

# The Great Controversy<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 1

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Job 1:1–5; Job 1:6–12; Zechariah 3:2; Matthew 4:1; Ezekiel 28:12–16; Romans 3:26; Hebrews 2:14.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “The LORD said to Satan, ‘May the LORD correct<sup>2</sup> you! He has chosen Jerusalem. So may he correct you! Isn’t [is not] this man Jeshua like a burning stick pulled out of the fire?’ ” (Zechariah 3:2, NlrV).

“**BOTH THE [OLD TESTAMENT] AND THE [New Testament]** contain many clues about a continuing war between God and Satan, between good and evil in heaven and on earth. By comparing<sup>3</sup> these verses, we get different pieces of information that can help us understand the full message of the Bible more clearly.”—Adapted from *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), page 969.

The great-controversy theme helps us better understand “the full message” of the Bible, especially the plan of salvation. The theme is clearer in the New Testament. But it is found in the Old Testament too. Perhaps in the Old Testament the clearest example of Satan and this war is found in the book of Job.

This week we will study the great-controversy theme in the book of Job. We will find out how it is the center of the book. And we also will learn how big this war really is. Our lives and stories are different from Job’s. But we have one thing in common: like Job, we are all involved in this controversy.

## DEFINITIONS

1. great controversy—war between Christ and Satan.
2. (to) correct (someone)—to say that someone has made a mistake and to give the correct information.
3. comparing—showing how two or more things are the same or different.

## A LITTLE HEAVEN ON EARTH (Job 1:1–4)

The book of Job begins on a rather positive note. It seems that Job is a man who is blessed in every way.

**Read Job 1:1–4. What do these verses show about the kind of life that Job lived? What was positive about Job’s life?**

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The word for “upright” means straight. It gives the idea of walking on a straight path.

Job certainly seems to have everything. He also has righteous (holy) character (thoughts; feelings; actions). The word translated in Job 1:1 as “blameless” (NIV) comes from a word that can mean “complete” or “full of integrity [honesty].” The word for “upright” means “straight.” It gives the idea of walking on a straight path. In short, the book opens with an almost-perfect picture of a wealthy, faithful, and honest man who “has it all,” as the saying goes, which means he has everything.

But he has it all in a sinful world.

**Read Job 1:5, 6. What do these verses teach us about just how sinful the world is in which Job lives?**

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“Job’s sons and daughters had a good life. But Job worried that his children might displease God. Job was the faithful priest of his household. So he offered sacrifices for each one of his children. Job knew how terrible sin was. He worried that his children might forget to keep and follow God’s principles [laws]. So Job served as their intercessor.<sup>4</sup> He asked God to save them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 1140.

Clearly Job has it good. The Bible shows Job as a man with a full life, big family, a great name. He owns many things. But he still lives on a planet damaged by sin. So as Job will soon find out, life comes with all the dangers that living in this sinful world brings.

**What are the good things in your life right now? How can you learn to be always in an attitude (thought or feeling) of thankfulness for them?**

### DEFINITIONS

4. intercessor—someone who defends or helps another person.

## WAR IN HEAVEN (Job 1:6–12)

The book of Job begins on earth in a place of peace and quiet.

But by the sixth verse of the first chapter, the scene changes. It quickly becomes a very different situation. This situation is one that is not seen by humans without help from God. And, interestingly enough, this picture of heaven does not seem to be as quiet and peaceful as things are on earth. At least this is what is first shown here.

**Read Job 1:6–12. We will study these verses more fully later in this quarter. But what is happening here? How is it different from what we have just seen happening with Job on earth?**

There is so much to explore in these few verses. They show parts of our universe that all our space telescopes cannot find and that human science does not even begin to understand. What is even more important is that these verses also show a great war taking place in the universe. We do not get a calm and peaceful picture from these verses. God talks about Job with (to use a human idea) a sense of pride, like a father who is proud of his son. Satan laughs at what God says about Job. “So Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Does Job fear [serve; respect] God for nothing?’ ” (Job 1:9, NKJV). One almost can hear Satan sneering when he talks to God.

The verse does not say clearly that this war was in heaven. But that is surely where it was. And so you have this angel (Satan), standing before God in heaven and challenging Him to His face, before other “sons of God.” It is hard to imagine someone talking to a worldly leader like that. But here we have an angel (Satan) doing so to God Himself. How could this happen?

The answer is found in a theme that appears in different places and in different ways all through the Bible. It is called the great controversy. And it provides (gives) a powerful picture that helps us understand the whole terrible story of sin and suffering on earth. And even more important, it helps us better understand just what Jesus does for us on the cross. Jesus dies to solve the problem of sin and suffering on the earth.



**Satan stands before God in heaven and challenges Him to His face, before the other “sons of God.”**

**THE WAR ON EARTH (Genesis 3:1–4)**

The book of Job pulls back the veil between the world we can see and the heavenly one we cannot. It shows us truth and facts about the universe that our eyes and ears and worldly ideas about the meaning of life could never show us. (If anything, these verses should show us just how limited our eyes and ears and worldly ideas about the meaning of life are when it comes to understanding the big picture.) And what these few verses show, too, is a war between God and Satan. The controversy (war) is first introduced in the book of Job as taking place in heaven. But it quickly moves to the earth. All through the Bible we find verses that point to this continuing war. This war involves us too.



**The book of Job pulls back a veil and shows us truth and facts about the universe that our eyes and ears could never show us.**

**Read Genesis 3:1–4; Zechariah 3:2; Matthew 4:1; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 3:8; and Revelation 12:9. How do these verses show that a war is being fought with evil powers here on earth?**

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These verses are a few examples of many that point to a real devil. He is a very powerful fallen angel who wishes to harm the human race (group). Many people laugh at the idea of Satan. They do not believe that there is a devil. But with such clear Bible testimony, we should not fall for this lie.

**What are ways that help us to understand how real Satan’s work is in our world? What is our only protection?**

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## THE BOOK OF JOB IS THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IN MINIATURE (SMALL SCALE) (Isaiah 14:12–14)

The beginning of the book of Job shows us a few important points. First, as we have said before, it shows that there is a heaven beyond our world. We can now know there are heavenly beings other than God. Second, the book also shows just how interconnected our earthly life here is with the heavenly kingdom. What happens here on the earth is not disconnected from the heavenly beings in this kingdom. Third, the book shows a war in heaven that is connected to what happens here on earth.

**The book of Job shows Satan involved in the war against God. But what it does not show is how it first started. Read Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–16; and 1 Timothy 3:6. How do these verses help us get some understanding about the controversy?**

Ellen G. White talks about “the law of love” as the foundation of God’s government. She notes that God does not want “forced obedience.” So He “grants [gives] freedom of will” to all His people. But “there was one [Satan] who put the freedom that God had given to His creatures to wrong use. Sin started with [Satan]. Next to Christ, Satan had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory [praise and honor] among the beings [people] who lived in heaven.” —Adapted from *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, pages 34, 35. Ellen G. White then quotes from the verses above in Isaiah and Ezekiel to describe the fall of Satan.

The important idea here is the “law of love,” which opens the way for free will to be real. The Bible tells us that Satan became full of pride because of his own glory and beauty. Why this sin happened, we do not know. It must be part of what 2 Thessalonians 2:7 calls “the mystery of lawlessness” (NKJV). This connection makes perfect sense when we understand how closely tied God’s law is to the foundation of His government. The point is that by the time Satan is introduced in Job, his fall is in the past. And the controversy Satan has started is now going on.

**What are some important choices that you are facing right now? And what Bible promises can you claim to make sure that you make the right ones?**



**The law of love is the foundation of God’s government.**

**ANSWERS AT THE CROSS (John 12:31, 32)**

The book of Job brings up many important issues. But many of these same issues are not answered there. We need the rest of the Bible. And even then “all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12, CEV).

As we learned yesterday, for example, the book of Job says nothing about how Satan’s rebellion (war) begins. Also it says nothing about how Satan finally loses the great controversy. Satan is involved deeply in all the evil that happens to Job in the book. But he appears only twice in Job (Job 1:6–12; Job 2:1–7). And then he is not seen again. Satan disappears. But before he disappears, he causes a lot of damage. The rest of the book does not bring up his name again. Instead, almost everything in the book is about God, not Satan. And that makes sense because, in the end, the book of Job is about God and what He is really like.

The Bible does not leave us without answers to the question about how Satan loses the great controversy. And the reason for Satan’s loss is the death of Jesus on the cross.

**Read John 12:31, 32; Revelation 12:10–12; Romans 3:26; and Hebrews 2:14. How do these verses help explain what Jesus did that will lead to the end of the great controversy?**

At the cross, Satan fully is shown to the universe for what he really is: a murderer. Those who knew Jesus when He ruled in heaven must have been shocked to see Him so cruelly treated by the men who served Satan. That is the “judgment” on Satan that Jesus talks about in John 12. At the cross, the Savior dies for “the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Only then could heaven announce that *salvation has now come*. Here and now, God’s promise, made before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9), becomes real. Because of His death for our sakes, Christ could be “right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26, CEV). At the cross, Jesus destroys the devil’s charges against God. Satan says that it is impossible to keep God’s law. And he says that it is unfair of God at the same time to save those who have broken that law. After Calvary, Satan’s doom is made sure.

**How can we learn to be joyful in what Christ has done for us at the cross, even though we still are going through the great controversy now?**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** The idea of a war between good and evil can be found in many cultures. But today, many Christians deny the fact that the devil and evil angels are real. Many argue that these are just symbols for human and natural evil. From our point of view as Adventists, it is hard to imagine how anyone makes sense of the Bible at all without believing that the devil and his angels are real.

Not all Christians have fallen for the lie that this war between good and evil is not real. For example, a Bible thinker named Gregory A. Boyd has written a lot about the ongoing battle between God and Satan. In the introduction to his book *God at War*, he comments on several verses in Daniel 10. Then he writes: “The Bible from beginning to end shows spiritual beings [angels and demons] who work ‘between’ humans and God. What these spiritual beings do can influence lives, for better or for worse. I argue for the fact that the Bible shows this [idea] to be true.”—Adapted from *God at War* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), page 11. How correct he is.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① What other verses talk about Satan and other demonic powers? What is lost if these are seen only as symbols for the evils done to humans?

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② Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian writer of the sixteenth century, says that it is much better for a ruler to be feared by his subjects than to be loved by them. But Ellen G. White writes: “God decided that Satan could no longer remain in heaven. But He did not destroy him. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the loyalty of His people must depend on the belief in His justice and kindness. The people of heaven and of other worlds were not ready to understand the terrible results of sin. At that time, they could not have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. If God had quickly destroyed Satan, the people of heaven and other worlds would have served God from fear rather than from love.”—Adapted from *The Great Controversy*, pages 498, 499. Why does God want us to serve Him from love and not fear?

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