and needy; a program with ADRA in which members handed out cards that could be presented for food in supermarkets; health presentations; Bible studies; and the distribution of *The Desire of Ages* and other books. On holidays, such as Mother's Day, church members placed a special card inside each book.

The church also opened a discipleship school where laypeople could learn how to evangelize, and four small groups were meeting regularly in homes.

Friendship evangelism has proven very successful, Misael said. While the volcano was erupting, church members spent two months passing out masks and literature with health information related to volcanoes. "That way the church became well known," Misael said. Indeed, many of the 15 people taking Bible studies lost everything in the volcano, and they have acknowledged that the crisis led them to God, he said. "Otherwise, they would not have been interested in learning about God," he said.

Misael looks back at his experience in the Canary Islands with joy. "The beginning was very difficult," he said. "We have been through a lot. But the results are very satisfying. We have seen how God has blessed us."

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in the Canary Islands and around the world.