

What Is the Fight Really About?



SABBATH—APRIL 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 19:41–44; Matthew 23:37, 38; Psalm 46:1; Isaiah 41:10; Acts 2:41; Acts 2:44–47; John 13:35; *The Great Controversy*, chapters 1–2.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So don’t worry, because I am with you. Don’t be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you strong and will help you. I will support you with my right hand that saves you’ ” (Isaiah 41:10, ICB).

Jesus warns about the things that will happen on earth before He comes back.

MAKE THIS PICTURE IN YOUR MIND: You are a shepherd in Bible times. You herd your sheep on the Mount of Olives. You can see the city of Jerusalem and the temple from the hillside. While you watch your flock, you hear people talking. One of the people is Jesus. His words to His followers surprise you. You can see that His followers also are surprised.

The afternoon sun shines on the roof of the temple while Jesus talks. The marble walls of the temple gleam snowy white in the light. “ ‘Do you see all these things?’ Jesus asked. ‘What I’m about to tell you is true. Not one stone here will be left on top of another. Every stone will be thrown down’ ” (Matthew 24:2, NIV). What is Jesus saying?

Jesus explains how Jerusalem will be destroyed. Jesus also talks about Satan’s end-time lies. Jesus warns about the things that will happen on earth before He comes back, too. We can read about these things in Matthew 24. This week, we will study Satan’s two-part plan to trick and destroy God’s people. Satan’s tricks may surprise us, but his tricks never surprise God. For sure, God always protects His people in the most difficult times.

A BROKEN-HEARTED SAVIOR (Luke 19:41–44)

Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. From where Jesus sat, He could see the whole city of Jerusalem. Jesus' heart was broken. Why? John tells us: Jesus "came to the world [the earth and everything in it] that was his own. But his own people did not accept him" (John 1:11, ICB). Jesus did everything to save His people from the coming disaster. Their beloved city, Jerusalem, was going to be destroyed.

Jesus loved His people. With love in His heart, He asked them to stop sinning and to accept His mercy.

Read Luke 19:41–44; Matthew 23:37, 38; and John 5:40. What do these verses tell you about how Jesus felt about His people? How did He feel when they rejected His offer of mercy and forgiveness? What do these verses teach us about Jesus?

Many people ask, If God loved His people, why did He allow Jerusalem to be destroyed? The Roman general Titus led his armies against the city. Thousands of people died in the fight. Jerusalem was destroyed. The Roman soldiers killed many men, women, and children. Where was God when His people suffered so much?

The answer is plain. But it is not easy to understand. Jesus' heart was broken. Jesus was crying. In the past, Jesus tried again and again to touch the hearts of His people. But His people fought against His love for hundreds of years. Soon Jesus could not protect or bless them anymore. God doesn't always stop bad things from happening when we make wrong choices. He often allows us to suffer the penalty of our wrong choices. God didn't cause the Romans to kill innocent children in Jerusalem at the time the city was destroyed. Satan was responsible for those killings, not God.

Satan loves war. Fighting causes the worst feelings to grow in the human heart. Satan's plan is to trick and destroy people and then blame God for his evil actions.

What did Jesus tell His people to do to save them from the Roman soldiers who were coming to destroy Jerusalem? Read Matthew 24:15–20 for the answer.

God wanted to save as many of His people as possible. So, He told His people to escape the city when they saw the Roman army.



God often allows us to suffer the penalty of our wrong choices.

THE SON OF MAN COMES BACK (Psalm 46:1)

God knows the future before it happens. We can see His knowledge about the future, His mercy, and His love in the things that happen just before the Romans destroy Jerusalem. Cestius Gallus, a Roman general, marches his army around Jerusalem to attack it. Right before the attack, the Roman army turns away from the city. The Jewish army chases the Roman army and wins a mighty battle.

At this time, the Christians in Jerusalem escape from the city. The Christians run to Pella, a city in the land of Perea, beyond the Jordan River. “Jesus promised His people a sign. When the sign came, the waiting Christians obeyed the Savior’s warning. God controlled what happened so that the Jews and the Romans couldn’t stop the Christians from leaving the city.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 30, adapted.



We can see God’s knowledge about the future, His mercy, and His love in the things that happen just before the Romans destroy Jerusalem.

Read Psalm 46:1 and Isaiah 41:10. What do these verses tell us about God’s loving watch care?

God is in control of everything that happens in heaven and on earth. He can control things on earth so that His plans will happen, just as He promises in the Bible. At times, God changes His first plans because of the choices we make. But we can be sure that God’s plans for us will happen. We may suffer hard times. People may hurt or attack us because of our faith. They may throw us into prison. We may die for our faith. In the worst of times, God continues to protect His church and keep His people safe.

Read Hebrews 11:35–38 and Revelation 2:10. What do these verses teach us about our fight against Satan? How do these verses help us understand the idea that God keeps His people safe? If God keeps His people safe, why does He allow them sometimes to suffer or die for their faith?

“Satan tried to destroy God’s church, but he failed. Jesus’ followers died for their faith. Yes, Jesus’ followers were killed. But His work continued.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 41, adapted.

The Bible writers suffered much. But they wrote about God’s love. How has God shown His love to you?

LOYAL TO GOD WHEN ATTACKED (Acts 2:41)

The Christian church grew fast. Thousands of people gave their lives to Jesus and joined His church.

Read Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:42; and Acts 8:1–8. What do these verses teach us about Satan’s attacks against the church? Why did the church grow so fast?

Jesus’ followers were told to stop preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:17). They were thrown into prison (Acts 5:17, 18). They were hurt and attacked for their faith (Acts 8:1); and they were killed because of their beliefs (Acts 7:59; Acts 12:2). The Holy Spirit filled Jesus’ followers with strength and courage. They bravely announced the good news that Jesus woke up from the dead. The church grew in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31).

Faith filled the hearts of Jesus’ followers. What made them so brave? They looked at Jesus after He woke up from the dead. That one look changed their lives forever. Jesus gave His followers a new reason for living. Our Lord also gave them His Great Commission (Important Work) (Mark 16:15). He gave them this promise, too: “ ‘But you will receive [get] power when the Holy Spirit comes into your life. You will tell about Me in the city of Jerusalem and over [in the rest of] all the countries of Judea and Samaria and to the ends [every part] of the earth’ ” (Acts 1:8, NLV).

Jesus’ Twelve Followers shared the Good News everywhere (Colossians 1:23). John was the last of the Twelve to die. He died at the end of the first century (A.D. 1 to A.D. 100). After John, other Christians announced the Good News about the living Jesus. Pliny the Younger wrote a letter about Christians. Pliny was the governor of the land of Bithynia, on the north coast of modern Turkey. In A.D. 110, about 80 years after Jesus died, Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan. Pliny said, “Christian men and women, rich and poor alike, are attacked for their faith. These attacks will continue. Christianity is the same as a disease. This ‘disease’ fills the cities and villages.”—Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), page 4, adapted.

Satan attacked God’s church. But the church grew fast.

What can we learn from the church in New Testament times that can help us in the end times?



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CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY (Acts 2:44–47)

The New Testament church grew because its members preached and lived the Good News. Jesus' followers did the work that Jesus did when He lived on this earth. "Jesus went everywhere in the country of Galilee. He taught in the synagogues and told the Good News about God's kingdom. And he healed all the people's diseases and sicknesses" (Matthew 4:23, ERV). Jesus cared deeply for people. The New Testament church cared deeply for people, too. The church grew because its members were unselfish. Church members helped people in need. They shared the Good News with everyone everywhere. Because church members did these things, they changed lives and made life better.



When Jesus touches us with His healing mercy, we want to touch other people's lives with His mercy, too.

Read Acts 2:44–47; Acts 3:6–9; and Acts 6:1–7. What important rule can we learn from these verses about being a real Christian?

The New Testament Christians followed Jesus' example. Peter says, " 'You know how God anointed [filled] Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power [might]. Jesus went around doing good. He healed all [people] who were under the devil's power [control]. God was with him' " (Acts 10:38, NIV). Jesus' church is the same as His body on this earth. During the early years, the church showed Jesus' love to people who were hurt and broken. These Christians were living examples of Jesus' love.

In the worldwide war between good and evil, Satan wants humans to stop loving God. The Good News about Jesus helps people to become as holy as God again in their hearts and minds. Jesus wants to heal people and make them whole. He wants to heal their bodies, minds, hearts, and spirit. In John 10:10, Jesus tells us His plan for each one of us: " 'A thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. But I came to give life . . . life that is full and good' " (ERV).

Jesus' words in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 tell us that terrible things will happen right before Jesus comes back. So, more than ever, people need the healing touch of Jesus. When Jesus touches us with His healing mercy, we want to touch other people's lives with His mercy, too. Then they can be made whole. Jesus sends us as His helpers to touch people's hearts with love. New Testament Christians loved each other in this way and the people in their communities.

THE GIFT OF LOVE (John 13:35)

Read John 13:35 and 1 John 4:21. What do these verses teach us about what it means to be a real Christian?

The early Christian church was a loving church. One of the leaders of the early church was named Tertullian. Tertullian wrote about the church's love: "Many people hate us because of the loving things we do. These people make fun of us and say, 'See how much those Christians love each other!' " (See Tertullian's *Apology* 39, S. Thelwall, translator, adapted.)

The church showed God's love in a special way two times, in A.D. 160 and A.D. 260. During these times, a terrible disease made many people sick. Christians volunteered to take care of the sick and the dying. The disease killed thousands of people. In some villages and towns, almost everyone got sick and died. The Christians' unselfish spirit changed many lives. Millions of people in the Roman Empire became Christians during these times of sickness. The Christians showed Jesus' love to the sick and dying. The church took care of the sick when no one else would help them.

Rodney Stark wrote a book about the Christians who took care of the sick and dying in A.D. 160 and A.D. 260. Stark's book helps us understand what happened during those times in a new and improved way. Stark explains how the whole Christian community served as nurses during the second sickness. These Christians took care of the basic needs of the sick and suffering. Stark writes, "During the worst of the second sickness, around A.D. 260, many local Christians lost their lives while taking care of the sick.

"Many Christians showed unselfish love and loyalty. They did not think about their own needs. They thought only of helping the ones who suffered. The Christians did not worry about danger. They took care of every need of the sick. They cared for them the way Jesus cared for the sick. Many of these Christians got sick and died. But they accepted their suffering and sickness with good cheer."—Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), page 82, adapted.

What does this story about Christian love teach us? How do we learn to die to self so that we, too, can have this same spirit?



The church took care of the sick when no one else would help them.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Satan’s effort to destroy God’s work on earth failed. God’s people continued to share the Good News. The church continued to grow. Jesus’ followers took the Good News into places where the Roman army failed to enter. At this time, many Roman leaders were torturing Christians for their faith. A Christian told some of these leaders: ‘You may kill us, hurt us, and accuse us. . . . Your actions are not fair. They are proof that we are innocent. . . . Your mean and nasty ways won’t help you win against us.’ The worse the Romans were to the Christians, the more other people wanted to join the church. The Christian said, ‘The more often you kill us, the more we Christians grow in number. The blood of Christians is the same as seed that caused the church to grow.’—Tertullian, *Apology*, paragraph 50.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 41, 42, adapted.



“‘The more often you kill us, the more we Christians grow in number.’”

“Many people are weak in faith. They can’t understand why God allows evil people to hurt the innocent. People who are weak in faith can’t understand this mystery. They are confused. Some of them are ready to stop trusting in God because He allows awful men to enjoy success while good and holy men suffer. The awful men also hurt these good and holy men. The Christians who are weak in faith ask, ‘If God is fair, filled with mercy, and all-powerful, why does He permit evil men to do all these terrible things?’ We must not ask this question. God has given us enough proof of His love. We must not doubt His mercy because we can’t understand how God works and why He allows some things to happen.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 47, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What does suffering for our faith teach us? Why do you think that God allows His people to suffer at times?
- ② What if a friend asked you these questions: “Where is God when I suffer? If He loves me, why am I having so many problems?” How would you answer your friend?
- ③ How can your local church become a caring community that helps other people? Talk about ways your church can use the things you learned from this week’s lesson to help people.

SARA'S CHOICE: SOMERSAULTS OR THE SABBATH?

Seven-year-old Sara loved to do acrobatic stunts, which are also named gymnastics. Gymnastics were easy for Sara to do. She was very good at it. She really liked to do cartwheels, which are a special type of somersault. In a cartwheel, you put your hands on the ground and bring your legs, one at a time, over your head. Then you land on your feet again. Sara could do cartwheel after cartwheel in a row. She only stopped when she fell down.

Sara loved something more than she loved gymnastics. She loved God.

So, Sara didn't want to miss church when her gymnastics coach announced that a big acrobatic show would be held on Sabbath in her hometown of Iesi, Italy. The show happened only one time each year. At the show, children showed their parents and families what they had learned that year in gymnastics.

Sara felt sad when her coach said that the gymnastics show was going to be held on the Sabbath.

At home, Mother saw Sara's sad face. Mother said, "God can solve any problem." Mother told Sara to tell her problem to God.

That evening, Sara prayed. "Dear God, I am very sad to hear the news that I will miss the show. But I want to honor You."

Sara and the other children met to practice gymnastics every Tuesday and Thursday. The coach announced the date for the gymnastics show on a Tuesday. Sara prayed that Tuesday night and again on Wednesday night.

At the Thursday meeting, the coach announced that the date for the gymnastics show had changed. She said, "We have to delay the show for one day because of some problems. So, the show will now be on Sunday."

Sara was surprised. She was so happy! When she told her mother the good news a little later, Mother smiled.

Mother said, "You must trust God always!"

Sara always has. This experience was her first big answer to prayer. The experience made Sara's faith in God grow strong. On Sabbath, Sara told the church about what happened. A church member preached a special sermon about Sara's prayer. Then he invited Sara up to the front of the church to tell her story about what God did for her.

Sara is now 19. She says, "I always pray to God to solve my problems in life."

This story illustrates Church Growth Task #7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" plan. Church Growth Task #7 is: "We will help youth and young adults put God first in their lives." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org. Read more about Sara next week.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Sara could do cartwheel after cartwheel in a row.