

Preparation for the End Time

The Cosmic Controversy

Lesson #1 for April 7, 2018

Scriptures: Ezekiel 28:1-2,11-17; Genesis 3:1-7; Revelation 12:1-17; 14:12; Romans 8:31-39.

1. Seventh-day Adventists are extremely blessed by the fact that we have been directed again and again—especially through the writings of Ellen White—to the idea of a great controversy. It is the great controversy which forms the background against which the entire history of our world is played out. But, the great controversy did not begin on this earth; it began in heaven right next to the throne of God! After a war in heaven, Satan and his evil host were cast out of heaven and down to this earth. (Revelation 12:7-12)
2. Fortunately, God has given us a glimpse into the key events in that great controversy. The cosmic conflict will end one day, and God will be victorious. And we have the opportunity to partner with Him in that victory. The rest of the universe has already been convinced that God's case has been won. What about us? What help do we need in order to trust God?
3. How did the great controversy begin? Read Ezekiel 28:1-2,11-17; Isaiah 14:12-14; and Revelation 12:1-17. The passages in Ezekiel and Isaiah picture the fall of Satan in the context of speaking about the prince of Tyre and the king of Babylon. But, it is clear from reading the passages that they are not speaking only about earthly monarchs; it is clearly speaking about the power behind those earthly monarchs, that is, Satan himself.
4. So, what happened in heaven? First of all, we must understand that there was nothing wrong with Lucifer when he was created. God did not make some mistake in the creation of Lucifer. But, God who is love insists on operating His government based on love. And love is impossible without free will.

It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. Yet enough may be understood concerning both the origin and the final disposition of sin to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with evil. Nothing is more plainly taught in [493] Scripture than that **God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin**; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. **Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.** Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God; it is “the transgression of the law;” [See 1 John 3:4. Compare Romans 14:23 and James 4:17.] it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 492.2-493.0. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

5. So, we see how sin and evil began. There was no excuse for it; there never can be. But, without free will, love is impossible; love is essential to the government of God. But, the

exercise of free will is the most dangerous thing in the universe!

6. To understand in considerably more depth what really happened in heaven, see the chapters “The Origin of Evil” in *The Great Controversy* 492-504 and “Why Was Sin Permitted?” in *Patriarchs and Prophets* 33-43. These are very important background chapters for understanding the great controversy.
7. Read Genesis 3:1-7. If possible, also read “The Temptation and Fall” in *Patriarchs and Prophets* 52-62. So, when did Eve begin to sin? Was it when she wandered away from Adam? When she approached the tree? When she began talking to the serpent? When she touched the fruit? When she took a bite of the fruit? Did Eve really understand the implications of what she was doing? Ellen White makes it very clear that Adam and Eve had regular conversations not only with God the Father and Christ but also with the angels who tried repeatedly to explain to them why they should stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
8. What do you think was going through Eve’s mind when Satan said, “You will not surely die”? (Genesis 3:4, *NKJV*) Did she immediately recognize that those words were a direct contradiction of God’s words? It is very clear from what she said to the serpent that she knew what God had said. So, why did she choose to take the fruit? Why didn’t she run away? How good is Satan at deceit in our day? Satan perverts everything he can!
9. And what about us? Do we always make the right choices based on clear and convincing evidence? Is there any reason to doubt God? Why do we listen to Satan? What selfish motivations lead us to do wrong? Why do we like to sin? Does sin often “feel good”?
10. When our first parents sinned and were ushered out of the Garden of Eden, it plunged our world into becoming the headquarters for sin, evil, and death. All we have to do is look at the evening news or watch what is happening around us to see the ultimate effects. Who could deny that we live in the midst of a great controversy?
11. Read Revelation 12:1-17. Look at the different battles in the great controversy which are touched on in these verses:
 1. War in heaven over who could best rule heaven and why and how—Christ won.
 2. War between Christ and Satan. Christ won in the wilderness of temptation and on the cross even though He died. The real victory came when He arose from the grave using His own power. (*DA* 785.2)
 3. War between Satan and the Christian church—Satan seemed to have won.
 4. War between Satan and the last remnants of the Christian church. Who will win?
12. It is important for us to understand who the combatants are in this conflict. This is not a battle between two different “gods.” It is a battle in which a creature is trying to fight against his own Creator. See Hebrews 1:1-2 and John 1:1-4.
13. As we have stated repeatedly, the great controversy is over who is telling us the truth. Is Satan’s selfishness-based government better? Or, is God’s love-based government better? We may all be liars; but, God must always tell the truth.

Romans 3:1-4: ¹Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles? Or is there any value in being circumcised? ²Much, indeed, in every way! In the first place, God trusted his message to the Jews. ³But what if some of them were

not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful? ⁴Certainly not! **God must be true, even though every human being is a liar.** As the scripture says, “You must be shown to be right when you speak;

you must win your case when you are being tried.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 3:1–4). New York: American Bible Society. [Bold type is added.]

14. Notice that “God must be true, even though every human being is a liar.” (*GNB*) But, even more important, notice that the Bible says when speaking of God: “You must win your case when you are being tried.” (*GNB*)
15. Satan was certain that when Jesus was born as a baby Boy, he would be able to get Him to sin. After all, there had never been a human being living on planet earth who had managed to escape sinning. But, Satan was wrong. Even in his incredible temptations in the wilderness, he failed in his battle against Christ. So, what did Satan do? Having failed in his controversy against Christ, he turned with rage against Christ’s followers, the Christians. And we can be assured that that anger will only escalate as the end approaches; Satan knows that if God’s people succeed in becoming pure and remaining pure, his demise is guaranteed.
16. Read Revelation 12:6,14-17. There are a couple of very interesting phrases in these verses. In verse 17 it says the Devil “went off to fight.” What does that imply? In Revelation 13-17, we notice that the Devil worked through human agencies pictured as terrible beasts. What kind of successes has he had in working against God’s people? Read Revelation 17:1-6. Is it possible that the pure woman dressed in “the sun” who fled to the desert or wilderness (Revelation 12:1,6) is the same woman who is later dressed in purple and scarlet and riding on the beast in Revelation 17:1-6? What happened to the nominal Christian church during those years?
17. A period of 1260 prophetic days (sometimes called 3½ years or 42 months) or years is mentioned repeatedly in Daniel and Revelation. See Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6,14; 13:5-6. This period of 1260 years—which began with the ascent of the papacy, controlling civil and military power in 538 A.D. and lasting until 1798 when the pope was taken captive—was a time of terrible persecution and danger for God’s faithful people. Of course, Christian persecution had begun long before that.

These persecutions, beginning under Nero about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, continued with greater or less fury for centuries. Christians were falsely accused of the most dreadful crimes and declared to be the cause of great calamities—famine, pestilence, and earthquake. As they became the objects of popular hatred and suspicion, informers stood ready, for the sake of gain, to betray the innocent. They were condemned as rebels against the empire, as foes of religion, and pests to society. Great numbers were thrown to wild beasts or burned alive in the amphitheatres.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 40.1.

18. Despite the fact that Satan went after God’s faithful people to destroy them in every way he possibly could, he did not succeed.
19. Read Matthew 28:20 and Romans 8:31-39. These two passages make it clear that nothing can separate us from God’s love. However, despite that fact, Christians have been killed and have suffered pain, trials, and every kind of persecution the Devil could dream up.

20. Read 2 Timothy 4:8. While Paul realized that he was about to face final judgment under Nero's administration, he knew that there was a crown of righteousness which would be given to him on judgment day by the righteous Judge and King of the universe.
21. Seventh-day Adventists have an unusual name. But, our name is very significant. As *Seventh-day* members, we believe in the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath and the importance of keeping all of the commandments of God. As *Adventists* we proclaim that our major hope is the soon coming of our Lord and Savior. We need to remember that there was no reason for Him to come the first time and go through all that He went through unless He plans to come back again.
22. Read Jeremiah 44:23; Romans 3:20-26; and Romans 7:7. If you carefully read Romans 3:1-4,25-26, you will discover that God must be "shown to be right" or "to declare his righteousness" three times before Paul talked about what God does for us. Why do you think that is? The great controversy is about the righteousness and trustworthiness of God.
23. Are any of these points hard to understand? Is God's victory in the great controversy clear? Do we understand why we should obey the law?
24. We look forward to a time when the peace and love that was present before the first rebellion in heaven will be restored. Notice this passage.

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven. Lucifer, "son of the morning," was first of the covering cherubs, holy and undefiled. He stood in the presence of the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glory enshrouding the eternal God rested upon him. "Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering.... Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." Ezekiel 28:12-15.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 35.1.

25. **As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been blessed with more truth in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White than any other people in history. Are we making proper use of all that goldmine of truth?**
26. If we are willing to read carefully not only the biblical passages but also the appropriate materials from Ellen White, we must agree that the conflict is not about us or even our salvation—as important to us as that is—the conflict is about who is telling us the truth, God or Satan. The conflict did not even start here on earth; it began in heaven. Who can be trusted with our eternal well-being? How should that impact us? Only God is that trustworthy.

27. Do we want to be a part of God's vast universe and live in agreement with God's law of love? Or, do we want to persist in our selfishness and join the rebels? Do we understand clearly what the implications of our choices will be? How many humans understand this?
28. Have you experienced the effect of getting to know Jesus better and wanting to be closer and closer to Him? There are many promises in the New Testament suggesting that He hopes that we will come and be with Him for the rest of eternity. For example, see John 14:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.
29. Do the passages in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 raise any questions in your mind? While we cannot possibly give an excuse for the origin of evil, can we have a fairly clear picture of how it started? Can you imagine anything so foolish as what Satan did? Why would anyone in his right mind want to follow his example? Why it happened is surely a mystery—the Bible calls it the mystery of iniquity. (2 Thessalonians 2:7)
30. Read Revelation 12:7-9. What actually took place when there was war in heaven? There certainly were no guns or military equipment. What weapons do you think were used? How were Satan and his followers finally expelled? Why do you think God allowed Satan and sin to continue? Couldn't God have destroyed Satan and his influence at any point?

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. **Rebellion was not to be overcome by force.** Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 759.1. [Bold type is added.]

31. So, God chose to win the great controversy by sending a helpless baby Boy to the center of the enemy's camp here on earth! Who would have thought that one could win a war by doing that! So, why was it that the life and death of Jesus managed to win the great controversy? All the questions and accusations of Satan had to be decisively dealt with by the life and death of Jesus before God could claim victory in the great controversy.
32. God had said that sin leads to death. Satan had called that a lie! God does not ask us to believe Him just because He has said so. He demonstrated the truth by sending Jesus. Satan had claimed that it was impossible for any human being to live on this earth in "his kingdom" without sinning. The life of Jesus proved him wrong. Satan had claimed that no human being would serve God perfectly just because he loved God. But, Jesus did! And we can too. Satan had claimed that sin does not lead to death; but, Jesus died the second death which is a direct result of sin and, thus, showed that sin does lead to death! Satan had claimed that he should be treated as equal with Christ because he stood next to God's throne just as Christ did. Jesus proved that He was God by rising from the dead using His own power. Satan could never do that! (John 2:19; 10:18; DA 785.2; 5SDABC 1113.4-8)
 1. The great controversy began in heaven before this earth was created. It involves the entire universe because the character and government of God were in question and were being attacked. So, the answers that were given must be appropriate for the angels and the beings in other parts of the universe as well as for human beings. (See *Desire of Ages* 758-764.)
 2. The really important questions in the great controversy are not about us or our salvation;

they are about God and His character. If God cannot be trusted, then what is the point of salvation? Would you want to live forever with a capricious, vengeful, tyrant? Has God lied to us? We are all sinners. Everyone should know that. So, the questions are not about us; they are about God. And God runs a very open and transparent government. He makes all of His arguments perfectly clear and understandable for anyone who is willing to take the time to study them. Thus, God will ultimately win His case before the entire universe. (See Romans 3:1-4.)

3. Since God is determined to make His case very clear and transparent, all we have to do is study the evidence, believe it, and act on it. Can God be trusted? The evidence which has already won the loyalty of the onlooking universe can and will win our loyalty as well if we give Him a chance. That is why trust/faith is the only requirement for salvation. (Acts 16:31)

4. Satan's case is based on lies and deceit. He is doing everything possible to keep us from discovering the truth about himself and about God.

33. Everything that God does must be done openly and transparently before the eyes of the entire universe. So, God never asks us to believe anything that is not ultimately for our own best good.

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. **His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt.** Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 105.2. [Bold type is added.]

34. When we come to fully understand this, we will obey Him because it is the right thing to do.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 97.3-98.0. [Bold type is added.]

35. Do we clearly understand the issues in the great controversy? Would we be ready to die rather than to misrepresent God?

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