

The Teacher's Notes—The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?, Lesson 2 Adult Bible Study Guide, 2024 2Q, "The Great Controversy"

The Teacher's Notes :

Sabbath School Lesson for April 6-12, 2024

Remember that Bible texts are hyperlinks to take you to the verses!

Overview of Lesson 2, The Central Issue, Love or Selfishness?

Memory Text: " ' "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." ' " [Isaiah 41:10 NKJV](#)

After examining the origin of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, it's logical to explore the destruction of Jerusalem that was foretold by Jesus while He was on earth. After all, He coupled the prediction of that important event with His prophecy of the last days in Matthew 24. We find in Jerusalem's destruction in about 70 A.D. a foreshadowing of the attempts of Satan to deceive and destroy God's people at the end of time.

[Isaiah 41:10](#), and many other verses like it, remind us that we don't need to fear those times, as hard as they may be. God has promised to be there with us during it all. He will strengthen and uphold us just as He's promised.

We will look at the central issue in the controversy by studying...

- **Sunday: A Brokenhearted Savior**—Our loving Jesus does all He can to save His people.
- **Monday: Christians Providentially Preserved**—The faithful church has survived Satan's attacks in the past with God's providential care.
- **Tuesday: Faithful Amid Persecution**—The early church of the first century can teach us much about having faith despite hard times.
- **Wednesday: Caring for the Community**—New Testament believers were noted for their love for each other and their neighbors.
- **Thursday: A Legacy of Love**—The Christian church not only survived, but grew because of their selfless care of others.

Read chapters 1 and 2 of *The Great Controversy*, by Ellen G. White.

An easy-to-read version in today's English, called *Love Under Fire*, is available online at https://media2.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_LF.pdf

Sunday: A Brokenhearted Savior

Even though “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” ([John 1:11](#)), **Jesus did everything He could to call His people to repent.** He delayed the consequences of their disobedience many times over the years.

As Jesus approached God’s city for the last time, His tears flowed freely, showing the love He had for those who would experience the horrific attack upon the city forty years yet in the future.

The many people who lost their lives when the Roman general Titus laid siege to Jerusalem was totally the work of Satan. God would have been justified in making it happen immediately after they killed His Son—the final act of their rebellious betrayal. But, **out of His mercy, it was delayed another forty years.**

Christ lovingly gave His followers guidance on how to escape the disaster. By carefully obeying His directive to leave the city as soon as it was totally surrounded, many were able to survive the impending destruction of Jerusalem, which, according to the historian Josephus, killed more than a million people.

Bible Verses:

- [Luke 19:41-44](#), [Matthew 23:37](#), [38](#), and [John 5:40](#)

What do we find here about the character of God, revealed in His Son?

- [Matthew 24:15-20](#) and [Luke 21:20-24](#)

How important were these words to Christians still living in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.?

Monday: Christians Providentially Preserved

We may wonder **how Christians were able to escape the city** after they saw that it was surrounded by Roman armies. Some historians tell us that **at some point before their final assault on the city, the Romans mysteriously withdrew, causing Jewish armed forces to pursue them**, winning a great victory.

It must have been during one of the brief pauses in the siege, when the Jews were able to drive back the enemy, that allowed enough time for Christians to get out of the city. **Heeding the words of Jesus, some of them fled to Pella, a city just beyond the Jordan River.**

Hebrews 11, known as the faith chapter, mentions several times when God intervened and preserved His people. But the chapter also reminds us that **many have fallen victim to intense suffering and even death for the cause of their faith.** Thankfully, despite Satan’s best efforts to erase God’s followers from the face of the earth, **they continued to grow in numbers, proclaiming the gospel with enthusiastic voices.**

Bible Verses:

- [Psalm 46:1](#) and [Isaiah 41:10](#)

How does God help us during our trials?

- [Hebrews 11:35-38](#) and [Revelation 2:10](#)

How does God reward the faithful, even those who suffer and are killed?

Tuesday: Faithful Amid Persecution

One has only to read the first eight chapters of Acts to get a sense of the crushing **difficulties of the early church in those years immediately following Christ's resurrection. They were fiercely threatened and imprisoned, and some were even killed.** The death of the first martyr, Stephen, took place only three and a half years after the crucifixion of Jesus, with many others following.

This intense persecution, however, **led to the spreading of the gospel.** Many Christians fled to other parts of the world, carrying with them their supreme desire to share the good news of the Messiah's coming to anyone who would hear.

Because of their fervent preaching, the church in Jerusalem grew by the thousands ([Acts 2:41](#) and [4:4](#)). Many of the Jews, from far and near, were delighted to hear about the Lord's sacrifice, not just for them, but for anyone who chose to accept His love. **The invitation to join God's heavenly kingdom was more inclusive than they could have hoped for.**

Those **Jews gathered in Jerusalem carried the disciples' message back to their homelands, planting seeds that later bore fruit for apostles** like Paul and Barnabas.

Bible Verses:

- [Acts 2:41](#), [4:4](#), [31](#), [5:42](#)

Why did so many respond favorably to these early sermons of the disciples?

- [Acts 4:17](#), [5:17](#), [18](#), [8:1](#)

What kind of trials faced God's people in the early years after Jesus' sacrifice and triumphant victory over death?

Wednesday: Caring for the Community

It wasn't just the eloquent sermons of the disciples that caused the church to grow. **His followers became known for living the gospel, as much as they preached it. Following the example of Jesus,** they "went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness...among the people" ([Matthew 4:23](#)). **This active, caring ministry touched human hearts, winning many of them to the cause of Christ.**

The early church lived out the purpose of God, as declared by Jesus in [John 10:10](#)—"I have come that **they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**" [3 John 1:2](#) portrays this same, caring sentiment with his desire that "I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."

This holistic approach to helping mankind, didn't stop with helping their fellow believers, but extended out to the community at large. They took very seriously God's desire to restore humanity into God's image. They knew **this included the restoration of their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.**

Bible Verses:

- [John 10:10](#)

What does it mean to live more abundantly? What does it include and how can we help others achieve it?

- [Acts 2:44-47](#), [3:6-9](#), [6:1-7](#)

How should these examples of caring and sharing impact our ministry today?

Thursday: A Legacy of Love

Surely **the most lasting legacy Jesus left His followers was His love.** Christians throughout the first three centuries after Christ's resurrection were well-known for their loving concern and care for others. **This spirit of love was largely responsible for the growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire** during that time.

Many aren't aware that **a great pandemic of what may have been smallpox or measles occurred approximately during the years 160-190 A.D.** It was called the **Antonine Plague** and may have killed **25-33% of Rome's population.** **Christians stepped forward and helped care for those who were sick,** influencing others with their organized, selfless acts of love. **Millions who witnessed the tender nursing care of Christians became believers in Christ.**

The feelings of love and selfishness are still important factors in how we conduct ourselves today. **Jesus called love a new commandment ([John 13:34](#)).** **We could all use a renewed commitment to love and care for others,** and to reject any selfish tendency that crops up in our lives.

Bible Verses:

- [John 13:34](#), [35](#) and [1 John 4:21](#)

Why does loving God lead to loving others?

How did Jesus show us how to love, and what practical ways have you and/or your local church found to show love to each other and those in the community?

Friday: Final Thoughts

Our understanding of [Matthew 24:15](#), [16](#) that talks about the destruction of Jerusalem is made clearer by reading Luke's version of what it meant by "the abomination of desolation, talked about by Daniel". Luke interprets that event, defining it as "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" ([Luke 21:20-24](#)).

Christians in Jerusalem must have been somewhat confused about how they could flee after their tremendously-fortified, three-walled city was surrounded. But historians describe brief victories for the

Jewish forces, and pp. 30-31 of “The Great Controversy” portrays one of those pauses in hostilities as prolonged enough to provide a number of faithful Christians time to escape the coming devastation.

Another historical discovery not often considered were the plagues of infectious diseases that occurred during the first few centuries that caused countless deaths in the Roman Empire. Despite intense persecution and suffering, Christians provided loving care for those who were sick, continuing their Master’s example of healing during His earthly ministry.

Our study this week has underscored the central issue of the great controversy as being whether our lives will demonstrate loving obedience or selfishness.

Next week, chapter 3 of “*The Great Controversy*” will be helpful in understanding this topic.

Read this chapter, along with the lesson, if you can. “*The Great Controversy*” in today’s English, called “*Love Under Fire*”, is also available online at

https://media2.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_LF.pdf

Next Week: Light Shines in the Darkness

To read the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly and see more resources for its study, go to

<https://www.sabbath.school/>