

# The Cross *and the* Great Controversy



## SABBATH *Afternoon*

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Job 1, 2, 42; Isa. 53:4; Matt. 4:1; John 12:31-33; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 5:11-14; 12:7-19.*

**Memory Text:** “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (*John 12:31, 32*).

However central our salvation was to the Cross, we limit our understanding of the Cross if we limit its import to humanity. Only in the context of the great controversy can we fully understand the Cross and why Christ died. Were it not for issues involving the unfallen universe, the Lord instantly could have wiped out Satan after his rebellion, or He could have chosen to save humankind without resorting to sacrificing Himself. However, because the questions surrounding sin, salvation, God's law, and love go beyond this world, the Lord chose to demonstrate what principles and issues are at stake in this cosmic drama. He not only exposed Satan for what He was but revealed to unfallen worlds, in a way never seen before, what their Creator is really like.

At the center of that revelation is the Cross. If we, who see through a “glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*), marvel at the Cross, what about those who knew Jesus face to face, before His incarnation and humiliation? Christ's death was for the benefit of them, as well.

**The Week at a Glance:** How does the Bible reveal the great controversy? What are the issues? What did Jesus experience at the cross? How were His sufferings greater than what we could know? How does the Cross answer issues in the great controversy?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.*

## The Cosmic Conflict

**Read** the following texts and write out what they reveal about the great controversy, such as who is involved? In what different ways is the controversy being made manifest? What are some of the issues? Where was, and is, it being fought? Who wins? See *Gen. 3:15; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-15; Zech. 3:1-10; Matt. 4:1; 25:41; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 15:57; Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 12:7-17.*

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Along with the powerful and insightful views given to us by the Lord through the ministry of Ellen White, there are scattered all through the Bible, in both Testaments, allusions and references to the great controversy. It's there! Indeed, the above verses are only a sampling of what Scripture says about what can be deemed only as a "cosmic conflict," a literal battle that began in another part of the cosmos and that is now being waged here on earth.

Manifestations of this battle are seen from the beginning to the end of Scripture, from the *enmity* between Satan and God's people first implanted by the Lord in human hearts (*Gen. 3:15*), up through the satanic *wrath* manifested at the end of time against those who "keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17*).

The great news, though, is that the outcome of this battle was assured from the foundation of the world (*Eph. 1:4, Rev. 13:8*). The question facing God wasn't whether He was able to defeat Satan but rather *how* He was going to defeat him and at what cost to Himself. The Cross, more than anything else, reveals what that cost to Himself really was.

**In what ways in everyday life do you experience the reality of the great controversy? How should the knowledge that the outcome is assured help you stand firm amid your own struggles in this often painful, trying conflict?**

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## The Cross and the Defeat of Satan

**Read** John 12:31-33, Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8. How do these texts relate the Cross to the final destruction of Satan in the great controversy?

At the cross, the pivotal moment in the great controversy arrives. Satan has been “cast out,” repudiated, exposed. In vision (*Rev. 12:10*) the apostle John heard “a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.” Only when the Saviour died “for the sins of the whole world” (*1 John 2:2*) could heaven proclaim that *Salvation has now come*. At Calvary the divine promise, first mentioned in Scripture back in Genesis 3:15, became a reality.

**How** do we relate Christ’s sacrificial death to the great controversy?

As we saw earlier, though Christ Himself was sinless, He died under divine judgment as our Sin Bearer (*Isa. 53:6, 11, 12; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18*). At the Cross, God assumed His own judgment on sin. The Creator took upon Himself our humanity so that His life—more than equal to lives of created beings—would atone for the sins of all humanity. In this manner the death of Christ upheld the validity of the moral law and demonstrated that God could be both just and merciful in character. The apostle Paul explains the significance of the Cross, particularly in light of the great controversy, with these points: “God [the Father] presented him [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate [before humanity and unfallen worlds] his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished [that is, moral sin in Old Testament times could not really be atoned by animal blood (*Heb. 10:4*)]—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:25, 26, NIV*).

**At the Cross, Jesus upheld the validity of God’s law, provided a sufficient substitutionary sacrifice for every sinner, exposed Satan’s true character to the universe, and provided the means in which everyone could be saved. What does each one of these things mean to us as individuals immersed in the great controversy? Which one of these accomplishments do you believe is the most important, and why?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 1)

The Cross, and the salvation offered to us because of the Cross, are key to the great controversy. The means by which the Lord upheld the validity of the law, while at the same time saving those who had transgressed that law, were crucial in answering Satan's charges against Him before intelligences in the universe, which themselves have a stake in the outcome of the great controversy (*see Rom. 8:22*).

**Read Revelation 5:11-14. Where is this scene taking place? Who is involved? Whom are they praising, and why? How do these verses help show the centrality of the Cross to the great controversy?**

However deeply involved and interested the universe is in the Cross and the great controversy, we must never forget that redemption was accomplished here on earth, for the sake of human beings. Christ took upon Himself a human, not angelic, nature (*Heb. 2:16*), because He came to save humans, not angels. Without the Cross and all that it entails (including the Resurrection), all humanity would, one way or another, face only eternal oblivion.

**In John 12:32, Jesus talked about His death drawing all men toward Him. What does that mean? What was it about the Cross that draws us to Jesus?**

Christ's assumption of humanity, of human nature, however crucial to the plan of salvation, wasn't enough to save humanity. According to the eternal plan (*2 Tim. 1:9*), Christ would die for the world, taking on Himself, in His Personhood and in His deity, the sins of the world, and all the guilt and suffering inherent in those sins. Every sin was there, at the Cross, falling on the Son of God. What an incredible spectacle to the universe, to see their sinless Commander suffering in Himself for a fallen race. Though the main purpose of the Cross was to save us, it also revealed much about the character of God to the universe.

**All our suffering, as humans, results from sin, does it not? Keeping that thought in mind, what do Paul's words that "he hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*) tell us about what Christ suffered on the cross in our behalf? How does this knowledge help draw us toward Him?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 2)

One of the greatest challenges that Christians face is the question of suffering. Why, if there is an all-powerful and all-loving God, does so much suffering exist? What Christian hasn't at some point felt the power of that daunting question assault his or her own faith?

Of course, the great controversy motif, with the battle between good and evil explained to us, certainly helps us understand the big picture behind suffering. And we know, too, that one day it will all end, and in a way that will vindicate the character of God. Even so, the question of suffering continues to confront us simply because so often there are no real answers to it, at least not answers that make sense to us now.

**Read Job 1, 2, and 42. How does this story help us understand the background of the great controversy that's such a part of human suffering? Yet, what questions about Job's sufferings were left unanswered that still don't make sense?**

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If you look at the sufferings of Job, or of any human being, one point mustn't be missed: All human suffering is individual suffering. Whether we are weeping for ourselves or for others, it's only our own tears that we shed. We can never splice into another person's nerves to feel a spasm of their pain, a prick of their woe, no matter how close or intimate we are. Other people's pain comes to us only as our own; our own, then, is all that we can ever know. Each of us experiences only our own pain, only our own suffering, never other people's. Whether we are suffering and dying alone or en masse, our pain can never exceed what our personal metabolism allows; we will never experience more suffering than what our own delirious cells can carry. No one ever ached beyond what he or she, individually, could; the moment the threshold was crossed, death struck.

**We're often horrified, and rightly so, by the great numbers of people who suffer in tragedies. Yet, no matter the numbers (whether one or one million), each person's suffering is limited by the fact that he or she could suffer no more than an individual could suffer. How does this idea help you understand better the question of human tragedy?**

## The Cross and Human Suffering (Part 3)

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (*Isa. 53:4*).

So far we have seen that all human pain and suffering come from sin. We saw, too, that, as humans, we experience only our own pain, only our own suffering, never another’s. Human suffering is always, and only, individual suffering. And finally we saw that, at the Cross, the sins of the whole world (and the cause of the whole world’s suffering) fell on Jesus, the Sin Bearer.

**With** these few points in mind, read Isaiah 53:1-12. Notice particularly verse 4. In the context of what we’ve been studying the past few days, what does this chapter, especially verse 4, tell us about what God Himself suffered in the great controversy because of sin?

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The point is that although we know only our own pain, only our own suffering, at the Cross, God felt it all, at once. What we know only *individually*, the Lord felt *corporately*, at the Cross. At Calvary, the Lord linked Himself to us through the essence of our humanity; that is, through our pain—only the level He experienced was greater and more intense than any other human being has ever known.

Thus, when the great controversy is over and all the issues resolved, no human being ever will be able to say that he or she suffered worse than did God Himself. At the Cross, the Lord showed humanity and the onlooking universe that in order to deal with the issues raised by Satan in a just, fair, and merciful manner, He Himself was willing to suffer worse than any fallen being ever had or ever could. He bore our griefs and our sorrows—that is, all our griefs and all the sorrows that we feel only as individuals, He felt at once!

Who can even begin to comprehend this incredible reality? No wonder the universe looks upon the Cross with awe, praise, and wonder (*Rev. 5:11-14*).

**How does this idea, that God in Christ, at the Cross, suffered worse than any human ever could, put the whole question of human suffering in a perspective that helps us better understand it?**

**Further Study:** “It will be seen that He who is infinite in wisdom could devise no plan for our salvation except the sacrifice of His Son. The compensation for this sacrifice is the joy of peopling the earth with ransomed beings, holy, happy, and immortal. The result of the Saviour’s conflict with the powers of darkness is joy to the redeemed, redounding to the glory of God throughout eternity. And such is the value of the soul that the Father is satisfied with the price paid; and Christ Himself, beholding the fruits of His great sacrifice, is satisfied.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 652.

“Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, discuss the idea presented this week about the individuality of human suffering as opposed to what Christ suffered corporately at the Cross. What does this idea tell us about the character of God? What does it mean that God Himself would suffer all the woes of the whole world? What would this truth reveal about God to unfallen worlds, as well?
- 2** How should the idea of Christ as our Sin Bearer—as the innocent One suffering for the guilty—impact how we treat others? How does the idea of bearing “one another’s burdens” (*Gal. 6:2*) reflect, in a small way, what Christ did for us at the Cross?
- 3** There are many Bible-believing people who attempt to understand sin, suffering, and salvation apart from the great-controversy motif. Put yourself in their shoes and try to explain some of these things another way, apart from the great controversy. How well does it work?

## Freed to Tell Others

by James Mace\*

Kumar lives in a Hindu country surrounded by the beauty of nature. But 19-year-old Kumar saw little of it. A year earlier he had become possessed by a demon and often writhed on the floor of his family's home for days at a time. His family had sought doctors, sorcerers, anyone who was willing to try, to come and help their son. But no one could free Kumar from the unseen demons that terrorized the family.

Then someone in the village learned that Bupendra was home for a visit. Everyone knew that Bupendra was a Christian. His family had disowned him when he gave his life to Jesus, but perhaps Bupendra's God could help Kumar. Someone asked Bupendra to come and pray for Kumar. When Bupendra and his wife arrived, four men held Kumar down, but he thrashed until he freed himself from their grip.

"Do you believe that Jesus can heal your son from the evil spirits?" Bupendra asked Kumar's family. They nodded hopefully, and Kumar's father answered Yes. "If you all believe, then we will pray for him. With Bible in hand Bupendra and his wife prayed that God would show His power over Satan and deliver Kumar from the demon that troubled him. When Bupendra said Amen, Kumar opened his eyes, calmly got up, and took something to eat. Bupendra left that home rejoicing.

Bupendra returned to the city in which he taught. A week later a young man walked in. At first Bupendra did not recognize him. "I'm the one you prayed for last week, and God delivered me from Satan's power." Kumar's face radiated peace and joy. "I want to serve the Creator God that delivered me from the devil," Kumar said humbly.

Kumar studied the Bible and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He returned to his home village to teach his family and friends what he had learned. Today Kumar's entire family rejoice in the love of Christ and the hope of His soon coming.

Worshippers in Kumar's village sit on straw mats that cover rough stones in the floor of the little stone church that the villagers built. They cannot afford to buy cement for the floor. They study and pray and sing praises to God together.

Kumar's village is the only one within ten days' walk that has an Adventist congregation. There is so much to do; so many need to hear the good news that Jesus brings. Pray for the believers in Kumar's village and those who would believe if they could only hear. Pray that they will hear the words of God before it's too late.

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\*JAMES MACE (*pseudonym*) and his family work in an Asian country that does not welcome Christian missionaries.

This quarter's study, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Mark*, by William G. Johnsson, will take us on an exciting journey to the Holy Land, to Galilee in particular. With John Mark as our guide, we will retrace the steps of the greatest Man who ever lived, Jesus Christ, the One who gave His life as a ransom for ours.

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## Lesson 1—Introducing Jesus, the Son of God

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Writer, John Mark.

MONDAY: The Gospel Begins (*Mark 1:1*).

TUESDAY: The Messenger (*Mark 1:2–8*).

WEDNESDAY: The Commissioning.

THURSDAY: The Ministry Begins (*Mark 1:14–20*).

Memory Text—*Mark 1:11*.

**Sabbath Gem:** This week we'll take a look at Mark's inspired opening and the special emphasis he conveyed. Throughout his Gospel we are conscious that Jesus is the Word made flesh, "full of grace and truth" (*1:14*).

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## Lesson 2—Amazing Miracle Worker

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Demon-possessed Man (*Mark 1:21–28*).

MONDAY: Peter's Mother-in-law (*Mark 1:29–39*).

TUESDAY: The Leper (*Mark 1:40–45*).

WEDNESDAY: The Paralytic (*Mark 2:1–12*).

THURSDAY: Levi Matthew (*Mark 2:13–21*).

Memory Text—*Mark 1:41*.

**Sabbath Gem:** What proof did Jesus start giving of His power? In what ways did the healing of Peter's mother-in-law reveal the principles of a Christian life? How did Jesus show the link between the spiritual and the physical life? In what ways did Christ break down some of the long-standing religious traditions of His day?

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