

Ellen G. White Estate

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE

THE GREAT

CONTROVERSY

What is the great controversy, or cosmic conflict?

STEP 15 OF 28



My Journey to Life, Step 15

Foreword

My Journey to Life will give you the keys for finding peace of mind, harmony of body, and success in relationships. Every step will transform your outlook on life as you unpack each lesson. We pray they will help you to fall in love with the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. So together, let's walk the pathway step-by-step to a new life in Jesus.

Preface

Today's lesson encapsulates the reason for our current existence on earth. Scripture portrays a battle waging between good and evil, God and Satan, and their respective angelic and satanic hosts. Understanding this struggle for human allegiance will definitively answer the question, "Why did Jesus come to live on this planet?"

Step Fifteen—The Great Controversy

What is the great controversy, or cosmic conflict? "All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 113

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-18; Romans 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Revelation 12:4-9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.4

1. Where did evil originate? The conflict between good and evil began in the perfect environment of heaven and will continue until the Second Coming of Jesus. The protagonists are Christ and His angels and Satan and his angels, though good and evil impact all of God's

creation. Understanding the controversy, which involves the entire universe, helps answer the question, “Why did Jesus come to this planet?”

Evil was introduced into heaven when Lucifer, one of God’s created angels, began to nurture pride in his heart. He refused to be content with the exalted position His Creator had given him. In selfishness, he coveted equality with God Himself. Although Lucifer desired God’s position, he had no interest in emulating His character. Lucifer contended for God’s authority but not His love. His rebellion against God’s government was the first step toward his transformation into Satan, “the adversary.”

Using the kings of Tyre and Babylon to symbolize Lucifer, Isaiah and Ezekiel illuminate how this cosmic controversy began. “Lucifer, son of the morning,” the anointed covering cherub, resided in the presence of God when his heart became lifted up because of his beauty and splendor.

Bible Discovery: Ezekiel 28:14, 15, Isaiah 14:12; Revelation 12:3, 4, 7, 9; 20:9

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 312.1; *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 396.2; *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 127.1

2. Who are angels, and how did Lucifer deceive them into rebellion against God? Angels were created to enjoy intimate fellowship with God. Of superior strength, and obedient to God’s Word (Psalm 103:20), they function as servants or “ministering spirits.” Though generally invisible, at times they appear in human form. It was through one of these angelic beings that sin was introduced to the universe.

Lucifer was the highest of the created angels. He began to covertly spread discontent and rebellion in heaven. To accomplish his evil purposes, he used flattery and deceit in his efforts to blind the angels to God’s love.

The resulting discontent and disloyalty to God’s government grew until one third of the angelic host joined him in rebellion (Revelation 12:4). The tranquility of God’s kingdom was shattered, and “war broke out in heaven” (Revelation 12:7). The celestial warfare resulted in Satan—depicted as the great dragon, the ancient serpent, and the devil—being “cast to the earth, and his angels cast out with him.” Revelation 12:9

Bible Discovery: Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 13:2; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 1:1; 3:5; 5:11

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 498.3

3. How was sin, with its accompanying guilt, pain, disease, and death, introduced into Planet Earth? Upon his expulsion from heaven, Satan spread his rebellion to our earth. Disguised as a speaking serpent and using the same arguments that had led to his own downfall, he

undermined Adam and Eve’s trust in the Creator (Genesis 3:5). Infatuated by the prospect of equality with God, Eve believed the tempter’s word—and doubted God’s. Disobeying God’s command, she ate the fruit and influenced her husband to do the same. In believing the serpent’s word over that of their Creator, they betrayed their trust in and loyalty to God. Tragically, the seeds of the controversy that began in heaven took root in the perfect environment of Planet Earth.

In seducing our first parents to sin, Satan ingeniously wrested from them dominion over the earth. Now claiming to be the “prince of this world,” Satan challenged God, His government, and the peace of the whole universe from his new headquarters, our own earth.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3; Luke 10:18; Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 2:2

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 25.2; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 114.3

4. Did God foresee this controversy between good and evil, and the introduction of sin into His newly created planet? Lucifer’s rebellion and Adam and Eve’s sin in their garden home did not catch God by surprise. Several scriptural passages show that God not only foresaw that humankind would be deceived in joining the rebellion, but also that the Godhead had developed a “rescue plan” before time began that would eventually destroy sin forever.

All of God’s intelligent beings were created as free moral agents. This means they could choose to respond to God’s love with grateful obedience or to reject His authority. God longs for connection and relationship with His created beings, not a rigid response from an automaton. The basis of our fellowship is that God is our Creator and Father. We are His greatly loved children. Just as parents treasure freely given love and loyalty from their children, so God gives us freedom to choose to whom we will give our love and loyalty.

Bible Discovery: Malachi 2:10; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 6:19; 1 John 3:2, 3

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.2; *Counsels on Health*, p. 222.2

5. What is the “rescue plan” that God devised before sin’s introduction into our world? The Godhead determined together that, should their created beings be seduced into sin, forgiveness would be extended to all who would repent. However, this reconciliation would cost the terrible death of the Son of God and cause great suffering to all three members of the Godhead. When Jesus became the sin bearer, it fractured their precious union. But the atoning, substitutionary death of Jesus Christ would satisfy divine justice and make it possible for God to adopt into His family everyone who would enter into union with Him, through repentance and submission to God’s benevolent authority.

This plan “laid from the foundation of the world” would meet two great needs of fallen humanity. First, death, the penalty for sin, would be canceled by the atoning sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Second, sin’s power in the human heart would be replaced by Christ’s indwelling power in our heart through the changing work of the Holy Spirit.

Scriptures treat the first Advent of Christ, including His incarnation at Bethlehem, life of self-sacrificing service, and death and resurrection as the climax of the great controversy. Satan is judged at the cross, the plan of salvation is confirmed, atonement for sin made, and the moral law and character of God upheld. God won at Calvary! Satan is a defeated foe!

Bible Discovery: Acts 2:23; Romans 3:21-26; 6:23; Ephesians 1:3-6; Colossians 1:26, 27; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:24

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, 12LtMs, *Manuscript 145*, 1897, par. 11

6. What are the objectives of heaven’s plan of salvation? God, omniscient and eternal, knew that earthlings would revolt and become estranged from heaven. But He was prepared with a plan that would ultimately bring about the moral security of the universe. His objectives include:

1. To clear the character, law, and government of God from all false charges.
2. To reaffirm the loyalty of unfallen intelligent creation.
3. To provide salvation to all sinners who respond to Heaven’s invitation to accept the Creator’s merciful lordship.
4. To destroy Satan and his rebel angels and unrepentant sinners, and to erase all the effects of sin by restoring the earth to its perfect condition and the universe to its original harmony.

Bible Discovery: Malachi 4:1; Psalm 34:21, 22; Isaiah 65:17; Ezekiel 28:16-19; John 12:31; Revelation 15:3

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 48.1; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.1

7. What was the impact of sin and rebellion on humanity? Death was introduced into God’s creation as a direct result of sin. The rulership of earth passed to Satan, who worked to deprave every aspect of human nature—intellect, emotions, spirituality, and willpower. Sin distorted the image of God in humanity, until the earth was filled with such wickedness that God destroyed it by a great flood. Only the righteous Noah and his family were preserved. “Love, no less than justice, demanded that God’s judgments should put a check on sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 100.3

Adam’s rebellion estranged the race from God. Humanity became God’s “enemies” (Romans 5:10) and fell under divine judgment. Only the blood of Christ and grace, the operation of the Holy Spirit on the human heart, provide a way of redemption from the consequences of sin.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3:19; 7:17-23; John 3:5-8; Romans 5:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 5; Ephesians 1:7

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 499.1

8. What is the pivotal issue in the life and death struggle between good and evil? Though God’s moral law is just as essential to the existence of His universe as are the physical laws that hold it together, Satan charges that the law is impossible to obey. Through constant and insidious undermining of God’s law, Satan attempts to overthrow His government and even God Himself.

The temptations brought to Christ by Satan during His earthly ministry reveal the seriousness of the controversy over obedience and surrender to God’s will. These temptations, which represent every temptation humanity faces, prepared Jesus to be a “merciful and faithful High Priest” (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus answered those temptations by quoting Scripture. Today, the great controversy raging furiously around Christ’s authority involves not only His law but also His Word—the Scriptures. Christ is the focus of the Scriptures yet increasing numbers of Christians no longer view the Scriptures as the Word of God, the infallible revelation of His will. It suits both Satan’s nature and purpose to suggest other centers of truth than Christ and His word.

Jesus went to the cross, not only to be our Sin-bearer, but to show that the law of God could not be erased and endures forever. The cosmic controversy came to its climax at the cross. The love and faithful obedience Christ demonstrated in the face of Satan’s cruelty undermined Satan’s position as the usurping prince of this world, assuring his ultimate downfall.

Bible Discovery: Luke 4:1-14; John 8:44; 14:5, 15; Romans 3:31; Ephesians 4:21; 1 John 3:4, 8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 510.3; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.2

9. Is the great battle between good and evil confined to our planet alone? We could consider earth to be the theater of the universe!

The account in the book of Job of a cosmic convocation involving representatives from various parts of the universe gives additional insight into the great controversy. The narrative describes a dialogue between Satan, who came among the representatives, and the Lord, in which Satan tells God he has been going back and forth on the earth. A dialogue ensues regarding Job’s

obedience and the motivation for his exemplary life.

Job’s cosmic perspective provides powerful proof of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and its impact on the universe. This planet is the stage on which this dramatic struggle between right and wrong is being played out.

Bible Discovery: Deuteronomy 10:14; Job 1:6, 7; 2:1-7; Isaiah 66:1; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 11:3

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68.2

10. How does the great controversy explain the mystery of suffering? The first step is to understand that evil did *NOT* originate with God. He who loves righteousness and hates lawlessness is not to blame for the world’s misery. Satan, a fallen angel, is responsible for cruelty and suffering. We can better understand violence, hate, calamities, pandemics, suffering and death when we see them in the framework of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, good and evil—which culminates in the destruction of Satan and his trail of woe.

Two great truths regarding God’s authority emerge from centuries of this cosmic conflict:

1. A governing authority based on love will always govern unselfishly in the best interests of the governed. The laws, requirements, and restraints of a love-based government bring greater joy, health, and meaning to life, drawing one into greater connection with the Lawgiver.
2. In contrast, authority motivated by selfishness ultimately exploits and ruins its subjects, despite promises of pleasure, freedom, and prosperity.

The cosmic controversy shows that the Creator brought into existence sinless angels and human beings, some of whom exercised their free will to rebel against a good, just, and merciful Creator. Consequently, the earth is filled with the terrible results of rebellion. The righteous as well as the unrighteous suffer the effects of sin’s reign, including death. However, the believer is the recipient of God’s redeeming grace and comforting promises of the blessed hope of Christ’s return, the resurrection of the just, and the end of the controversy.

Bible Discovery: Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:9; 1 John 3:8-10; 4:7, 8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 499.1

11. Why does God allow sin and suffering to continue? The fallen angels, including Lucifer, were cast to the earth until the final judgment. This period of waiting allows the principles of self-centeredness to develop so that the watching universe can make their decision about

which side of the great controversy they will choose, with a full understanding of the issues. At the same time, God is showing His mercy and compassion in a thousand ways. He is not willing that any perish, but gives each person continued opportunities to respond to His love.

The two principles of good and evil are locked in mortal combat over us. The spiritual battles that continue help us understand in clearer detail the true nature of the rebellion and the fuller development of the principles that are in conflict. In the end, God's character of love is completely vindicated.

The great controversy is currently being played out on a cosmic level, but also in each of our lives. We must individually decide which side will receive our allegiance. Christ extends to us the door of mercy, forgiveness, and eternal life. Satan tempts us at every turn to choose "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Our decision determines our eternal destiny.

Bible Discovery: Joshua 24:15; Psalm 86:15; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:12; 2 Peter 2:4; 3:9; Jude 1:6

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 504.1

12. What will be the final outcome in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? The cosmic view unveils Satan's attempt to remove Christ from His rightful place. Throughout history, Satan has also sought to persecute God's people and wipe them off the face of the earth. This diabolical effort was particularly fierce during the 1260 prophetic days (years), mentioned seven times in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and ending in 1798.

The year 1798 marks the beginning of the "time of the end" (Daniel 11:33-35; 12:4) and an escalating conflict over whether God or Satan is worthy of worship. The religiopolitical power symbolized by the horn with the eyes and mouth of a man on Daniel's fourth beast (Daniel 7:8) will join with the two-horned beast (Revelation 13:11-17) to force observance of the false day of worship on pain of death.

In his last struggle against God and His church, Satan attempts by economic boycott and threat of death to overthrow the faith of believers in Christ and His seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is the Creator's own memorial of His creative power, and He requires its observance. Adherence to the fourth commandment will precipitate Satan's final assault on God's people (Revelation 12:17—13:18). As the pre-Advent investigative phase of judgment ensues (See My Journey to Life, Step #27), the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 will be proclaimed to every country, and people group, in the entire world. Many will enter a covenant with God—with His law written in their hearts—and give steadfast obedience to their Creator and Redeemer.

At the zenith of Satan's last strike against God's people, Jesus descends from heaven with mighty power to rescue His people. The wicked are destroyed by the brightness of His coming,

(2 Thessalonians 2:8) while Satan’s final annihilation comes at the end of the millennium. (see: My Journey to Life, Step #27). God’s hand, although countered by satanic activity, nevertheless has moved human history to its consummation: the Second Coming of Christ, the eradication of Satan and all the forces of evil, and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.

Considering all these climactic events soon to come, let us choose daily to be *at-one-ment* with Jesus, reflect His beautiful character in our lives, and rest in the security of His salvation!

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:8-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Hebrews 8:10; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:14; 13:15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 589.2, 3 – 590.1; 578.3 – 579.1; 678.3

Reflection...

Satan seeks to create chaos and disaster on a global and individual level because “he knows he has but a short time” (Revelation 12:12). You can have the confidence, however, that Christ, the Vindicator of God’s law, and character, will be your Protector and Friend today, as well as the ultimate Restorer of what mankind lost through sin.

Next Step...

In the next lesson, we will explore a central Christian ritual that has deep personal meaning and offers us certainty and peace in what Christ has done for us.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is involved in the Great Controversy?
2. Where did guilt, death and disease originate?
3. In what sense is the cross of Christ the culminating event in the battle between good and evil, Christ and Satan?

Further Reading

Official Adventist Website: <https://adventist.org/the-great-controversy>

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