

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

PART 1

Lucifer, the Archdeceiver

Surveying the sources

Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 35–43, 52–54, 61, 63–70, 78, 79.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- get a big-picture understanding of how sin began;
- better understand the gospel—how God plans to save human beings from the consequences of sin; and
- realize that they, themselves, are active participants in the great controversy.

Focusing on group members' needs

The needs of the different members of your class or discussion group will vary depending on where each one is in his or her spiritual journey. Try to determine the makeup of the group. Are some new Christians? New Adventists? Have some not yet made a commitment to Jesus? You won't be able to customize the discussion to fit every individual situation, but try to be sensitive to areas of understanding or experience that may need special attention. And, of course, there are basic spiritual needs and issues that will apply to every member of the group. For example, Lesson 1 focuses on how the sin problem began, how God intends to deal with it (and is dealing with it), and the fact that each one of us is personally involved in the ongoing struggle between God and Satan. These are basic issues that apply to every human being.

Starting the discussion

Invite class members to try to imagine that they are angels in heaven before sin existed. As angels, how would they have reacted to Lucifer when he first began to voice discontent? Surprise? Fear? Confusion? Sympathy? Why would the angels have found it difficult to grasp what was happening or where it would lead?

Next, invite class members to try to imagine themselves as Eve in Eden before sin. As Eve, how would they have reacted to Lucifer speaking through the snake? When confronted with Satan's temptations, who would have found it more difficult to grasp what was happening—sinless Eve or the sinless angels? Why?

Digging into the issues

Because we live in a sinful world and have done so all our lives, it's hard for us to realize that the ongoing struggle between good and evil—the great controversy—is really only a “brief” interlude between the sinless perfection that existed in the universe before Satan's rebellion and the sinless perfection that will exist after the rebellion is ended forever. It's important that we have a big-picture understanding of how sin began, how God is handling the problem, and the fact that we are each personally involved in the outcome. Only then will we be able to successfully carry out our role in the great controversy. Only then will God be able to deal with the sin problem in a way that will put it to rest forever.

Issue 1: How did sin originate in the perfect environment of heaven? Sin arose in the mind of Lucifer, the highest-ranking angel in heaven. Why? What are some of the factors that caused Lucifer to become dissatisfied and ultimately sin against God in open rebellion? Were any of these things caused by some lack or deficiency in God or in His administration of heaven? Is there any rational explanation for sin that is not also an excuse for it in some way? Was Christ's position as the divine Son of God clear to all the angels in heaven? If so, why did Satan feel justified in being envious or jealous of Christ? What strategies did Satan use to entice Adam and Eve into joining his rebellion? What in the sinless pair responded to Satan's temptations?

Issue 2: What are the main features of God's plan for dealing with sin, and what do they say about God? When Lucifer first began raising questions in heaven, what steps did God take? Why did He respond as He did? What role does freedom of the will have in the origin of sin? What bearing does it have on how God dealt with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven—and how He has continued to deal with sin ever since? How long do you think God continued working with Lucifer and the disaffected angels, before finally expelling them from heaven? Why does God not use force—Satan's weapon of choice—in dealing with sin? What would be the result if He did? What role did Christ willingly undertake in solving the sin problem? What does this say about God's character?

Issue 3: What role do we have today in the great controversy? According to the lesson, God's plan of redemption includes two great objectives: (1) saving human beings from sin, and (2) vindicating God's character against Satan's unjust charges. What light does this shed on our role in the great controversy? How can redeemed sinners help to vindicate God's character? How can we better keep in mind that we are not merely spectators of the great controversy, but active participants?

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Encourage group members to apply the things they are learning to their own lives. Look for specific things you can encourage group members to put into practice during the coming week.

Applying the lesson to life

Jesus offers to take your sin and cover you with His righteousness (see 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 61:10). Have you accepted Him as your Savior? If not, what is preventing you from doing so? Try to analyze the strategies Satan uses successfully to tempt you to sin. What can you do to protect yourself against these? What is your primary motive for serving God? What motive does Jesus say you should have for obeying Him? (See John 14:15.) How does it make you feel to know that you can have a part in vindicating God's character against Satan's lies?

Leaving group members with something to think about

On a scale of one to ten, where is your relationship with Jesus *right now*?

Poor									Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

List some specific things you can begin doing *today* to improve your relationship with Jesus:

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PART 2

The Controversy Continues on Planet Earth, Part 1

Lucifer's rebellion in heaven presented God not only with the problem of sin and its challenge to His authority, it also presented God with the problem of how to respond in a way that would allow the entire universe to see that He was handling the problem in love and that Lucifer's accusations were completely without merit. In other words, God must not only be fair; He must *be seen* to be fair. This is not as easy as it might first appear.

This is one of the issues explored in Lesson 2, and it is one of the major themes that will keep cropping up throughout these lessons: *How can God deal with Satan and sin in a way that not only redeems lost human beings but also settles the sin problem forever?*

As this lesson points out, *our* response to the sin problem is inextricably linked to God's response. This lesson gets into the question of motive: is God just as interested in *why* we obey as He is in the *fact* that we obey? This is an important point to get across to the class. To answer this question, the lesson looks at the experience of Cain and Abel. It also looks at the examples—positive and negative—left by others in the Old Testament, such as Noah, Enoch, those building the Tower of Babel, Abraham, Lot, and so on.

Another insight that might be extremely helpful to your class is to better understand that these characters in the Bible stories were real people, going about their daily lives, trying to make it from day to day—just as we do today. Because these stories are so familiar to most of us, we sometimes lose sight of that. The people become unreal, like characters in a play. Or the outcome of the story seems predetermined. But they had to struggle to make the right decisions, just as we do. It wasn't any easier for them than it is for us today. Use this lesson to help your class members see that they can learn a lot from the successes and failures of these individuals in the Bible.

Surveying the sources

Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 71–73, 78, 81, 85, 86, 88, 89, 91, 92, 95, 96, 98, 101–104, 123–126, 129, 130, 134, 154, 155, 162, 165, 177–182, 197, 247–251, 260, 268, 269, 279, 290, 294.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- see the need for God to deal with Satan and sin in a way that not only redeems lost human beings but also settles the sin problem so that sin will never arise again;
- better understand how faith and obedience are related and how this relationship needs to be expressed in their own lives; and

- rededicate themselves to serve God not only with the head, but also with the heart.

Focusing on group members' needs

Although as an effective teacher, you will have clear objectives in mind for each lesson, you should also be open to letting the discussion move into areas that reflect individual needs—even if this diverges somewhat from your lesson plan. Often questions from a member of the group will indicate a specific need. Be alert to these and make sure the discussion meets needs of the heart as well as the head. Class members should not only understand issues, they should also see how these issues affect the way they live.

Starting the discussion

Cain and Abel illustrate two different responses to God's gracious offer of salvation. Both brothers brought sacrifices, but only one obeyed God. What made the difference? Did the difference consist mainly in the objects they sacrificed or in their attitudes (motives)? What does this tell us about God? Ask group members to read aloud the following verses: Genesis 4:7; 1 Samuel 15:22; John 14:15. (*Ask for volunteers or choose individuals you know will not be embarrassed by being asked to read aloud.*) What do these verses tell us about God's attitude toward obedience?

Digging into the issues

In heaven, Satan argued that God's law was arbitrary and that God was unfair in demanding that angels obey it. When he exported his rebellion to earth, he pointed to the sin of Adam and Eve as evidence that he was right—created beings cannot, and should not, be expected to obey God's law. In order to respond adequately to Satan's accusations God must do so in a way that is consistent with His character of love and also in a way that clearly proves Satan wrong.

Issue 1: How could God deal with the sin problem in such a way that saves sinners and also ensures that the sin problem will be permanently settled? The stories of the Old Testament are illustrations of God working out His plan for dealing with the sin problem. The apostle Paul says that we should learn from these experiences (see 1 Corinthians 10:11, 12). What do we learn about God's dealings with sin from the experiences of Cain and Abel? Enoch? Noah? The builders of the Tower of Babel? Abraham? Lot and the people of Sodom? Jacob and Esau? Moses? Are most of these individuals successful in their struggles against sin? How? Are their relationships with God smooth ones—or are there bumps along the way? In what way does God's dealing with these individuals help ensure that the sin problem will someday be settled forever?

Issue 2: How are faith and obedience related, and how can we express this relationship in our own spiritual experience? As long as you obey the speed limit, does the police officer care whether you do so (1) willingly, because you believe the law is fair and necessary, or (2) unwillingly because you don't want a ticket? Does God care *why* you obey His laws? Or does He simply care that you obey? In God's sight, is unwilling obedience really obedience? Does it make a difference whether you obey in order to be saved or because you have been saved? Why is motive so important to God? How is it related to His character of love? How is it related to His objective of dealing with sin in such a way that it will never rise up again? Read John 14:15. Can we infer from what Jesus says that if we aren't obeying from the motive of love, we might as well not obey at all? Why do you think the Bible declares that without faith it is impossible to please God? (See Hebrews 11:6.)

Issue 3: What is involved in serving God not only with the head, but with the heart? Other ways of framing the contrast between "head" and "heart" could be "reason" and "emotion" or "works/obedience" and "faith." Read James 2:14–26. How does James explain the relationship of faith and obedience? What Old Testament story does James cite to prove his point? Notice verse 23 in which James says that Abraham's *works* fulfilled Genesis 15:6—a text that speaks only of Abraham's belief or faith! How does James reach this conclusion? Do you agree? Do our beliefs always affect our actions?

Applying the lesson to life

Personality has a larger role in our approach to spiritual issues than we sometimes realize. Some people tend to see life as a serious matter, focusing on their responsibilities and obligations. Others go through life with a relaxed, “live and let live” attitude. Which approach best describes you? Neither approach is necessarily right or wrong. But each can benefit from trying to see the value in the other approach—and in adopting some of the opposite viewpoint. Do you tend to see God’s commandments as obligations or as opportunities? Whatever your answer, what could you do to better understand the opposite viewpoint? Would this be helpful to you spiritually?

Leaving group members with something to think about

Place the following quotations on 3 x 5-inch cards and distribute one to each group member. Encourage them to read these quotations frequently throughout the coming week.

**“Obedience without faith is possible,
but not faith without obedience.”**

—Unknown

**“God seeks comrades and claims love;
the devil seeks slaves and claims obedience.”**

—Rabindranath Tagore

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PART 3

The Controversy Continues on Planet Earth, Part 2

Lesson 3 looks at how Satan exported his rebellion from heaven to earth—the strategies and temptations he used against Eve in Eden. One significant point you will want to help your class members understand is that Satan's methods and temptations haven't changed very much over the centuries. He tempts us to sin today using the same strategies he has always used. And they often seem, at the time, to involve minor, inconsequential issues. To Eve, it seemed to be just a matter of eating a piece of desirable fruit—but behind the fruit was the issue of God's authority and obedience. Seemingly minor infractions can have major consequences. Obedience is important. If you can help your class members to understand this point alone, the lesson will be worthwhile.

But there is more. This lesson also points out that even before sin broke out, God had a plan in place to deal with it—and redeem sinners. He hinted at His plan to Adam and Eve right after their sin. And He unfolded it further throughout the Old Testament as individuals were better able to understand and appreciate it. There is a sense in which it's true that God's people before the Cross lived under the "old" covenant of "obey and live," but it was a covenant largely of their own making. In reality, God has saved men and women by His grace through faith from the very beginning. There will not be a group in heaven who deserve to be there because of their perfect obedience. We will all be there because of God's grace.

This lesson examines Satan's temptations and how they were successful in causing Israel to fail in carrying out God's purpose for them. But don't let it end on that note. Close on the high note of God's promise to modern Israel—the church. The promise that He will give us the spiritual strength to meet any temptation Satan may bring into our lives. By His grace, we can show the world that we love Him by the way we live for Him.

Surveying the sources

Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 331–336, 338, 339, 342, 363, 364, 370–372, 400–405, 420, 421, 493, 522.
Prophets and Kings, pages 15–20, 47, 55–58, 71, 72, 88, 93, 100, 105, 108.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- realize that Satan has exported his rebellion to this earth and that he uses the same deceptions here that he used to deceive angels in heaven;
- see that God's grace (the "new covenant") has been operating throughout human history ever since Adam and Eve sinned in Eden; and

- understand the reasons for Israel’s failure to be God’s witness to surrounding nations as He intended them to be—and how to avoid making the same mistakes in carrying out God’s purposes for their lives.

Focusing on group members’ needs

The members of your group have everyday lives that consume most of their attention. It isn’t always easy for them to keep in mind that beyond their daily concerns there is a spiritual struggle going on between real, though unseen, entities and that they are squarely in the middle of that struggle. This lesson can help them see that Satan is still working today as he has always worked to tempt men and women into sin and to separate them from God. Group members need to better realize that although they must live in their everyday world, they also need to be aware of the unseen world and the spiritual forces arrayed both *against* them and *for* them.

Starting the discussion

Ask a class member to read Romans 7:14–19. (Bible scholars argue over whether Paul is describing himself *before* his conversion or *afterwards*, but that need not concern us right now.) Ask class members, “How many of you can identify with Paul? How many find yourselves feeling as he does? Why do we so often find it so difficult to resist Satan’s temptations?” (*Try to generate discussion on this point, but don’t let it continue too long.*)

Ask class members to read James 1:14. What does James say is the reason why we so easily give in to Satan’s temptations? (*Answer: Our own desires draw us away from God and entice us to sin.*) Let’s see how Satan goes about tempting human beings and how God helps us resist.

Digging into the issues

As we go about our lives each day, we are also involved in a real spiritual struggle that we don’t always realize (see Ephesians 6:12). More than we often do, we need to realize that Satan is intent on destroying us spiritually.

Issue 1: What strategies does Satan use consistently in carrying forward his rebellion on earth? (1) Doubt. Read Genesis 3:1–5. How did Satan sow doubt in Eve’s mind before flatly contradicting God? How does Satan sow doubt in the minds of Christians today? Does he try to cause us to doubt big issues—the existence of God, Jesus’ love, and so on? Or does he try to introduce us to doubt regarding smaller issues—seemingly unanswered prayers, why evil goes unpunished, and so on. Are doubts sin? Why or why not?

(2) Envy, jealousy. This is how Satan tempted Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to rebel against Moses’ authority. How does Satan use envy and jealousy to tempt us today? In what ways does he disguise envy and jealousy so that we won’t recognize it (or admit it to ourselves)? Which of the Ten Commandments relates most closely to issues of envy and jealousy?

(3) Self-pity, pride. These are opposite sides of the same coin. What Old Testament experience included in the lesson for today illustrates this temptation of Satan? (*Answer: Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it as God directed.*) In what ways does Satan use this temptation against us today?

These are by no means all of the ways Satan tempts us to sin. However, they illustrate how he has consistently preyed on human weaknesses using the same temptations throughout the great controversy. Likewise, we are able to overcome him in the same way that individuals in the Old Testament were able to so do—through trust in God and relying on His power and grace.

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Sharing a personal experience can be a powerful teaching tool. If you feel comfortable doing so, consider sharing an experience in your life that illustrates an aspect of the lesson—perhaps a successful, or unsuccessful, encounter with temptation and what lessons you learned from the experience.

Issue 2: What is the “new covenant,” and has it been in operation ever since sin began? The Bible speaks of an “old covenant” and a “new covenant” (see Hebrews 8). A *covenant* simply means an “agreement.” The “old” covenant refers to God’s agreement with Israel to be their God and their agreement to obey His laws (see Exodus 19:1–8). The new covenant refers to God’s promise to make a new covenant with His people in which He will place His laws in their hearts (see Jeremiah 31:3–34; Hebrews 8:7–13). The terms of the old covenant were “obey and live.” The terms of the new covenant are “forgiveness of sins and . . . the grace of God to renew the heart” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372). In actuality, the “new” covenant has been in effect ever since sin entered Eden (see Genesis 3:15). Salvation has always been by faith in God’s gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and has always resulted in a transformed life.

Issue 3: In what ways did Israel fail to be God’s witnesses, and how can we avoid making the same mistakes? God chose Israel to be His witness to the world (see Genesis 15; Isaiah 60:1–3). In the same way, God has chosen His church to be His witness to the world today (see Acts 1:8). There were a number of reasons for Israel’s failure to carry out God’s purpose, but chief among them was its tendency to turn God’s blessings inward and see themselves as separate from, and better than, the world around them. Instead of reaching out to the world with God’s blessings, they looked down on it as deserving of God’s displeasure. Is God’s church today tempted to do the same? What can we do to avoid Israel’s example?

Applying the lesson to life

The Bible promises that with each temptation Satan brings to us, God will open up a way for us to successfully resist it (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). James urges us to “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, NKJV). The next verse tells us what is involved in resisting the devil—“draw near to God” (verse 8). We draw near to God by spending time with Him in prayer, Bible study, and letting Him fill us with His Spirit. Determine to begin this week on a course of increasing your spiritual strength by drawing nearer to God.

Leaving group members with something to think about

Recall an incident when Satan was able to successfully tempt you to sin. Looking back, can you identify the factors that caused you to react as you did? What might you have done to resist this temptation?

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PART 4

God's Side in the Controversy Is Helped or Hurt to the Extent His Character Is Reflected in the Lives of His People

Lesson 4 brings us to the book *Prophets and Kings* and to the great controversy as it was played out in the later history of Israel prior to the birth of Jesus. In many ways, this lesson is not an encouraging one. It deals with Israel's failure to live up to the grand purpose God designed for His Old Testament people. But be sure your class understands that God recorded these failures, not to discourage us, but to help us learn from them. He wants us to know that we don't have to make the same mistakes. He promises that we can do what He wants us to do—in His strength. And the lesson points out a number of these specific promises given in Scripture.

Paradoxically, however, these very assurances can be discouraging to some of your class members. After all, if God assures us we can overcome sin and carry out His high calling—and yet we still fail and feel we don't measure up—these assurances can make us feel even more discouraged! No doubt, some of your class members are struggling with just such feelings. Try to give the lesson a balanced approach—between God's high standards and His loving mercy to sinners, between obedience and forgiveness. The two sets of Bible texts given in the Teacher's Guide for this lesson demonstrate that one can find such a balance in the Word of God. These two sets of texts can be extremely helpful for those who may be having a difficult time finding their balance on these issues. The idea is not to excuse sin but to show that God understands our weakness.

Another significant point to make clear in this lesson is that God is able to use even imperfect, flawed individuals to accomplish His purposes. Examples in the lesson are Elijah and Jonah. Both men experienced failures; both men accomplished great things for God. An important Bible text on this point that is not included in the Teacher's Guide is 1 Corinthians 1:25–29.

Surveying the sources

Prophets and Kings, pages 111, 119, 139, 140, 147, 148, 150, 154, 177–182, 186–189, 201, 220, 231, 233, 236, 237, 255, 259, 260, 263, 264, 270, 271, 276, 277, 292, 309, 311, 314, 315, 323, 376–378, 386, 387, 408, 418–421, 426, 428, 442, 457, 458, 464, 475, 506, 512, 513, 535–537, 545, 548, 557, 576–578, 582–592, 599, 601, 605, 606, 709, 710, 713, 714, 716, 720.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- be convinced that God has all the necessary resources to enable them to accomplish anything He asks them to do;
- see that God wants His people to represent His character and laws to a world that does not know Him; and
- accept the challenge of being a part of God's living church in the last days that will finish the work He began with Israel.

Focusing on group members' needs

Failure seems to be an inevitable part of the human experience. Today's lesson looks at spiritual failure and what it means to live as God wants us to live. If we agree that we *should* live as God wants us to, how do we relate to the times we fail? Some group members will be earnest, sincere Christians who worry about how well they are measuring up to all that God requires of them. These individuals may need to see a less demanding side of God. Other group members will have a more relaxed attitude toward God's expectations. These may need to be reminded that God says what He means and means what He says. As you lead out in today's discussion, try to keep these competing needs in mind—and help class members arrive at a balanced approach to godly living.

Starting the discussion

Ask for volunteers to read Matthew 26:69–75 and Acts 4:1–22. These two events in the life of Peter occurred only a few weeks apart. Ask, “Why do you think Peter was so weak in once instance—and so strong a few weeks later?” Direct group members' attention to Acts 4:13. What light does this verse shed on the change in Peter's behavior? What lesson(s) can we learn from Peter's experience that will help us to stand firm for Jesus when tested by Satan? Compare 1 Corinthians 10:12 and Isaiah 41:10. Did Peter need to hear both texts? At the same time? Or at different times in his experience? Do we sometimes need to hear a particular Bible text and a different one at other times?

Digging into the issues

We all know how it feels to fail—and it isn't a good feeling! Spiritual failure carries an additional downside—the feeling that we have let down God and that perhaps He doesn't love us anymore. Even when we “know,” intellectually, that He has forgiven us, it's still hard to shake these feelings. Let's look at what God really expects of us and how He promises to help us meet those expectations.

Issue 1: Can we carry out everything that God requires of us—in His strength? Read Philippians 4:13. If we read this text in isolation, it seems quite clear that Paul is saying there is nothing God requires of us that we can't do if we rely on Him to help us. And, truly, can we think of a single thing God asks of us that we simply can't do? Then what is the problem?

The problem is that in real life, we find ourselves failing—over and over again—to do everything that we know God wants us to do. It's something like the situation in your family. Could your daughter do everything you want—and expect—her to do? Is it likely that she *is* going to do so without any failures? Let's look at some Bible texts that may help us. (*Divide the class into two groups. Ask someone from Group A to read a text from the first set of texts and then ask someone from Group B to read the corresponding text from the second set.*)

Set 1

Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14
 James 2:10
 Luke 9:62
 Ezekiel 18:20
 Hebrews 10:26, 27

Set 2

Micah 6:8
 1 John 1:9
 John 3:16
 1 John 2:1, 2
 Hebrews 4:15, 16

What general observation do you notice about the two sets of Bible texts? (*Answer: One set of texts emphasizes the importance of obedience and the penalties for failing to obey; the other set focuses on the reality of human failure and God's gracious response to sinners.*) Are both sets of texts equally inspired? Are all Bible texts equally relevant to all situations? Is it possible that one set of texts is aimed at individuals who need to take obedience more seriously and the other set at individuals who need to take God's love and forgiveness more seriously? Taken in its entirety, God's Word seems to hold firmly to the high ideal of unwavering obedience while at the same time recognizing human frailty and holding up God's mercy and forgiveness to sinners.

Issue 2: What does it mean to represent God's character and His law to a fallen world?

When Israel fell into apostasy, what clear decision did Elijah place before the people? (See 1 Kings 18:20, 21.) What was the result of Elijah's challenge? (See verse 39.) Was Elijah's faith tested in this experience, and how successfully did he meet the test? (See 1 Kings 19:1–4.) Was Jonah's witness to the surrounding nations an unwavering example of faith and obedience to God? (See Jonah 1:1–3; 4:1–11.) Can we conclude from the experience of Elijah and Jonah that God can use flawed, failing human beings to witness effectively for Him—if they are growing in their experience with Him and if they allow Him to work through them? What does this tell us about our role today as God's witnesses in the world?

Issue 3: How can God's church today fulfill the purpose God wanted Old Testament Israel to accomplish? How does Revelation describe God's people in the last days? (See Revelation 14:12.) Notice how this text links obedience and faith (see also Revelation 7:9–14). God's church today can fulfill the role God designed Israel to fill in the Old Testament by faithfully following Him in all things, and by turning to Him in repentance and accepting His forgiveness if they fail (see 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2).

Applying the lesson to life

Here is Hebrews 4:14–16 (NKJV) with the words *we*, *our*, and *us* replaced with *I*, *my*, and *me*. Does this make the text take on even more personal relevance? “Seeing then that I have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let me hold fast my confession. For I do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with my weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as I am, yet without sin. Let me therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that I may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Leaving group members with something to think about

“All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. . . . Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God” (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 587).

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

PART 5

Jesus Came to This World to Reveal Both the Truth About God and About What Human Beings May Become Through the Gospel

Ellen White tells us that the plan of salvation was not an afterthought, and Revelation 13:8 refers to Jesus as the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. From eternity past, Jesus took on the role of sacrificial Savior. And at the appointed time, He left heaven, became a man, and was born in Bethlehem. That's where Lesson 5 picks up the story. Five of the thirteen lessons in this series will be looking at the life of Jesus as told in *The Desire of Ages*. Jesus' life and death are central, of course, to God's successful handling of the great controversy, and that's why they are central as well to this series of lessons.

Lesson 5 is concerned with two major points—and two related responses. It is designed to help class members see why Jesus came to earth and that He is our Example in godly living. It's also designed to elicit one of two responses to His incomprehensible love as demonstrated in the way He lived and died. The first response concerns a class member who may never before have accepted Jesus as his or her personal Savior. Probably, most of the members of your class will have already made that decision. But there might be someone who has not. If so, hopefully this lesson will help that person to do so—even if you don't publicly ask for a decision. The second response concerns those who have already given their hearts and lives to the Lord. Those decisions need continuous updating. Lesson 5 gives class members an ideal opportunity to renew their commitment to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

As you discuss the issue of Jesus as our Example, you will want to point out that He is our Example both in the sinless life He lived and also in *how* He lived such a life. To focus on one without the other can be discouraging. Be sure class members understand that the same power that was available to Jesus is also available to us.

Surveying the sources

The Desire of Ages, pages 19–22, 24–26, 32–38, 43, 49, 71, 72, 74, 100–103, 106, 107, 111, 112, 114–117, 119–121, 123, 125, 126, 131.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- better understand the two great reasons that Jesus came to earth as a man: (1) to save sinners, and (2) to reveal God's character of matchless love;

- accept (or renew their acceptance of) Jesus Christ as their personal Savior from sin; and
- see that Jesus is their Example, both in His sinless obedience and in His total faith and reliance on His Father.

Focusing on group members' needs

Are there members in your group who have never accepted Jesus as their personal Savior? If so, this lesson can open up the possibility of drawing them to do so. Be alert to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and to ways you might cooperate with God to help individuals make this crucial decision. Even if all the class members have already accepted Jesus, this lesson can help them to better understand what that decision involves—and to renew their commitment to their Savior.

Starting the discussion

Whom do you love enough to give your life for? Probably your spouse. Surely your children. But after that, the qualifying candidates begin to disappear quickly. Seriously, think about it! Would you die for your uncle? For your cousin? For your next-door neighbor? But Jesus, the Son of God, loved *you* enough to die for you!

The Beatles may have been slightly overstating it when they sang, “All you need is love,” but not by much. The most well-known and best-loved verse in the Bible—John 3:16—sums up the twin reasons Jesus came to earth: (1) to save sinners, and (2) to reveal God’s matchless love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (NKJV). And it was also the apostle John who wrote, “This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NKJV). Let’s see how Jesus’ life on earth demonstrated that “God is love” (verse 8).

Digging into the issues

At the beginning of the great controversy, Satan accused God of being harsh and demanding, interested only in Himself and His own well-being. God’s response was to announce the plan of salvation, the essence of which involved His Son, Jesus, becoming a human being, living on earth as one of us, and dying in our place. God would answer Satan’s accusations by His actions.

Issue 1: In what ways did Jesus’ ministry on earth both save sinners and reveal God’s love? How does Peter

describe the first reason Jesus came earth—to save sinners? (See 1 Peter 2:21–24.) Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21 with Isaiah 53:4–6. All these texts emphasize the idea of *substitution*, that is, Jesus took our place. He became human and lived the life of sinless obedience we should have lived. He took our sins and died the death that we should have died. And in return, if we accept Him as our Savior, He places over us His righteous life like a robe, covering our sins (see Isaiah 61:10). This amazing substitution, by itself, would be irrefutable evidence of God’s love. But there is more.

In His daily life on earth for thirty-three years, Jesus demonstrated God’s character of love in the way He interacted with people. What kind of people did Jesus spend most of His time with while He was on earth? (*Answer: The sick and disabled, women, children, non-Jews, “sinners,” and the lower classes of society.*) These were all individuals on the margin of respectable society in Jesus’ day. What did this say to Jesus’ contemporaries about God? What did Jesus say about His relationship to His Father? (See John 10:30; 14:9.) If Jesus were to have come to earth in our day—instead of 2,000 years ago—what kinds of people do you think He would be spending most of His time with? What would

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Encourage participation. Learning is not a spectator sport. It is enhanced when all group members join in the discussion. Sharing ideas and responding to the ideas of others sharpens thinking and understanding.

this tell us about God's love? What would it tell us about how we should be treating these kinds of individuals? Jesus' life on earth showed us what God is like—and refuted Satan's lies about Him.

Issue 2: What does it mean to accept Jesus as one's personal Savior? (1) Believe in Him. Ask class members to read John 1:12 and Acts 16:31. Believing in Jesus means accepting Him as God's Son and trusting Him to save you from your sins. But it means more than that. It means (2) act on your beliefs. This is the second part of what it means to accept Jesus as your Savior. This means giving up on self and your own righteousness. It means accepting His forgiveness and His righteousness. And it means patterning your life after His through the power of the Holy Spirit (see Philippians 3:7–11; 2 Corinthians 5:14–21).

Issue 3: In what way(s) is Jesus our Example? What does the apostle Peter say about Jesus as our Example? (See 1 Peter 2:21–24.) Peter points out that Jesus never sinned and that He is our Example in this. Jesus came to demonstrate that Satan was lying when he claimed God's laws were unjust and that created beings could not keep them. We can follow Jesus' example of obedience in the strength God provides (see Philippians 4:13). But Jesus is also our Example in His complete faith and reliance on His Father during His time as a human on earth (see John 8:21–30). We can place our trust fully upon God, just as Jesus did. As a human, how did Jesus live a sinless life—by His own resources or by relying on the power of His Father? (See John 5:19, 30.)

Applying the lesson to life

Making a formal appeal at the close of the class for individuals to accept Jesus is probably not the best approach, but you might say something like this: “Our discussion today has dealt with the most important decision a person can make—the decision to accept Jesus as his or her Savior. If you've never made that decision, the Holy Spirit may be speaking to your heart. You may be thinking about it seriously. If so, I would be happy to help you anyway I can. Or I can arrange for you to talk to the pastor. And for those who have already invited Jesus to be their Savior, I encourage you to renew that commitment as we have our closing prayer.”

Leaving group members with something to think about

How does it make you feel to think of Jesus as your Example? Fearful that you don't (can't) measure up? Condemned, because you know you so often fall short? Glad to have a standard against which to measure your progress in living a godly life? Determined to do a better job of following His example? Seeing Jesus as our Example can mean different things to different people. What do you think Peter meant by pointing to Jesus as our Example? (See 1 Peter 2:21.) What counsel does he give in 2 Peter 3:18? What does it say about Jesus as our Example?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY
IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

PART 6

Jesus Interacted With Men and Women by Life and Word—and in So Doing, Revealed What God Was Like, Thus Proving Satan Wrong, Part 1

This lesson looks at some individuals who interacted with Jesus while He was on earth and how He met their needs—physical needs, spiritual needs, and social needs. No one ever came to Jesus that He didn't respond to. The lesson emphasizes that Jesus meets our needs today just as He did for people back then. Even when we don't realize our real needs, Jesus is able to see below the surface and provide what we need most.

A second emphasis of this lesson is on Jesus' sermon on the mount in which He enunciated the principles of God's kingdom. Specifically, the lesson focuses on these principles in the context of how they refute the accusations Satan has made against God in the great controversy. (Don't miss the opportunity of pointing out how Jesus expands the concept of obedience to include motive.) And finally, the lesson asks, "How can we live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount in our daily lives—and so help show that Satan's charges against God are false?"

If you have time, explore with the class, in the context of this lesson, the kinds of people Jesus spent time with while He was here on earth. Point out how He especially reached out to those on the margins of His society—women, children, non-Jews, tax collectors, lepers, and so on. You might ask the class what kind of people they think Jesus would spend most of His time with if He were living on earth today—instead of 2,000 years ago. You might point them to Luke 15 where the religious leaders of His day accused Jesus of spending all His time with "sinners," implying that He did so because He was like them, that "birds of a feather flock together." And you might explore with the class the three parables Jesus told in Luke 15 (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy) to point out to the religious leaders why He spent time with people they considered to be sinners. Try to help class members see that they have the same access to Jesus today as those who lived with Him on earth.

Surveying the sources

The Desire of Ages, pages 101, 136, 138, 139–141, 147, 154, 161, 168, 171–173, 175, 189, 203, 214–216, 219, 220, 224, 225, 239, 246, 251, 263–271, 275, 276, 278–280, 283, 284, 296, 299, 308–311, 314.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- realize that Jesus meets their personal needs today in the same way that He met the individual needs of men and women while He was on earth;
- better understand the principles of God's kingdom as Jesus announced them in the Sermon on the Mount—and how they refute Satan's charges against God during his rebellion in heaven; and
- recommit to placing themselves on God's side in the great controversy by letting Him live in and through them.

Focusing on group members' needs

Many Christians feel there is a disconnect between what happened in Bible times and the way life works today. They feel that Jesus was personally present to heal and comfort and forgive while on earth, but that today we don't have the same personal access. That he isn't there for us in quite the same way that He was when people could see and hear and touch Him. Some class members may be dealing with serious issues in their lives; they may have deep spiritual, physical, or emotional needs of which no one is aware. Don't pry, but try to direct the discussion in such a way that class members will feel free to open up about their needs and what help they feel Jesus might provide. Today's lesson should help class members know that Jesus is there for them and that He is just as willing to meet their needs today as He was to meet the needs of people when He was living here. It should also help them see how to come to Jesus for the assistance they need.

Starting the discussion

Have a class member read Mark 2:1–5. Ask the class, “Do you see anything odd about Jesus' response in verse 5?” Had the paralytic asked for forgiveness? What was his obvious need? Why didn't Jesus address this obvious need?

Would it help to know that in the minds of Jesus' contemporaries (and in the mind of the paralyzed man) sickness, disease, and physical disability were the evidence of sin in the life of the sufferer? With this in mind, does Jesus' response become more understandable? *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267, says of the paralyzed man: “It was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could . . . receive the assurance of forgiveness, . . . he would be content to live or die.” Jesus was able to see beneath the surface and discern the real needs of individuals—and He focused on relieving those needs. What does this tell us about Jesus' ability to meet our needs today?

Digging into the issues

No sincere individual ever came to Jesus while He was on earth without having his or her needs—physical, spiritual, emotional, or mental—met by the Savior. And the way Jesus met the needs of men and women when He was on earth is the same way He meets our needs today.

Issue 1: In what way(s) did Jesus meet the needs of men and women while He lived among us on earth? (1) Nicodemus (John 3:1–21). Who was Nicodemus? (See verses 1, 10.) What needs did Nicodemus have? How important were these needs to Nicodemus? (*Hint: He came to Jesus at night, so he wouldn't be seen by his peers. But he came.*) Did Jesus take Nicodemus's needs seriously? (*Hint: His conversation with Nicodemus is one of the longest He had with a single individual as recorded in the Bible.*) Were Nicodemus's

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Develop in your own mind clear, specific goals for (1) what you want group members to learn as a result of the lesson, and (2) what you want group members to do as a result of the lesson. Effective teaching should aim not only to increase the student's knowledge, but also to help the student see how to put that knowledge into practice in the life.

needs obvious? Might a casual onlooker have thought he didn't really have any needs? Despite his earlier reluctance to be seen with Jesus, what courageous act did Nicodemus perform after Jesus' death? (See John 19:39–42.)

(2) The woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1–26, 39–42). What nationality was this woman? (*Answer: A Samaritan. If you can, use a good Bible dictionary to learn the background of Samaritans and how the Jews felt about them.*) What needs did this woman have? Why do you think Jesus took a somewhat confrontational approach with her? (See verses 10, 16, 17.) How did Jesus meet her needs? What was the result? What was the reaction of the disciples to finding Jesus talking to this woman? (See verse 27.) Why? (*Answer: Jewish men did not interact in public with women—especially Samaritans!*) What does this tell us about Jesus' willingness to reach out to anyone who needs His help?

(3) The paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–15). What needs did this man have? How did Jesus meet them? What was the result for the man? For Jesus? (See verses 16–18.) What spiritual application of this healing does Ellen White make? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 203.)

What do these examples (there are many more) tell us about Jesus' willingness and ability to meet our needs today? Ask class members to read aloud the following promises: Matthew 11:28–30; John 10:27, 28; Matthew 28:20. Can we claim these promises for our needs?

Issue 2: How do the principles Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount refute Satan's charges against God? Read Matthew 5:1–12. In the Beatitudes, Jesus lists the underlying principles of God's kingdom. Could there be a greater contrast to Satan's charges against God—that He is selfish, arbitrary, unreasonable, self-seeking, and so on? Could there be a greater contrast to the characteristics Satan exhibited in his rebellion against God in heaven? Humbleness, meekness, mercy, purity, peacemaking—these qualities are foreign to Satan, but they permeate God's kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount, how does Jesus expand God's law to include motive as well as action? (See Matthew 5:21–28.) In what way does the importance God attaches to motive refute Satan's accusations against Him?

Issue 3: How can we better allow God to live in and through us? How can we live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount? (*Answer: Read Matthew 7:7–11. God will give us what we need—if we ask! This includes power to live for Him.*) The key is our willingness to ask and to allow Him to live in and through us. The promise is that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be filled (see Matthew 5:6). Ellen White writes, "All who long to bear the likeness of the character of God shall be satisfied. The Holy Spirit never leaves unassisted the soul who is looking unto Jesus" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 302).

Applying the lesson to life

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pronounced blessings—we call them the *Beatitudes*—on different types of behavior or attitudes (see Matthew 5:3–11). During the coming week, review one of these beatitudes each day. Think carefully about what that behavior or attitude involves and why Jesus blesses those who develop it. Think about specific ways you can better develop that characteristic in your life.

Leaving group members with something to think about

We might think that individuals who lived with Jesus while He was here on earth had advantages that we don't have. After all, they could actually see and hear Jesus. They could talk to Him directly and present their needs. But can you think of advantages we have over Jesus' contemporaries? (*Ask class members to make a list of any advantages they can think of and bring it to the next class.*) Is Jesus any less able or willing to meet our needs today than He was to meet the needs of those He interacted with while living on earth?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

PART 7

Jesus Interacted With Men and Women by Life and Word—and in So Doing, Revealed What God Was Like, Thus Proving Satan Wrong, Part 2

Faith is one of those things we talk about a lot, but it becomes elusive the more we try to define it and pin down exactly what it is we are talking about. Lesson 7 explores what we mean by “faith,” and what additional quality transforms mere “faith” into “saving faith.” The difference is illustrated in two incidents in which Jesus healed individuals—the demon-possessed man at Gergesa and the woman with a hemorrhage. The important point here is to help your class members see that faith must always result in action or some kind of appropriate response—or it isn't really faith at all. We don't really believe unless we act on what we believe.

This lesson also repeats a point that has been made in previous lessons—that God's saving grace not only forgives us, but restores in us His character of love. This is akin to the distinction between faith and saving faith. When we are forgiven—saved—God expects that experience to make a difference in our lives. In fact, if it does not, it is evidence that we haven't really fully experienced what it means to be forgiven. This is the point James makes in his New Testament letter when he says that faith without works is dead. (By the way, Martin Luther, the champion of faith, didn't think too much of the book of James. He called it “an epistle of straw.”)

An interesting topic to explore, if you have time, is the link between physical healing and spiritual healing in Jesus' miracles. Even when the two aren't explicitly mentioned together, it's implied that Jesus never healed physical ailments without making the individual whole spiritually as well. This was partly because in the religious culture of His day, sickness and disease were seen as the result of sin—not in a general way, but specifically. A person was sick or blind or a leper specifically because he himself had sinned in some way. That was the belief. So, in their minds, physical healing automatically meant forgiveness as well. This insight can help your class see Jesus' healing miracles in a new light as far as what they meant to people in His day.

Surveying the sources

The Desire of Ages, pages 322, 324, 330, 331, 336, 338–341, 347, 353, 355, 356, 384–394, 406, 407, 409, 412, 413, 415, 416, 431, 455, 456, 458, 466, 471, 478–480, 483.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- understand better what is involved in faith—and what it means to have “saving faith”;
- realize that the gospel not only pardons from sin, but that it also restores in human beings a character that is in harmony with God; and
- determine to be receptive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and, by God’s grace, to follow all the light He gives them.

Focusing on group members’ needs

Try to keep in mind that your class members have the same basic human needs as those individuals who turned to Jesus for help while He was here on earth. At some time in our lives, we all face sickness, fear, discouragement, guilt, failure, relationship problems, and so on. We may be separated by centuries and live in a radically different world than did Jesus’ contemporaries, but our basic human needs are much the same. Try to help class members have the assurance that Jesus will help them with whatever problems they may be facing.

Starting the discussion

Remind class members that you asked them to make a list of advantages that we, today, have over those who lived with Jesus while He was on earth, in terms of Jesus meeting our needs and having a relationship with Him. Find out how many class members actually brought a list. (1) If enough have lists, ask them to exchange lists with the person next to them. Then have each individual read a list. As suggested advantages are read, make a master list on a blackboard. Spend five minutes discussing the advantages listed. Then ask class members to vote whether they believe they are more (or less) able than Jesus’ contemporaries to relate to Jesus and have Him meet their needs. (2) If few class members, or no one, brought a list, have class members suggest advantages and make a list on the board. (Include the items on lists that members *did* bring.) Then discuss the suggestions and vote as in option 1. Keep this whole exercise to about ten minutes.

Introduce the current lesson by saying something like, “Today, we are going to continue looking at how Jesus met the needs of people when He was here on earth and what this means for us today.”

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: What is “saving faith” and how is it demonstrated in the life? Read Hebrews 11:6. How does this text describe faith? Is it a complete description? Why or why not? By the description of faith given in this text, do Satan’s angels have faith? Read James 2:19. Do Satan’s angels have “saving faith”? Let’s look at a more complete definition of faith—saving faith—as demonstrated by some individuals with whom Jesus interacted while on earth.

(1) The demoniac(s) at Gergesa (Luke 8:26–39). *(Avoid the question of whether there were one or two demoniacs healed; it is irrelevant to this discussion.)*

This incident pulls back the curtain and reveals the reality of Satan and his angels. What was the demons’ response to Jesus? (See Luke 8:28.) Does this response bear out what James says about demons having faith? (See James 2:19.) Did the demons’ faith “save” them? In contrast, did the demoniac(s) faith save them? What does

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Repetition fastens key points in the minds of your class members. An effective way to do this is to present the same point through a variety of illustrations or examples. Especially when individuals today are being bombarded with an overload of information, it may take several repetitions before a particular point really takes hold.

this story tell us about the difference between faith and *saving* faith? (*Answer: Faith can be defined simply as “belief”; saving faith can be defined as “belief that acts—or responds—appropriately.”*) How does James frame this distinction? (See James 2:14–23.) What does he mean when he says, “Faith without works is dead” (verse 17)? What did Jesus tell the healed demoniac(s) to do? (See Luke 8:38, 39.) Ellen White wrote, “Souls that have been degraded into instruments of Satan are still through the power of Christ transformed into messengers of righteousness” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 341). If we cannot preach a sermon or give a Bible study, we can all tell others what Christ has done for us.

(2) The woman with a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25–34). What did the woman believe? (See verse 28.) Was this faith or saving faith? Would she ever have been healed if she had continued believing a touch would heal her—but never actually touched? What demonstrated that she had *saving* faith, as opposed to “mere” faith? (See verse 27.) What was the result? (See verse 29.) What did Jesus say regarding her healing? (See verse 34.) Do you think Jesus was referring to her belief (verse 28)? Her touch (verse 27)? Both? What does this experience teach us about the importance of acting on our faith? In writing of this incident, how does Ellen White describe saving faith? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.)

Issue 2: What is the total scope of the gospel in terms of how it relates to us? In Lesson 5, we saw that Jesus had two great purposes in coming to earth: (1) to save sinners, and (2) to reveal God’s character of love. We may also say that the second of these two has a dual application. Jesus not only came *to reveal* God’s character of love, but *to restore in us* God’s character of love. As far as possible in our sphere, we are to reflect God’s character of love by His grace and power. When Jesus met human needs, He not only forgave sins, healed, or comforted; He also drew that individual into a relationship with Himself. In the same way, He saves us and pardons our sins. But He then draws us into an ongoing relationship with Himself that is designed to restore in us His own character of love. How does the apostle John describe this restoration in us of God’s character of love? (See 1 John 2:6.) How do we walk as Jesus walked? (See Colossians 2:6.) We receive Jesus into our life by faith, and it is by faith that we walk with Him, daily becoming more like Him. How does Paul describe this process of spiritual growth? (See Romans 6:4.)

Issue 3: What is the work of the Holy Spirit in leading us into a relationship of complete surrender to God? What did Jesus promise shortly before He died and returned to heaven? (See John 14:16–18.) Who helps us walk as Jesus walked—restoring in us God’s character of love? (See Galatians 5:25.) How does Jesus describe the role of the Holy Spirit in this process? (See John 16:7–15.)

Applying the lesson to life

Ellen White wrote, “A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. . . . It is not enough to believe *about* Christ; we must believe *in* Him. . . . A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 347). Does this last sentence describe your relationship with God? If not, do you wish that it did? Will you let the Holy Spirit make it a reality in your life?

Leaving group members with something to think about

Compared to a year ago, is my life:

_____ More Christlike

_____ Less Christlike

_____ The same

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

PART 8

Our Lord's Last Awful Week— but What a Week It Was for Us! Part 1

One of the recurring themes running through all the lessons in this series is the need for God to deal with sin in a way that will forever put to rest Satan's lies and accusations. This lesson and the next look at the sacrificial death of Jesus. This lesson, Lesson 8, looks at Jesus' death from the standpoint of what effects it had on settling the issues of the great controversy in the minds of the onlooking universe. Although the sin problem will not be totally eradicated until God creates a new heaven and a new earth following the millennium, there is a real sense in which the Cross marked a crucial watershed in the great controversy. It was crucial, of course, in the sense that it assured salvation for everyone who would accept it. (This is the focus of Lesson 9—the implications of the Cross for the gospel.) It was crucial also as a turning point in God's dealings with sin and the issues Satan had raised in the great controversy. Ellen White says that the Cross forever severed any lingering ties of sympathy angels and beings on other worlds might have had with Satan.

This lesson looks at the way the Cross dealt with the questions Satan had raised regarding God's character, His law, and whether sin inevitably results in death. In all three of these areas, Jesus' death on the cross refuted Satan's positions and vindicated God.

The lesson also discusses how the Cross shapes our picture of God and the fact that how we view God directly affects our own characters. This was true of different groups in Jesus' day—how they viewed God shaped their characters and their responses to Jesus. And it is true of us today.

Finally, this lesson looks at one of the most amazing and challenging statements to be found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White. It asks class members to consider carefully just what the statement is saying and its implications. It asks them to think about their own reactions. This kind of reflection will help your class members grow spiritually.

Surveying the sources

The Desire of Ages, pages 587, 590, 600, 604–606, 608, 625, 626, 636–641, 643–645, 652–656, 662, 664, 667–669, 671, 676–678, 680, 685–687, 689, 690, 693, 694.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- gain a big-picture understanding of why Jesus died on Calvary and what effect His death had on the issues in the great controversy;

- see that how a person views God directly affects his or her character; and
- seek to experience the promise that Jesus can bring them into such a close relationship with Him that they will be following their own impulses when they are carrying out His will.

Focusing on group members' needs

Sometimes, there can be a fine line between challenging a person and discouraging him or her. How a person reacts to the Bible's commands for holy living or promises of overcoming sin can be shaped by his or her personality, earlier life experiences, and other factors. Some class members will thrive on high expectations; others may be overwhelmed. Try to be aware of both possibilities.

Starting the discussion

In an often-told story, a little girl is working busily with her crayons, drawing a picture while her father is reading the newspaper. "What are you doing?" her father asks.

"I'm drawing a picture of God," the little girl replies.

"But, honey, no one knows what God looks like."

"They will when I'm through!" she announces.

With our lives, you and I are drawing a picture of God every day. Those around us gain a picture of God from the way we live. And the reverse is also true—the way we live is affected by the mental picture we have of God's character. Our lesson today will help us gain a better picture of God's character and thus be better equipped to reflect His character of love.

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: How did Jesus' death affect the issues at stake in the great controversy?

(1) The issue of God's character. How did Jesus' death settle Satan's accusations regarding God's character? (See 1 John 4:9, 10.) Satan had accused God of being selfish and unfair, of being interested only in Himself at the expense of the beings He created. Jesus' death on the cross forever refuted that accusation. At infinite, incomprehensible loss, God willingly sacrificed Himself for us, living our life as a human and dying our death (see Philippians 2:5–8; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21). On the cross, His love was manifested beyond any doubt. What image does Jesus use to illustrate a three-fold inseparable love relationship—the love relationship between Himself and the Father, the love relationship between God and us, and the love relationship Christians have with each other? (See John 15:1–17.) In your own words, what does it mean to "abide in Christ"? To have Him "abide in you"?

(2) The issue of God's law. What effect does Paul say Jesus' death had on the issue of God's law in the great controversy? (See Romans 3:23–25, 31.) Some believe that Jesus' death has abolished

God's law and replaced it with His grace. Paul says that His death establishes the law all the more and emphasizes the importance of obedience. Satan had argued from the beginning that God's law is unfair, arbitrary, and that created beings cannot obey it. Jesus' life and death proved that accusation to be false. We are not saved by our obedience to the law, but those who are saved will be obedient.

(3) The issue of death. What and who does Jesus' death on the cross destroy? (See Hebrews 2:14, 15.) What was

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Keep in mind that people learn best in different ways. Some are visual and learn best by seeing. Some learn best by listening. Some learn best by doing. Try to include something in each class for each type of learner. Use a blackboard, engage the class in hands-on exercises when possible, and encourage participation and discussion.

the very first issue Satan raised in introducing the great controversy to earth? (See Genesis 3:15.) Satan lied to Eve in saying that sin does not cause (result in) death. In several ways, Jesus' death on the cross forever settled that issue. First, the universe saw Satan bring about the death of the sinless Son of God. So it was clear that sin *does* cause (result in) death. Second, Jesus' death ensured the eventual, final, complete destruction of Satan and death itself. And for those who accept Him, Jesus' death stands in place of the death they deserve, so they don't have to die. And third, the fact the God's own Son had to die in order to solve the sin problem proved that there was no other way. Sin inevitably results in death.

Issue 2: In what way(s) does our picture of God shape our character? Let's look at some examples of how different groups viewed God—and how it affected their characters and their actions.

(1) The Sadducees. List some of the things the Sadducees believed about God (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 604). As a result how did this affect their characters and their relationship with Jesus? (See pp. 604–606.)

(2) The Pharisees. What can you deduce from the following texts about how the Pharisees viewed God: Matthew 5:20; 9:11; 16:1; 23:23, 25; Luke 11:42, 43; 15:2? Did any of the Pharisees accept Jesus? (See John 3:1; 19:39.)

(3) Jesus' disciples. Did the disciples have a clear conception of God's character—even after having been associated with Jesus for a long time? (See Luke 9:51–56; Mark 10:35–45; John 14:7–9.) How did the misconceptions of the disciples affect their faith and their obedience to God? For example, would they have been so devastated and disappointed when Jesus died on the cross if they had had a better understanding of God and His character of love?

(4) You and me. Can you think of ways in which your views of God have affected your character and the way you live—in both positive and negative ways? Can we still have a saving relationship with God even if we don't understand Him as well as we could—and should?

Issue 4: Can we come into such a close relationship with Jesus that His will becomes our will? Note the following remarkable quotation from *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668: “All true obedience comes from the heart. . . . If we consent, He [Jesus] will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.” Think about what this statement is really saying. Do you believe it is possible to have this kind of relationship with Jesus? Why or why not? Can you think of anyone in the Bible who seems to have achieved this kind of Christlikeness? If a person were to have this kind of relationship with Jesus, would he or she ever sin? Is this a goal to work toward or an expectation that God has for each of us? Do you feel energized or discouraged when you think of the possibility of attaining this kind of relationship with Jesus? To what extent do you think God takes into account our differing backgrounds and life experiences when assessing our relationships with Him?

Applying the lesson to life

Everything Jesus did to carry out the divine plan of salvation—He did for you. The sinless life He lived, He lived for you. The shameful death He died, He died for you. If you were the only person on earth to accept His sacrifice, Jesus would still have gone to the cross. So you may claim all the promises, all the benefits, and all the salvation He offers. They are all for you!

Leaving group members with something to think about

As you know, the Greek language has more than one word for *love*. *Agape* (ἀγάπη) is the Greek word for unconditional love. That is the word used in 1 John 4:8, “God is love” (NKJV). It is also the word used in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's classic essay on the nature and importance of love. Read 1 Corinthians 13. If God is love, what does this chapter say about God's nature and character? How does this picture relate to your mental image of God?

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

PART 9

Our Lord's Last Awful Week— but What a Week It Was for Us! Part 2

This lesson, Lesson 9, deals with what the Cross means in terms of the gospel, that is, how it affects us as sinners and how it can bring about complete restoration from sin in our lives. This has meaning for the final resolution of the issues Satan raised against God's handling of sin in the great controversy. Part of Satan's rebellion against God involved his insistence that created beings cannot keep God's laws and that God was therefore arbitrary and unreasonable in asking them to obey Him. He also pictured God as self-seeking in requiring obedience.

By voluntarily forsaking His place in heaven and becoming a human being, Jesus showed Satan's charge of self-seeking to be false. By His life of complete obedience on earth, He showed that obedience is possible and reasonable. By His death, Jesus makes all this available to us humans. That is what this lesson points out—that by becoming a man, Jesus is not only our Example, He is our Substitute. He took our place, so in a real sense, what He did, we have done—if we accept Him as our Savior. Rightly understood and applied, this is a powerful means of relieving the guilt that we all struggle with. It relieves guilt, not because we take sin less seriously, but because we take seriously the forgiveness Jesus provides due to what He did for us on the cross.

Another important thing that Jesus' humanity does for us is that it makes Him able to fully understand us and the daily battles we fight with self and sin. And because He understands, He is able to provide the very help we need just when we need it. All we need to do is come to Him and ask Him to help us. He has promised never to turn us away.

Try to help class members realize that seeing Jesus as our Example can be a liberating concept when we focus on the fact that all the resources of heaven that were available to Jesus as a man here on earth, are also available to us.

Surveying the sources

The Desire of Ages, pages 700, 703, 704, 706, 707, 710, 729, 743, 745, 753, 754, 756, 758, 761–764, 772, 790, 799, 805, 807, 819, 823, 824, 826, 827.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- see more clearly that it is Jesus' humanity that qualifies Him to be their High Priest in heaven who can sympathize with their temptations and help them in times of need;
- realize that just as Jesus lived a sinless life on earth through the power of His Father, so all the resources of Heaven are available to each human being to keep him or her from falling prey to Satan's temptations; and

- understand that the essence—the grand goal—of the gospel is complete restoration from all that has been lost by sin.

Focusing on group members' needs

Guilt is one of the most powerful and widespread of human emotions. Of course, most of us have reason to feel guilty about *something*; we know we are always failing in some way. So guilt can serve a positive function—helping us realize we need to make changes in our lives, right wrongs, and so on. But guilt can be an extremely destructive emotion as well, and the need to be free from guilt is one of our most pressing needs as humans. You can be sure that there are individuals in your class who are struggling with guilt feelings. This lesson can help them see Jesus as the One who takes their guilt and forgives their sins.

Starting the discussion

In 1999, writer and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich left her comfortable middle-class life and joined the millions of Americans who work for poverty-level wages. She did so voluntarily. Armed with a car, a laptop computer, and \$1,000 in startup funds, she spent parts of two years trying to survive while working for minimum wage as a waitress, a cleaning woman, a nursing home assistant, and a Wal-Mart employee. She discovered that these kinds of jobs require exhausting physical and mental effort and that one job is not enough to get by. You need at least two such jobs if you intend to live indoors.

Ms. Ehrenreich temporarily changed lives to make a point and write a book about it. Her experience illustrates (although it can't compare with) what Jesus did. Ask a class member to read Philippians 2:5–8. Let's try to see what is involved in Jesus becoming a human being—what it meant for Him and what it means for us.

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: Can Jesus truly understand us and our human weaknesses? Did Jesus really become a human being? (See Hebrews 2:14–18.) We cannot understand the Incarnation—how Jesus can be fully God and fully man. Yet the Bible affirms both His full divinity and His full humanity. He truly became one of us—forever (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25). That Jesus voluntarily left heaven to become a human and live with us on this earth is a sacrifice beyond our comprehension. What experience near the end of His earthly life shows clearly the extent to which Jesus took on our humanity with all its sins, guilt, and suffering? (See Matthew 26:36–46.) What specific human attributes does this experience highlight? Jesus felt sorrow and deep despair (see verse 38). Jesus did not want to die (see verse 39). Jesus longed for sympathy and support (verse 40). Jesus felt the agony of guilt (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 686). Jesus felt the almost unbearable temptations of Satan (see p. 687). Jesus felt the horror of sin (see p. 690).

Following the terrible agony of Gethsemane, what further agony awaited Jesus in His humanity? (See Mark 15:15–37.) Jesus was severely beaten (see verse 15). He was ridiculed and mocked (see verses 16–20). He was tortured to death (see verses 22–25, 33–37). He felt the hopelessness of guilt that lost sinners will feel at the end of time (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753). This is what it meant for Jesus to become a human being.

What does Jesus' humanity mean for us? Ellen White wrote, "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Good teachers listen as well as talk. Listen carefully to questions from class members; often such questions will indicate a need or concern that may not be apparent on the surface. Don't feel that you have to be the one to always answer students' questions. You can turn the question over to the class for discussion.

treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25). The Bible says that Jesus was made sin for us, so that we might become righteous (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). What else does Jesus' humanity mean for us? (See Hebrews 4:14–16.) Is there any temptation, weakness, or problem we can face that Jesus does not understand? Is there any situation we can face that Jesus cannot give us strength to deal with? Could Jesus have been able to understand our problems and provide the help we need if He hadn't become one of us?

Issue 2: What does it mean to overcome sin, and can we hope to achieve such a victory? Did Jesus live a sinless life while on earth as a human being? (See 1 Peter 2:21, 22.) What implication does Peter draw for us from the fact that Jesus lived a sinless life? How did Jesus overcome sin as a human? (See John 5:19, 30.) Is this source of power also available to us? What does John say about overcoming sin? (See 1 John 2:4, 6.) What else does John say about our sins? (See verses 1, 2.) What does Paul say about the temptations we face and the help we can receive in meeting them successfully? (See 1 Corinthians 10:13.)

Issue 3: What does "total restoration from sin" look like? When God's dealings with sin are finished, all that has been lost by sin will be restored. What does Peter say about the earth being restored following sin? (See 2 Peter 3:10–13.) How does John describe the new heaven and earth that will be restored following sin? (See Revelation 21.) Why do you think John mostly describes things that will *not* be present in the new earth? (See verses 1, 4, 25, 27.) What are some of the things John says *will* be present in the new earth? (See verses 3, 10–14; 22:1–3.) In terms of human character, what does total restoration from sin look like? (See 1 John 3:1–3; Revelation 7:13–17; 21:27; 22:14.)

Applying the lesson to life

Jesus is our Example both in the sinless life that He lived and also in His total reliance on His Father as the means by which He overcame every temptation. He asks us to live as He lived, but He also offers us all the power of Heaven to do so. Jesus can fully understand our temptations because He experienced them fully as a human. He can give us the very help we need for every situation we face in life.

Leaving group members with something to think about

On a scale of one to ten, how well do you think you are doing in making good decisions in your spiritual life today? Try to be as objective as possible. (*It might be interesting to have your spouse or a close friend evaluate your decision making on this same scale—and compare his or her assessment with your own!*)

Poor decisions

Excellent decisions

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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THE END OF THE WAR
PART 10

God's Side of the Story in the Great Controversy as Told by the Early Church

With this lesson, the focus shifts to the great controversy as played out in the experience of the New Testament church—recorded in the Bible book of Acts and in the fourth book in Ellen White's series by the same name.

The early church lived in the expectation of Jesus' soon return. That is apparent in a number of New Testament passages. Of course, more than 2,000 years later, the church is still waiting. So one of the issues this lesson deals with is—"Why?" Is Jesus' coming overdue, and if so what are the factors that have delayed it for so long? Or were the early Christians simply not justified in believing Jesus would return in their day? Can we, today, hasten the time of His coming? Is Jesus waiting for us to do something? As with other issues, the answers are not as simple as one might think. Encourage class members to think carefully about the topic and join in the discussion.

On a somewhat more positive note, the lesson points out that Christians today stand in an unbroken line of God's people who have stood faithfully for Him through the centuries. We are part of a family of the faithful. This can give us an important sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves. It also means that we are to take up the unfinished task begun by the New Testament church and carried along by the church in every age. Being part of the family has its responsibilities.

Finally, this lesson looks at the sources of power that the early church drew on in carrying out God's assignment to take the gospel to the world. Chief among those resources, of course, is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to His disciples and to us. Throughout the book of Acts in the New Testament, we find the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of the apostles and the church. Class members need to realize that the same power is available to them today. The Holy Spirit is poised to empower the church today to do even greater works than were seen in the days of the apostles.

Surveying the sources

The Acts of the Apostles, pages 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 23, 28, 31, 37, 39, 40, 45, 48–50, 52, 55, 62, 73–76, 88, 96, 111, 152–154, 157, 189, 190, 209, 210, 219, 220, 230, 232, 245, 246, 296, 313, 384–388, 451, 475–478, 482, 483, 531, 532, 541, 543, 600.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- see that they stand in an unbroken line of Christ's disciples, reaching from the early New Testament church to the end of time, to whom Jesus has given the task of communicating the gospel to the world;

- recognize how much they need the Holy Spirit in order to live for Jesus and be His witnesses in a fallen world; and
- gain insight into why the coming of Jesus has been so long delayed.

Focusing on group members' needs

Relationships with others are important—families, friends, coworkers, and fellow Christians. We all need significant interactions with other people, yet many today feel isolated—even living in cities and among crowds. In fact, without significant relationships, being surrounded by people can make the situation worse and cause us to feel even more alone. Akin to this need is the need to belong to something larger than ourselves, to feel a part of something that is making a difference. Today's lesson meets those needs by emphasizing how we are part of a Christian family that stretches back to the time of the apostles themselves. It also points to a time when Jesus will return to take us all home to live with Him forever.

Starting the discussion

In Hebrews 12:1, 2, the apostle pictures Christians as participants in a sporting event—a great race. He pictures us down on the field, surrounded by throngs of spectators filling every seat in the stadium. He pictures the race about to get underway, as we get ready to run. “Strip down!” he urges us. “Take off the training weights, lay aside anything that will slow you down, and get ready to run the race of your life, pacing yourself and making sure you reach the finish line, keeping your eyes on the team Captain who has run the race before you—Jesus, the One in whom you begin and finish your race.”

We Christians today stand at the end of a long, unbroken line of believers—stretching back to the early church and the New Testament apostles themselves. It's like a relay race, and the baton has been handed off from generation to generation until it has been passed on to us. The throng of heavenly spectators is cheering us on; the finish line is drawing closer and closer as we finish the race.

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: Has God given us the same task He gave the New Testament church, and if so, how can we accomplish this task? What role did God assign the church after His return to heaven? (See Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.) What assignment did Jesus give the demon-possessed man after He cast out his demons? (See Luke 8:38, 39.) We can all bear witness to our personal experiences—what Jesus has done for us. How are we connected to the New Testament church? (See John 17:20, 21.)

We stand today in an unbroken line of those who have believed in Jesus and who have invited Him to be their Savior.

What sources of power did the early church draw on to carry out its God-given mission? (See Matthew 28:20; Acts 1:8; 4:13.) The power of Jesus working in His disciples through the Holy Spirit enabled them to fulfill the task He gave them of carrying the gospel to the entire world. Even their enemies attributed their effectiveness to the fact that they had been with Jesus. What was the other great source of power for the early church? (See Acts 8:26–39.) Note especially verse 35. Philip used the Bible (the Old Testament Scriptures) to preach Jesus. The Bible and the Holy Spirit are our sources of power as we finish the work the early church began of carrying the gospel to the whole world.

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Keep classroom discussion focused. It's easy to let a vocal class member lead the discussion off into areas unrelated to the lesson topic. Be responsive to questions, but distinguish between those that are on topic and those that are not. If you have to control the discussion, try to do so courteously and without embarrassing anyone.

Issue 2: What part does the Holy Spirit play in enabling us to live and witness for Jesus? What happened to the disciples at Pentecost and what was its effect on the spread of the gospel? (See Acts 2:1–4, 41, 42.) What does Paul say about the role of the Spirit in enabling believers to do the work of God? (See 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Ephesians 4:11–13.) Ellen White writes that the church in the last days can expect a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to prepare it to finish God’s work and be ready to meet Jesus when He comes (see *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55). Just as God’s Spirit was seen in a marked way in the early church, God’s work will close with a similar manifestation of His power through the work of the Spirit in His people.

The book of Acts repeatedly points out the power of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles and early Christian believers: Peter (Acts 4:8); Stephen (Acts 6:5, 10; 7:55); Philip (Acts 8:29); Paul (Acts 9:17; 13:9); Barnabas (Acts 11:24); and so on. Paul testifies that his effectiveness in the gospel ministry is due entirely to the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:4). Will the same be true of God’s last-day church? Why or why not?

Issue 3: Is Jesus’ coming overdue, and if so, what are some factors that have delayed it? Did the disciples expect Jesus to return in their lifetimes? (See John 21:20–23; Titus 2:11–14; Revelation 22:20, 21.) What did the apostle Paul say to Christians living in his day about the return of Jesus? (See Romans 13:11–14.) What reason does Peter give for a delay in the coming of Jesus? (See 2 Peter 3:8, 9.) What counsel does Paul give to Christians who were expecting the Lord to return? (See 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8.)

Can you think of some reasons why the coming of Jesus has been delayed? (*Possible suggestions: More time is needed to allow the sin problem to work itself out before the universe; God’s people are not ready; the church has not carried the gospel to the world as aggressively as it should have; evil in the world has not yet reached “critical mass.”*) Do you think these are credible reasons or rationalizations? Can we really know why the Lord has not yet come?

What counsel did Jesus Himself give about preparing for His return? (See Matthew 24:42–44.) When asked what he would do if he knew the Lord would return to earth “tomorrow,” Martin Luther is supposed to have replied, “I would plant a tree today.” Do you think that is good advice? Why or why not? Should we continue living faithfully each day and leave the time of Jesus’ coming to Him?

Applying the lesson to life

The apostle Peter applies today’s lesson to each of us. In concluding his sermon at Pentecost, he said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38, 39, NKJV). That promise, then, includes you!

Leaving group members with something to think about

What work do you think God has in mind for you to do for Him? In what ways do you think the Holy Spirit is equipping you to carry out this work? Try to look objectively at your strengths and weaknesses. Consider your circle of influence—those you interact with daily. Weigh the talents and abilities God has given you. What do these things tell you about the work God has planned for you?

THE END OF THE WAR

PART 11

Apostasy of the Early Church

Class members may be surprised to learn how quickly the early church fell into apostasy. Yet in some ways it isn't surprising at all. There are foreshadowings in the New Testament of the falling away that is already coming. Jesus' messages to the seven churches, as recorded in Revelation 2 and 3, contain warnings and rebukes for various failures and errors. Remember, too, how quickly Adam and Eve fell into sin in the perfection of Eden. The point is one that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 10:12—"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Lesson 11, along with the final two lessons in this series, are based on *The Great Controversy*, the fifth and last book in Ellen White's Conflict of the Ages series. These three lessons trace the history of the church from the death of the apostles to the final end of sin and sinners.

This lesson highlights how quickly the church lost sight of God's truth, how quickly it lost a living relationship with its Lord. Even more important, it explores *why* this happened. And it makes the point that the same thing can easily happen today.

Satan initially tried to destroy the church through persecution. Most of the apostles died violent deaths. But often, persecution seemed only to *strengthen* the church and drive it closer to God. So Satan turned to other more subtle and more effective means. This lesson identifies these methods. It analyzes why they were so effective and how we can guard against similar attacks by Satan today.

By A.D. 300 the church had largely lost its way, leading to the centuries known as the Dark Ages. Even so, there has always been an unbroken line of individuals who have remained steadfast in following God and truth. This faithful line eventually produced the Reformers—Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Huss, Jerome, Wycliffe, Tyndale, and others. Look for ways in this lesson to encourage class members to renew their determination to take their place in this unbroken line of the faithful; and help them to recognize—and thus be able to resist—Satan's strategies to separate them from God as he did the early church.

Surveying the sources

The Great Controversy, pages 20, 22, 28, 29, 35–37, 42, 43, 45, 47–52, 55, 56, 58, 59, 61–70, 73, 80, 89, 94, 97–99, 120–122, 132, 140, 148, 149, 173, 174, 186, 187, 189–195, 202–205, 207, 208, 212–214, 216, 217, 220, 227, 230, 234, 235, 239, 240, 244, 265.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- see how quickly Satan was able to introduce errors into the early church and bring about apostasy among Christian believers;
- be committed to standing with those who have remained faithful to God in every age—even when it

seemed that spiritual darkness would overwhelm the light of God's truth; and

- see how God has raised up reformers in every age to restore forgotten truths and to call their contemporaries back to a personal relationship with Him.

Focusing on group members' needs

The great controversy unfolds in our hearts as well as on a cosmic stage. Spiritual turmoil results from the struggle of our human nature against our spiritual nature, from failing to live as we know we ought. This lesson will help us see how Satan exploits this internal struggle—and how we can find peace.

Starting the discussion

Try to imagine that you are Satan observing the early Christian church. It hasn't been long since Jesus returned to heaven. You see the zeal of the apostles and the power of the Holy Spirit working through them. You see new believers being added daily to the church. You see their love for Jesus reflected in their lives. If you were Satan, how would you go about severing their relationship with Jesus and tearing down the Christian church? (*Encourage class members to make suggestions.*) According to the New Testament record, what obvious method did Satan employ? (See Acts 6:8–13; 7:54–60; 8:1; 9:1, 2; 12:1–4; and so on.) How successful was this method? (See 2 Corinthians 4:7–9, 16–18.) Persecution was largely unsuccessful in separating Christians from the Lord Jesus. In fact, as the early church leader, Tertullian, put it: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Yet, the speed with which the early Christian church lost sight of a living relationship with Jesus Christ is surprising. As the apostles and the first generation of Christians began to die and their places were taken by others Satan managed to accomplish by stealth what he had been unable to accomplish through force and persecution. Very soon the church began to lose much of its living, vital relationship with the Lord.

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: How was Satan able to lead the early church into apostasy so quickly? Satan used two strategies to bring spiritual darkness into the church. (1) He held out to the church the prospect of social acceptance and worldly prosperity and influence (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 42). To a church accustomed to persecution and being condemned and looked down upon by society, this was an alluring temptation. By making a few concessions, by lowering its standards a bit, by yielding or modifying a few features of its faith, the Christian church saw an opportunity of gaining influence and even prestige in the world. (2) Satan brought into the church converts who were not totally committed to Christ and His truth (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 43). Many who joined the Christian church also held on to some of their pagan beliefs and practices. Inevitably, these ideas began to weaken the church, introducing superstition, idolatry, and unbiblical doctrines as well as a weaker commitment to Jesus Christ. How did the apostle Paul warn against this very thing? (See Acts 20:27–30; 2 Timothy 4:1–4.) Are there uncommitted individuals in the church today? (See Matthew 13:24–30.)

What unbiblical beliefs and practices was Satan able to introduce into the church soon after the apostles passed from the scene? (*Ask class members to glean at least five examples from The Great Controversy, pp. 49–60.*) Through these things, error, pride, and vice strengthened their hold on the church, and an era of great spiritual darkness descended upon it.

Issue 2: What is required to stand in the unbroken line of God's faithful people? Hebrews 11 describes a "Hall of the Faithful." What link is there between this unbroken line and us today? (See verses 39, 40.) Although Satan was able

TEACHING PRINCIPLE

Imagining can be an effective teaching tool. Several lessons have suggested you ask class members to imagine themselves in a particular role and to verbalize how they would respond or react to certain situations. This helps them to see through new eyes and think in new ways. Push them to think outside the box.

to weaken the church, there were always those who remained stalwart and faithful to God—even in times of deepest spiritual darkness. What were the factors that kept them faithful and that will allow us to stand in an unbroken line with them? (1) A *personal* relationship with Jesus. Many second-generation Christian believers had a secondhand relationship with Jesus based on the testimony of others. They failed to maintain a living connection with Jesus and allowed themselves to become enveloped in spiritual darkness. The same can happen to you and me. Like any relationship, our relationship with Jesus requires continual attention and nurture if it is to grow and thrive. Each of us must have a *personal* relationship with Jesus. We can't depend on the spiritual experience of our parents, our teachers, our pastor, or our friends. If our spiritual experience is a secondhand one, it will not grow or be strong. Unless we take the time and make the effort to daily nurture a personal relationship with Jesus, spiritual darkness will inevitably overshadow us.

(2) An unwavering determination not to compromise with sin. As he did with the early Christian church, Satan often tempts us to make minor compromises and concessions in our relationship with God. It is easy to tell ourselves that these are little things that don't really matter and that the result will be good. But in reality they will weaken our faith and bring us to spiritual ruin—just as they did with the church in the early centuries.

(3) Maintain a spiritual awareness of the issues involved in the great controversy. We need to be vigilant and spiritually aware. As in the early Christian church, it may seem on the surface that all is going well for a while, but the great controversy continues to play itself out—in our lives, in the church, and in the world—and will do so until the end of time. What counsel do the apostles Peter and Paul give us in this regard? (See 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:10–12.)

Issue 3: What was the focus of the Reformers and what implications does this have for us today? (1) They called people back to the Word of God. *Sola scriptura* (the Bible only) became the watchword of the Reformation. Luther, Wycliffe, Erasmus, and others translated the Bible from Latin into everyday languages. The Waldenses made copies of the Scriptures and clandestinely circulated them. Likewise, God expects us today to be a “people of the Book,” making it a central focus of our spiritual lives and pointing others to its truths for today. (2) They stressed a personal faith in God—as opposed to coming to God through a church or human priest. Luther was the great champion of righteousness by faith. Today, we need to model and teach the importance of a living faith that claims God's power and His promises.

Applying the lesson to life

Seeing how men and women have remained faithful to God even in times of deep spiritual darkness helps us to claim His promises to enable us to take our place with them. As we let God live in us, we will find spiritual peace. Just as He has done for others, God will help us remain faithful, no matter how dark the circumstances may be that surround us.

Leaving group members with something to think about

Are you making daily progress in following God and His truth? List some specific evidences of such progress that have taken place in your life recently.

THE END OF THE WAR
PART 12

The Church Finally Proves Satan Wrong as God Concludes the Great Controversy

Most class members will be familiar with the name William Miller and the date 1844. They will know about the Great Disappointment that took place when Jesus didn't return on that date as Miller and his followers expected. They will know that Miller's movement was the forerunner of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and that the answer to the Disappointment had to do with the sanctuary in heaven. But for many Adventists, how all these things fit together and what they really have to do with us today—all this is somewhat vague. And too often, the whole topic fills them with uneasiness—even fear. Lesson 12 will help clear up some of these issues for the class. Hopefully, they will see why it's important for them to understand what is going on today in the sanctuary in heaven.

This lesson takes up the progress of the great controversy at the point that it moves into the end time. Miller's movement, though mistaken in expecting the return of Jesus, was led by God to focus attention on the promise of Jesus' coming and also to begin the work pictured in Revelation 14 by three angels with important messages from God to the whole world. This is the work Seventh-day Adventists believe God has given them in order to prepare the world for Jesus' coming. An important part of that message has to do with the judgment that began in 1844 as Jesus' ministry in the sanctuary in heaven changed. This lesson will help class members understand what the judgment means for them. Judgment can be a scary concept, so be sure to point out that God's purpose in the judgment is to exonerate us—vindicate us—not condemn us. The judgment also serves to vindicate God's handling of the sin problem.

Leave class members with the reassuring thought that Jesus is both our Judge and our Advocate in the judgment. You might point out, too, that it isn't as if Jesus has to persuade the Father to love and forgive us. God the Father is as eager as is the Son to see us safely through the judgment.

Surveying the sources

The Great Controversy, pages 245–247, 251–256, 260–264, 269–271, 289–293, 295, 297, 317, 320, 338, 339, 355, 356, 373, 374, 383–385, 388, 409, 419–423, 425, 428, 433, 435–446, 452, 453, 457, 458, 461–465.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- see how God's purposes were fulfilled in William Miller's message that Jesus would return in 1844, in spite of Miller's misunderstanding of some aspects of the prophecies and the bitter disappointment that followed when Jesus did not come as expected;

- better understand Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and how His work as High Priest changed in 1844; and
- more fully place their lives in the hands of Jesus, trusting Him as their Advocate in the judgment going on in heaven.

Focusing on group members’ needs

Fear is a strong motivator—although not necessarily a good one. Sometimes Christians can be motivated by fear—fear of being lost when Jesus comes, fear of the judgment, fear of failing to measure up, fear that their sins are not forgiven. Hopefully this lesson can help class members who may be fearful of such things. Try to focus the lesson in such a way that class members will see God’s love and grace even in such potentially scary events as the Second Coming and judgment.

Starting the discussion

Perhaps you saw the billboards proclaiming, “Judgment Day—May 21, 2011.” These were paid for by an organization run by radio evangelist Harold Camping, who had calculated that the world would end and Jesus would return on that date. A former civil engineer turned Bible student, Camping believed he had determined the May 21, 2011, date from the Bible and that the end would begin at 6:00 P.M. with a massive earthquake in New Zealand. Judgment Day would then roll across the earth following the time zones. He convinced a number of followers who helped finance efforts to warn the world. Camping’s prediction, of course, turned out to be inaccurate.

More than a century ago, William Miller, a farmer turned Bible student, made a similar prediction that generated even more attention than did Camping’s. Miller preached that Jesus would return “around 1843” and later refined the date to October 22, 1844. Why do we believe that Miller’s prediction (though mistaken) was part of God’s plan and yet believe Camping simply to be mistaken? Let’s dig a little deeper.

Digging into the issues

*Issue 1: How did God use William Miller’s movement in spite of his mistaken expectation that Jesus would return in 1844? On what did Miller base his expectation that Jesus would return in 1844? (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 324, 325.) (Answer: The prophecy of Daniel 8:14 that the sanctuary would be cleansed at the close of 2,300 prophetic days. Miller understood the “sanctuary” to be the earth, which would be cleansed by fire at the second coming. The 2,300 days he worked out to end in 1844.)* What was Miller’s mistake—the time element of the prophecy or the event to happen in 1844? (See pp. 352, 353, 409, 410.) What was the sanctuary referred to in Daniel 8:14? (See Hebrews 8:1, 2, 11; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 413–415.) What is meant by the “cleansing of the sanctuary”? (See pp. 417, 421, 422.)

What does all this have to do with us today? (See 2 Corinthians 5:10.) How does Daniel describe the judgment? (See Daniel 7:9, 10.) In her book *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White makes these points regarding the investigative judgment: (1) a work of judgment began in heaven in 1844 that involves reviewing the life record of each Christian (pp. 479–482, 486); (2) God’s law is the standard by which each person’s life will be judged (p. 482); (3) the books in heaven contain a complete record of our lives—every good deed and every sin (pp. 483, 486, 487).

Should Christians fear the judgment? Why or why not? Can we trust God to judge justly? Read

“The . . . cleansing of the heavenly [sanctuary] is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 422).

Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:18; 61:10. Do these verses cause you to see the judgment in a different light? The apostle Paul says that every one of us must stand before Christ's judgment seat (see Romans 14:10). However, Jesus said that those who believe in Him will not come into judgment (see John 5:24). How do you harmonize these two statements? Does 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 shed any light? God's eternal law is the standard in the judgment. What is the central principle behind the law that undergirds each of its individual commandments? (See Galatians 5:14; Matthew 22:34–40; Romans 13:8–10; 1 John 4:7, 8.)

How did William Miller's mistaken emphasis on the Lord's return in 1844 actually carry out God's purpose? (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 373, 374, 405, 406.) God held His hand over the mistaken interpretation. It was His plan that Miller's message would focus attention on the second coming of Jesus—even though those looking for

Jesus' to appear in 1844 would be terribly disappointed. This message was the beginning of God's threefold, last-day message to the world (see Revelation 14:6–12), calling on God's people to worship Him and keep His commandments, because the time for His judgment had come. This message also led to a focus on God's law and the seventh-day Sabbath as crucial issues in the last days and ushered in the final stages of the great controversy.

Issue 2: How did Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary change in 1844, and what does it mean for us? (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 424–428.) Jesus is our High Priest in the sanctuary in heaven (see Hebrews 8:1, 2). Following His return to heaven, He ministered in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, carrying out in reality what the Old Testament priests on earth illustrated by their daily service in the Jewish sanctuary—the forgiveness of sins. In 1844, Jesus' ministry moved to the Most Holy Place, where the Day of Atonement ceremony took place once each year in the sanctuary on earth. This foreshadowed a work of judgment that began in the heavenly sanctuary in 1844. The judgment will also disprove Satan's accusations against God in the great controversy. What impact does Jesus' work in the Most Holy Place have on us?

Issue 3: What does it mean to have Jesus as our Advocate in the judgment? Jesus is our Savior (see Matthew 1:21). Jesus is also our Judge (see John 5:22). Jesus is also our Advocate—or Attorney (see 1 John 2:1). The One who argues our case before the heavenly judgment is also our Savior who gave Himself for us! The One who is our Judge in the heavenly judgment is also the Savior who died on the cross so that we might live! Is there any reason to fear the judgment when Jesus is on our side as Savior, Advocate, and Judge? Can anything separate us from God's love? (See Romans 8:31–39.)

Applying the lesson to life

Since the judgment began in heaven in 1844, the lives of individuals have been coming up for review. At some point, your life will be judged. Judgment can be scary, but if you have a personal relationship with God today, that relationship will see you through the judgment. Jesus stands up for you in the judgment and covers your imperfect life with His righteousness—if you have accepted Him as your Savior. Seen in this light, judgment is liberating, not something to fear.

Leaving group members with something to think about

Compare Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 with Zechariah 3:1–5. Do both texts present valid snapshots of how God will deal with us in the judgment? What happens if we focus too heavily on one picture or the other?

“While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 425).

THE END OF THE WAR
PART 13

End-time Events Will Focus the Controversy in Technicolor So That Doubts Will Never Again Arise, Ever!

This lesson focuses on (1) overcoming Satan's end-time temptations, and (2) preparing to live forever with God and Jesus in the earth made new. These are *the* two important considerations for us as God brings the great controversy to an end and ushers in His kingdom in which sin will never rise up again.

It's true that the trials of the last days will be fierce. It's true that Satan will do everything in His power to break our hold on God. It's true that each of us will have to make a decision to follow God no matter what. But try to help your class members see that in spite of all this, God will continue to be just as close to them in the end time as He has ever been. It doesn't minimize the crucial nature of these final events in the least to say that we will pass through them in just the same way that we have lived our daily lives up to that point—by abiding “in Christ” and by trusting His love and power. Holding His hand, we will walk with Him into the kingdom just as we have walked with Him through each day.

The lesson points out some of the ways Satan has tried to destroy faith throughout the great controversy—and that He will use the same tactics against God's people in the end time. It also points out that *now* is the time to be developing a relationship with Jesus that will enable us to resist Satan's deceptions and temptations. *Now* is the time to be living in such a way that we will enjoy eternity.

Try to help the class visualize the new earth and what it will be like to live there—eternally. Invite them to close their eyes and picture themselves in the scenes Isaiah and John describe. Read Ellen White's classic quotation with which she closes her book *The Great Controversy* (it's reproduced in the Teacher's Guide). What a day it will be when the great controversy is ended—when sin and sinner are no more!

Surveying the sources

The Great Controversy, pages 36, 37, 383, 390, 488–491, 524, 525, 528, 533, 534, 541–543, 549, 554, 555, 558, 561–563, 578, 579, 581, 582–584, 588, 589, 591–594, 597, 598, 601, 602, 604, 605, 607, 608, 611–615, 618–625, 627–630, 633, 634, 637, 651, 655, 656, 658, 659, 663–667, 669–671, 674.

Setting the objectives

Class members will

- learn to recognize the deceptive snares Satan has used through the centuries so that they can successfully resist His temptations in the strength God gives;

- better understand the issues and events of the last days in order that their faith will not fail; and
- resolve to be among the redeemed who will live forever with God and be learning more about His great love as manifested in the plan of salvation.

Focusing on group members' needs

This lesson focuses on security—the security we find in Jesus to overcome all of Satan’s deceptions and the eternal security we will enjoy when the great controversy is ended and there is no more sin. Satan’s course has caused human beings to live with ongoing fear, insecurity, and feelings of vulnerability. But that is all coming to an end. Even now, Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27, 28, NKJV). Where could we find greater security than nestled safely in the hand of Jesus?

Starting the discussion

There have been crucial times in the great controversy that have called for a decision—for or against God. We think of Joshua’s farewell challenge to the children of Israel, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve!” (Joshua 24:15). We recall Elijah on Mount Carmel, demanding, “How long will ye halt between two opinions? God or Baal? Which will it be?” (see 1 Kings 18:20, 21). We remember the three angels flying in the heavens in Revelation 14, with God’s last warning message to the world.

In the final stages of the great controversy every person on earth will have to decide whether to follow God or follow Satan. You and I will have to decide where we stand. Much will depend on the choices we have been making on a daily basis prior to that point. If we have been regularly choosing God and letting Him work in our lives, we will be able to make the all-important decision at the end of time to follow Him completely in spite of the powers of evil Satan brings to bear against us.

Digging into the issues

Issue 1: How can we recognize and overcome Satan’s deceptions? What are some of the deceptions and snares that Satan has used throughout the great controversy—and that he will use increasingly as the end draws nearer?

(1) Satan tries to lead us to neglect prayer and Bible study (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 519). What does the Bible say about the importance of a strong prayer life and Bible study? (See Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4.)

The devil knows that prayer and Bible study are two of the most effective ways to stay close to God. So he tries his best to prevent us from taking advantage of these blessings. Ellen White wrote, “The last great delusion is soon to open before us. . . . So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. . . . In order to endure the trial before them [God’s people], they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word. . . . None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594).

(2) Satan tries to get us to believe that it really makes no difference what we believe regarding religious things (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 520; 2 Timothy 4:1–4; 3:7). We are not saved by how well we understand the Bible, but what we believe is important. If we have misunderstandings about God, it will be more difficult to serve Him. The

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 678).

better we understand God and His truth, the closer our relationship with Him can be.

(3) Satan introduces doubts and questions concerning God and His Word (see *The Great Controversy*, pp. 522–528; James 1:6). God doesn't remove all possibility of doubt. We can always find questions we can't answer. It is a matter of perspective. If we look for reasons to doubt, we will find them. If we look for reasons to have faith, we will find them. Satan is pleased when we nurture doubt, because he knows it will eventually lead us away from God.

Issue 2: How can we maintain our faith through the trials of the last days? In spite of Satan's temptations and snares, what assurance do we have? (See James 4:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 10:13.) The weakest person is more than a match for all of Satan's deceptions as long as he or she is depending on the Lord's strength. How does Jesus describe the relationship we should have with Him? (See John 15:1–10.) Just as the branch draws nourishment from the vine, so we draw spiritual nurture and life from Jesus. Just as the branch cannot live separated from the vine, neither can we live spiritually apart from Jesus. To a large degree, we will endure the temptations and trials of the last days in the same way we do so today—by trusting Jesus and depending on Him. If we keep our hand in His daily now, we can walk hand-in-hand with Him through the last days into the kingdom.

Issue 3: What will it mean to be among God's redeemed when the great controversy is over? What does the Bible say about the possibility of sin ever arising again after the great controversy is ended? (See Nahum 1:9.) Can we even begin to understand what life in a world without sin would be like? (See 1 Corinthians 2:9.) How does the prophet Isaiah describe life when the great controversy is ended and sin is no more? (See Isaiah 11:6–9; 32:18; 35:1, 2; 55:12, 13; 60:18; 65:17–19, 21, 22.) What will be the greatest attraction of the earth made new? (See Revelation 21:3, 22; 22:3, 4.) We will live with God Himself and Jesus, His Son; we will see Them and serve Them forever. How does Ellen White describe the never-ending joy of the redeemed? (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.)

Applying the lesson to life

In what ways are you preparing today to live eternally with God in the new earth? What activities give you the most pleasure today? How do you spend most of your free time today? What things do you value most about your life today? Now, ask yourself, "How well do all these things carry over into life in the new earth? Can these things continue (in some form) in the new earth? Are they compatible with what I know of the future life?"

Leaving group members with something to think about

After the great controversy is ended forever, what will be the only physical reminder of sin left behind? (*Answer: The scars in Jesus' hands, feet, and side, left by the wounds that gave us eternal life.*)

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