

God's Love and Justice

The Cosmic Conflict

Lesson #9 for March 1, 2025

Scriptures: Matthew 4:1-11; 13:24-27; Genesis 1:31; 3:15; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; John 8:44-45.

1. What is *the cosmic conflict*? Who is involved? Where did it start? When did it start?
[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] Central to biblical theology is the great controversy between Christ and Satan [over the character and government of God]. Although the idea of a cosmic conflict between God and celestial creatures who have fallen and rebelled against God is a prominent motif of Scripture (*Matt. 13:24–30, 37–39; Rev. 12:7–10*) and also is prevalent in much of Christian tradition, many Christians have rejected or neglected the whole idea.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, February 22.^{†§} [Most Christians today have never heard of it!][‡]
2. Understanding the great controversy is essential to our understanding of the overall themes of Scripture. So, we must ask the following questions: Where do we find the great controversy represented in Scripture? And, what is the nature of that conflict? See the two handouts posted in “General Topics” in “Teacher’s Guides” on www.Theox.org: “Satan Before and Soon After His Fall” and “The Great Controversy Described in Scripture.”
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3. While we believe that the great controversy began in heaven when Lucifer/Satan rebelled against God’s government, the **results** of that initial rebellion has spread to the entire universe. It impacts every single being in the universe every day. Satan is seeking to promote his *modus operandi* of selfishness, as opposed to God’s universal principle of love.
4. To understand this in more detail, we need to consider the following themes:
 1. [BSG:] The cosmic conflict is not a dualistic battle of omnipotent powers. The cosmic conflict centers on the moral perfection of God’s character. The conflict does not involve two equally independent powers fighting over an endless war, as **Lucifer was originally created by God and decided to question his Creator’s character.**
 2. The cosmic conflict involves God’s people. **The whole universe feels the effects of the cosmic conflict.** In heaven, Christ was the primary target of Lucifer’s rebellion. In the wilderness, Satan questioned Jesus’ Sonship. Yet, Jesus was victorious, and He is empowered to make us sons and daughters of God.
 3. The resolution of the cosmic conflict could not be [**must not be**] premature. There will come a day when God finally will put an end to evil. Meanwhile, **evil is permitted to come to maturity so that the false charges made against God’s divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings. [See *The Great Controversy* pages 662-678.]**

Life Application: How should the fact that we are facing the effects of the cosmic conflict on a daily basis make us even more aware and willing to depend on

God at all times?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 119.†‡

Matthew 13:24-28: ²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵One night, when everyone was asleep, **an enemy came and sowed weeds** among the wheat and went away. ²⁶When the plants grew and the ears of corn began to form, then the weeds showed up. ²⁷The man’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ **‘It was some enemy who did this,’** he answered.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 13:24-28). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].†‡

5. In this parable, Jesus said in a simple way that the conflict has involved the entire universe.
6. Many people, considering God’s omnipotence have wondered how evil got started. Didn’t God create the world perfect in the beginning?

[BSG:] The master replies to his servant’s question: “ ‘**An enemy has done this**’ ” (*Matt. 13:28, NKJV*). Jesus later identifies the one “ ‘who sows the good seed’ ” as “ ‘the Son of Man,’ ” who is Jesus Himself (*Matt. 13:37, NKJV*), and explains that “the field is the world” (*Matt. 13:38*), and the “ ‘**enemy who sowed**’ ” **the tares is “ ‘the devil’ ”** (*Matt. 13:39, NKJV*), explicitly depicting a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Why is there evil in the world? Evil is the result of the enemy (the devil) who opposes the master. “ ‘An enemy has done this’ ” (*Matt. 13:28, NKJV*). [At what age did Jesus realize His role on this earth and His role in the great controversy?]

This answer, however, provokes the follow-up question, “ ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ ” In other words, why not uproot the evil immediately? “ ‘No, ’ ’ ” the master replies, “ ‘lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest’ ” (*Matt. 13:29, 30, NKJV; compare with Mark 4:29*). According to the parable, **God will finally put an end to evil, but uprooting it prematurely would result in irreversible collateral damage that harms the good.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 23.†‡§

7. Ellen White supported the idea that **the tares must not be pulled out prematurely.**

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. **Had he [Satan/Lucifer] been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. Evil must be permitted to come to maturity.** For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages **Satan must more fully develop his principles**, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the

immutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 498.3-499.0.†‡

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8. At this point in time, we have no way of knowing which are “wheat” and which are “tares.” As humans, we would be in error in trying to root out some who are wheat and retaining some who are tares. But, that does not mean that we should ignore the Devil’s work and pretend that his effects on the human race are not important!
9. Let us review how the great controversy came to this earth and see how it started in heaven.

Genesis 3:1-7: ¹ Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

² “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden,” the woman answered, ³“**except the tree in the middle of it.** God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; **if we do, we will die.**”

⁴ **The snake replied, “That’s not true [thus, calling God a liar who could not be trusted]; you will not die. ⁵God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.”**

⁶ The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it. ⁷As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding and realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

10. Genesis 3:1-7 explains how Adam and Eve succumbed to the Devil’s temptations and introduced evil into the inhabitants of this world.

[BSG:] In this narrative, we see lies about God’s character raised by the serpent, identified as the devil himself (that “serpent of old” [NKJV] in Revelation 12:7–9. The serpent first uses a question to cast doubt on God’s command, nearly reversing what God had commanded in his question. Then, the serpent directly challenges what God had said, saying to Eve, “ ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*).

Someone, either the serpent or God, lied to Eve, who now has a choice to make about whether she will believe what God told her or what the serpent did.

Here and elsewhere in Scripture, **the nature of this conflict is primarily over what and whom to believe**, which is itself integrally related to love. And that is because your beliefs about someone, the kind of person that he or she is, and whether he or she can be trusted, deeply impact whether you will love and trust that person and, in this case, listen to what that person tells you.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, February 24. †‡Ω§

11. Fortunately for us, that is not the end of the story!

[BSG:] In any case, the good news of the narrative of the temptation in the Gospels is that we have a different history of humanity in Jesus, the new Adam. While Adam fell in the temptation in Eden, Jesus was victorious in the temptation in the wilderness. His victory opened up a new horizon for the sons

and daughters of God in the cosmic conflict, inasmuch as Christ is the new Adam, that is, the new head of the human family.

In Matthew's Gospel, the narrative of the temptation appears right after the account of Jesus' baptism. Instead of Luke's universal reference to Adam, Matthew seems to have in mind the people of Israel. The genealogy focuses on such figures as Abraham and David (*Matt. 1:1–17*), and the decree for the death of children in the context of the history of Jesus (*Matt. 2:13–16*) echoes the history of Moses. The comparison with the people of Israel becomes more emphatic when we notice that **all the answers Jesus gave to the devil in the wilderness are scripturally taken from the experience of Israel in the desert** (*Deut. 8:3, Deut. 6:16, Deut. 6:13*). In short, **where Israel failed, Jesus was victorious**, which opens up a new horizon for the people of God in the cosmic conflict, as Christ representatively takes the place of a new Israel.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 121.†‡§

12. Jesus not only defeated Satan in heaven and cast him out, but also on this earth in His human form, Jesus again faced the Devil one-on-one and conquered him through the use of Scripture. Every time Satan attacks Jesus Christ, he loses! The children of Israel had gone through similar problems during their wilderness wanderings and failed; (Deuteronomy 6:16; 6:13; 8:3) but, Jesus met the same temptations and conquered through the use of Scripture.
13. In talking about the conflict between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness, it is interesting to notice some differences between the account of Matthew and the account of Luke.

[BSG:] Luke's account of the temptation of Christ is preceded by the divine affirmation of His Sonship (" 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased' " [*Luke 3:22, NKJV*]) in the narrative of His baptism, which is followed by a genealogical list, starting with Jesus as the "son of Joseph" (*Luke 3:23*), and progressively moving backward (*Luke 3:23–38*) to Adam, "the son of God" (*Luke 3:38*). With this background of Sonship language in mind, the attentive hearer/reader of the Gospel sees Satan beginning his temptations in the wilderness by questioning whether Jesus is, in fact, "the Son of God" (*Luke 4:3*), which is clearly and precisely what the divine voice told Jesus a few verses earlier. If we take Adam as an important reference in the genealogy that immediately precedes the narrative of the temptation, there is a stark similarity with the temptation of the serpent in Eden, where Eve also questioned, at least in her mind, (see *Gen. 3:1, 4*) a clear statement from God to her husband and her about the deadly results of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as indicated a few verses before (see *Gen. 2:17*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 121.†‡§

14. **Jesus made it abundantly clear that the central issue in the great controversy is about whether or not God can be trusted to tell us the truth!**
15. Notice that God did not leave Adam and Eve in a state of hopeless wonderment after their sin; but instead, He immediately told them that a plan was in place to reverse the consequences of their sin.

Genesis 3:15: "I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring's heel."—*Good News Bible*.*

16. But, it is important to recognize that even **the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden provides evidence that the origin of the great controversy was in heaven.** Someone reading the story for the first time, might have gotten the impression that God intended to tempt Adam and Eve. But, understanding the facts in a little more depth, we note **that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was placed in the Garden of Eden as a protection for Adam and Eve by limiting the access that Satan would have to our first parents.** Satan could not follow them wherever they went, trying to tempt them at every corner. **He could only approach the couple at the tree.** The tree was **not** placed in Eden primarily to test or tempt Adam and Eve. The great controversy had already started, and God knew what Satan was capable of doing! **All that Adam and Eve needed to do to avoid Satan and his evil ideas was to stay away from that tree! There was no need for them to approach that tree.**

[EGW:] The tree of knowledge had been made a test of their obedience and their love to God. The Lord had seen fit to lay upon them but one prohibition as to the use of all that was in the garden; but if they should disregard His will in this particular, they would incur the guilt of transgression. **Satan was not to follow them with continual temptations; he could have access to them only at the forbidden tree.** Should they attempt to investigate its nature, they would be exposed to his wiles. They were admonished to give careful heed to the warning which God had sent them and to be content with the instruction which He had seen fit to impart.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 53.3.†† <https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p84.162&index=0>‡

17. God had told Adam and Eve very clearly what would be the result if they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:9,16-17: ⁹He made all kinds of beautiful trees grow there and produce good fruit. In the middle of the garden stood the tree that gives life and the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad....

¹⁶[The LORD said:] “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, ¹⁷ except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day.”—*Good News Bible*.*‡

18. Down through the generations, people have tried to explain in one way or another how evil could have come about. One explanation is known as *dualism*. As C. S. Lewis pointed out:

[BSG in part quoting C. S. Lewis:] Dualism is “the belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the back of everything, one of them good and the other bad, and that this universe is the battlefield in which they fight out an endless war.” To say that these powers are equally independent means that “they both existed from all eternity.”... This dualistic engagement is not the type of cosmic conflict emphasized in the Bible. From a biblical perspective, the one who is now called Satan “was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong.” Similar to dualism, the Christian view is that our “universe is at war.” But unlike dualism, “it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.”—*Mere Christianity* [(New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 33-34, 36].

**Therefore, instead of a cosmic conflict fought between two independent
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omnipotent powers, what we have is a rebellion of the creature against the Creator. According to what we learn about the role of the deceiving serpent in Genesis 3, **the conflict centers on the perception of God’s character as reflected in His law. In other words, is God trustworthy? [Can God be trusted?] Can we believe His words? Obviously, these two questions are crucial for a loving relationship. It is basically impossible to develop a genuine and deep love relationship with someone we do not trust.**

The rebellion of Lucifer against God, which marks the beginning of the cosmic conflict, starts in heaven and is observed in Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:12–19, especially as we compare these chapters with Genesis 3 and Revelation 12. Whereas the passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel refer directly to the kings of Babylon and Tyre, respectively, “in each passage there is a movement from the local, historical realm of earthly kings to the heavenly supernatural realm describing Lucifer/Satan and the rise of the Great Controversy.”—Richard Davidson, “Cosmic Narrative for the Coming Millennium,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos. 1, 2 (2000): p. 107. **Essentially, Lucifer/Satan wants to make himself exalted like God. More precisely, he wishes to possess/usurp God’s dignified status and power, but not His loving character, given that Lucifer/Satan attempts to exalt himself by means of trading/slander (Ezek. 28:16) and lies (Gen. 3:4, John 8:44).**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 119-120.†§

19. There are two very important passages in the Old Testament describing Lucifer’s/Satan’s position in heaven before he fell. Read Ezekiel 28:12-19 and Isaiah 14:12-15.

Ezekiel 28:12-19: ¹² “Mortal man,” he [the LORD] said, “grieve for the fate that is waiting for the king of Tyre. Tell him what I, the Sovereign LORD, am saying: **you were once an example of perfection. How wise and handsome you were!** ¹³**You lived in Eden, the garden of God, and wore gems of every kind:** rubies and diamonds; topaz, beryl, carnelian, and jasper; sapphires, emeralds, and garnets. **You had ornaments of gold. They were made for you on the day you were created.** ¹⁴I put a terrifying angel there to guard you. You lived on my holy mountain and walked among sparkling gems. ¹⁵Your conduct was perfect from the day you were created until you began to do evil. ¹⁶You were busy buying and selling, and this led you to violence and sin. So I forced you to leave my holy mountain, and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the sparkling gems. ¹⁷You were proud of being handsome, and your fame made you act like a fool. Because of this **I hurled you to the ground** and left you as a warning to other kings. ¹⁸You did such evil in buying and selling that your places of worship were corrupted. So I set fire to the city and burnt it to the ground. All who look at you now see you reduced to ashes. ¹⁹You are gone, gone for ever [*sic*-Br], and all the nations that had come to know you are terrified, afraid that they will share your fate.”—*Good News Bible*.*††

Isaiah 14:12-15: ¹² “King of Babylonia, bright morning star, **you have fallen from heaven!** In the past you conquered nations, but now you have been thrown to the ground. ¹³**You were determined to climb up to heaven and to place your throne above the highest stars. You thought you would sit like a king on that mountain in the north where the gods assemble** [Hebrew:

Armageddon]. ¹⁴**You said you would climb to the tops of the clouds and be like the Almighty.** ¹⁵But instead, you have been brought down to the deepest part of the world of the dead.”—*Good News Bible*.*††

20. While each of these passages addresses what appears to be a human prince or king, it is clear from reading the passages that these passages could not apply simply to humans.

[BSG:] Before he fell, the being who became known as Satan was a covering cherub. Beyond being identified as this cherub, he was “ ‘the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty’ ” and was “ ‘in Eden, the garden of God’ ” (*Ezek. 28:12, 13, NKJV*). Neither of these things could be said of the human king of Tyre (or any other human). **Hence, we know that we have been given here a glimpse into the fall of Lucifer.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, February 25.††§

21. Clearly, there was a civil war in heaven. Lucifer/Satan was determined to promote himself to a position equal with the position of God. He tried to accomplish this by using slander against God’s character and government.

[BSG:] The Hebrew term for “trading” in Ezekiel 28:16 also means “slander,” an indication of how Satan will operate against God and against us, as well.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, February 25.‡

22. Having reviewed the history of the great controversy, let us now see how it played out in the experience of Jesus while He was on this earth.

Matthew 4:1-11: ¹ **Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil.** [See Ellen White’s comments below.] ²After spending forty days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. ³Then the Devil came to him and said, “If you are God’s Son, order these stones to turn into bread.”

⁴**But Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.’ ”**

⁵ Then the Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the Holy City, set him on the highest point of the Temple, ⁶and said to him, “If you are God’s Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says:

‘God will give orders to his angels about you; they will hold you up with their hands, so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.’ ”

⁷ Jesus answered, “**But the scripture also says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”**

⁸ Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” the Devil said, “if you kneel down and worship me.” [That is what Satan has always wanted. He appeared as a bright angel; Jesus was emaciated!]

¹⁰ Then Jesus answered, “Go away, Satan! **The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!’ ”**

¹¹ Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him.—*Good News Bible*.*††

23. Notice Ellen White’s comments.

[EGW:] When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted, He was led by **God’s Love and Justice #9** - page 7 of 10

the Spirit of God. **He did not invite temptation. He went to the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate His mission and work.** By fasting and prayer He was to brace Himself for the bloodstained path He must travel. But Satan knew that the Saviour [*sic-Br*] had gone into the wilderness, and he thought this the best time to approach Him.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 114.2.*††
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24. **Jesus was led into the wilderness to spend some time alone to prepare for His ministry over the next three years. He was NOT led by the Spirit “to be tempted.”** Luke, was more careful in his wording about that event.

Luke 4:1-2a: ¹ **Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert,** ²**where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

25. Jesus went into the wilderness to prepare Himself for what He knew was coming. He did not go there specifically to be tempted by the Devil. But, Satan recognized that this might be a prime opportunity for him to tempt Jesus.

26. It is important to notice that in response to all three temptations, Jesus used Scripture to defend Himself against the enemy’s attacks.

27. Jesus is not the only one facing wicked spiritual forces.

Ephesians 6:12: For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age.—*Good News Bible*.*

[BSG:] We have seen some passages that teach a cosmic conflict between God and Satan. But how is such a conflict even possible? How could anyone oppose the omnipotent God? If the cosmic conflict were over sheer power, it would have been over before it started. It must be of a different kind. Indeed, **Scripture reveals that the conflict is a dispute over God’s character—a conflict over slanderous allegations raised by the devil against God,** that (among other things) He is not fully good and loving. **Such claims cannot be defeated by power or brute force but by comparing the two competing characters.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 27.†† [For more details see the handout referenced earlier:

[KHart BTGG PDF Gnrl Satan Before and Soon After His Fall.pdf](#)†

[EGW:] In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not—flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. **Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of heaven, as well as of all the worlds, that God’s government was just, His law perfect.** Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper, and his real object, must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 498.1.*††

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28. For more detail about these claims by Satan, see chapter 29 of *The Great Controversy* by Ellen White, “The Origins of Evil”: <https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p132.2227&index=0>
29. As we have seen in Ezekiel and Isaiah and also in Revelation 12:7-10:

[BSG:] **The devil’s plan from the beginning has been to try to make creatures believe that God was not really just and loving and that His law was oppressive and hurtful to them.** No wonder Jesus refers to the devil as “a liar and the father of” lies (*John 8:44, NKJV*). In contrast, Jesus came to “‘testify to the truth’ ” (*John 18:37, NASB*) and directly counter the lies and slander of Satan, defeating and, ultimately, destroying the devil and his power (*1 John 3:8, Heb. 2:14*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 27.^{†§} [Only by telling the truth can lies be defeated!][‡]

30. **What did Jesus say about truth? Who is telling us the truth?**

John 18:37: So Pilate asked him, “Are you a king, then?”

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. **I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.**”—*Good News Bible.*†* [The truth is about God.][‡]

1 John 3:8: Whoever continues to sin belongs to the Devil, because the Devil has sinned from the very beginning. **The Son of God appeared for this very reason, to destroy what the Devil had done.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

Hebrews 2:14-15: ¹⁴ Since the children, as he calls them, are people of flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. **He did this so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death,** ¹⁵and in this way set free those who were slaves all their lives because of their fear of death.—*Good News Bible.*†*

[BSG:] Revelation 12:9, 10 identifies **Satan (1) as the “serpent of old” (NKJV), (2) as the one who in the heavenly court accuses God’s people,** [See Zechariah 3:1-5.] and (3) as the **dragon ruler who deceives the world.** The Greek word translated “devil” just means “slanderer,” **showing once again that the nature of the conflict is over beliefs, including beliefs about God’s character.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 27.^{†§}

Zechariah 3:1-5: ¹ In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. **And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him.** ²The angel of the LORD said to Satan, “May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire.”

³ Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. ⁴The angel said to his heavenly attendants, “Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear.”

⁵ He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua’s head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.—*Good News Bible.*†*

31. Do we understand clearly that **selfishness** is Satan’s main operating principal? On the other

hand, God has **love** as His operating principal. In which kind of government would you prefer to live? Each side has claimed our loyalty. But, we must decide who is telling us the truth.

32. Jesus not only came to correctly represent the Father and tell us the truth about God's side, but also, He realized that in that process, He would destroy the Devil by countering his lies.
33. As we have seen, evil has been focused on this earth. But, it also involves the angels of heaven where the great controversy began. Passages like Job 1&2 suggest that the charges and challenges of Satan have been spread even to the beings of other worlds.
34. When Jesus was born as a baby, Satan refused to accept the idea that any human, even the divine-human Jesus Christ, could live a life on this earth without sinning. Satan lost the war in heaven; so, he was even more determined to destroy Jesus while He was on this earth!
35. As we review the history of Scripture, it does seem like Satan has come close to winning the great controversy on several occasions. Think of the flood. Think about the conditions in the world just before Jesus came.

[EGW:] Nothing is more plainly taught in 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.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 492.2-493.0. [1911].*†‡
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36. Do you have questions about the great controversy? And how it started? And how it affects you? Consider these questions raised in the Bible study guide:

1. [BSG:] Many people wonder how a sinless creature like Lucifer could sin for the first time. Why is sin so “mysterious” and “unaccountable”? How can we explain this first sin without excusing it or justifying it? That is, **why would explaining its origin be the same as justifying it?**
2. Why did God not simply blot Satan out of existence right away? **Why must evil “be permitted to come to maturity”?** How is this “for the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages”?
3. Why is it so important to understand that **the conflict between God and Satan is not one of sheer power but a conflict of a different kind?** How does a conflict over character make sense in ways that a conflict over sheer power could not?
4. How does understanding the nature of the conflict pull back the curtain, so to speak, on ways in which your own life might be a microcosm of the cosmic conflict? In what ways are you even now experiencing the reality of this conflict? How should you respond in ways that show whose side you truly are on?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, February 28.†‡

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Last Modified: February 9, 2025

Email: Info@theox.org