Quarter 2 Lesson 02

Apr 06 - Apr 12

'The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?'



[Discuss on the Daily Blog](https://ssnet.org/blog/24b-02-the-central-issue-love-or-selfishness)

Sabbath Afternoon

Read for This Week’s Study

[Luke 19:41-44](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Luke%2019.41-44); [Matthew 23:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2023.37-38); [Hebrews 11:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Heb%2011.35-38); [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rev%202.10); [Acts 2:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%202.44-47); [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2013.35).

**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](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Isa%2041.10)).

Suppose you are a herdsman tending your goats on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. You hear voices. Immediately you recognize the voice of Jesus. As the setting sun gleams off the temple and reflects in snowy whiteness off its magnificent marble walls, Jesus emphatically states, “ **‘Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ”** ([Matthew 24:2](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.2)).

The disciples are confused, and so are you. What could Jesus possibly mean by these words? How do they relate to the end of the world that Jesus’ disciples asked about? You listen in rapt attention as Jesus masterfully blends events that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem with those that would take place just before His return.

In the destruction of Jerusalem, we discover a foreshadowing of Satan’s strategy both to deceive and destroy God’s people at the end time. Jesus’ instruction in [Matthew 24:1-51](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.1-51) clearly outlines last-day events in the context of Jerusalem’s fall.

We will study Satan’s twofold strategy both to deceive and destroy God’s people. What the evil one fails to accomplish through persecution, he hopes to achieve through compromise. God is never caught by surprise, and even in the most challenging times He preserves His people.

Introduction: Last week, we studied the origin of the great controversy in heaven and on earth. This week, we focus on how the great controversy plays out in the lives, and in the history, of God’s people, especially at the intersection of Judah (the people of God in the latter part of the Old Testament) with the church (the people of God in the New Testament).

**Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes:**

1. **As a result of its rejection of Christ, Judah officially, as a political entity, lost its favored-nation status as God’s special people and suffered the horrific experience of the destruction of Jerusalem.**
2. **God established His people, the remnant of Israel, incorporated into it both Jews and Gentiles, and saved it from the cataclysms that befell Jerusalem in a.d. 70. God led His church in its mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, calling people of all nations to receive the good news and to join His new people.**

**Sabbath Afternoon, April 6 (Ellen White Notes)**

Amid national strife and ruin, the steps of the disciples would be beset with perils, and often their hearts would be oppressed by fear. They were to see Jerusalem a desolation, the temple swept away, its worship forever ended, and Israel scattered to all lands, like wrecks on a desert shore. Jesus said, “Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars.” “Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” Matthew 24:6-8. Yet Christ’s followers were not to fear that their hope was lost or that God had forsaken the earth. The power and the glory belong unto Him whose great purposes would still move on unthwarted toward their consummation. In the prayer that breathes their daily wants, the disciples of Christ were directed to look above all the power and dominion of evil, unto the Lord their God, whose kingdom ruleth over all and who is their Father and everlasting Friend.—**Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 120.**

The twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew gives an outline of what is to come upon the world. We are living amid the perils of the last days. Those who are perishing in sin must be warned. The Lord calls upon everyone to whom He has entrusted the talent of means to act as His helping hand by giving their money for the advancement of His work. Our money is a treasure lent us by the Lord, and it is to be invested in the work of giving to the world the last message of mercy. He who looks at earthly things as the chief good, he who spends his life in an effort to gain worldly riches, is indeed making a poor investment. Too late he will see that in which he has trusted crumbling into dust. It is only through self-denial, through the sacrifice of earthly riches, that the eternal riches can be obtained. It is through much tribulation that the Christian enters the kingdom of heaven. Constantly he is to war the good warfare, not laying down his weapons until Christ bids him rest. Only by giving all to Christ can he secure the inheritance that will endure through all eternity.—**This Day With God, p. 152.**

To the believer, death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. “If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death,” “he shall never taste of death.” To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” John 8:51, 52; Colossians 3:4. . . . The same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise His church, and glorify it with Him, above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come.—**The Desire of Ages, p. 787.**

*\*Study this week’s lesson, based on The Great Controversy, chapters 1–2, to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.*

Sunday [↑](https://ssnet.org/lessons/24b/less02.html#top)

7th of April

[Discuss on the Daily Blog](https://ssnet.org/blog/24b-02-a-brokenhearted-savior)

A Brokenhearted Savior

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem, His heart was broken. John’s Gospel says, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” ([John 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%201.11)). Jesus did everything He could to save His people from the coming destruction of their beloved city.

Jesus’ love for His people flowed from a heart of infinite love. He repeatedly appealed to them in love to repent and accept His gracious invitation of mercy.

Read [Luke 19:41-44](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Luke%2019.41-44); [Matthew 23:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2023.37-38); [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%205.40). What do these verses tell you about Jesus’ attitude toward His people and their response to His loving invitation of grace and mercy? What revelation of God’s character do you see?

It is difficult to understand such an event as the destruction of Jerusalem in the light of God’s loving character. History reveals that tens of thousands died as the Roman general Titus led his armies against the city. Jerusalem was devastated. Men, women, and children were slaughtered. Where was God when His people suffered so greatly? The answer is clear but not easy to grasp fully. God’s heart was broken. His eyes were filled with tears. For centuries He reached out to His people. By their rebellion against His loving-kindness, they forfeited His divine protection. God does not always intervene to limit the results of His people’s choices. He allows the natural consequences of rebellion to develop. God did not cause the slaughter of innocent children in the destruction of Jerusalem; the tragic death of the innocents was Satan’s act, not God’s.

Satan delights in war because it stirs the worst passions of the human heart. Down through the centuries, it has been his purpose to deceive and destroy and then blame his evil actions on God.

Read [Matthew 24:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.15-20). What instruction did Jesus give to His people to save them from the coming destruction of Jerusalem?

It is well to remember that the vast majority of Christians living in Jerusalem in a.d. 70 came from a Jewish background. A loving God desired to preserve as many of His people as possible. That is why He gave the instruction that when the Roman armies approached, they were to flee the city.

Reflect on the following statement: we do not judge God’s character by events we see around us; rather, we filter all the events we see through the prism of His loving character as revealed in the Bible. Why is this such good counsel?

Could it be that the magnificent temple, which was the nation’s glory, was soon to be a heap of ruins? The foreboding of evil was shared by the disciples, and they anxiously waited for some more definite statement from Jesus. . . . Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity. . . . This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth’s history.—The Desire of Ages, pp. 627, 628.

The sin of the world today is the sin that brought destruction upon Israel. Ingratitude to God, the neglect of opportunities and blessings, the selfish appropriation of God’s gifts—these were comprised in the sin that brought wrath upon Israel. They are bringing ruin upon the world today. The tears which Christ shed upon Olivet as He stood overlooking the chosen city were not for Jerusalem alone. In the fate of Jerusalem He beheld the destruction of the world. . . . In this crisis, where is the church to be found? . . . Men are in peril. Multitudes are perishing. But how few of the professed followers of Christ are burdened for these souls. The destiny of a world hangs in the balance; but this hardly moves even those who claim to believe the most far-reaching truth ever given to mortals. There is a lack of that love which led Christ to leave His heavenly home and take man’s nature that humanity might touch humanity and draw humanity to divinity. There is a stupor, a paralysis, upon the people of God, which prevents them from understanding the duty of the hour.—Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 302, 303.

[God] knows that in humanity we shall find no solace for our woe, and He pities us because we are so needy, yet so unwilling to make Him our confidant, our burdenbearer. He sees human beings slighting the love and mercy provided for them, and He says sadly, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). . . . He will never neglect those who come to Him. Of the poor, fainting soul, tired of looking to humanity only to be betrayed and forgotten, Christ says, “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me” (Isaiah 27:5).—This Day With God, p. 23.

Monday [↑](https://ssnet.org/lessons/24b/less02.html#top)

8th of April

Christians Providentially Preserved

God’s mercy, grace, providence, and foreknowledge are clearly revealed in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Cestius Gallus and the Roman armies surrounded the city. In an unexpected move, when their attack seemed imminent, they withdrew. The Jewish armies pursued them and won a great victory.

With the Romans fleeing and the Jews pursuing, the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella in Perea, beyond the Jordan River. “The promised sign had been given to the waiting Christians, and now an opportunity was offered for all who would, to obey the Saviour’s warning. Events were so overruled that neither Jews nor Romans should hinder the flight of the Christians.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 30.

Read [Psalms 46:1](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2046.1); [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Isa%2041.10). What do these passages tell us about God’s providential care?

God is sovereign and overrules events on earth for the ultimate accomplishment of His divine purposes. Although at times God alters His original plans based on our human choices, His ultimate plan for this planet will be fulfilled. There will be times when the people of God experience hardship, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself for the cause of Christ. But even in the most challenging of times with Satan’s most vicious attacks, God sustains and preserves His church.

Read [Hebrews 11:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Heb%2011.35-38); [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rev%202.10). What reality do these texts reveal about our battle with the forces of evil? How do these passages harmonize with the idea of God’s protection in the previous question? Is there a contradiction in the idea of God’s protection and God allowing some to face painful suffering and even a martyr’s death for the cause of Christ?

“In vain were Satan’s efforts to destroy the church of Christ by violence. The great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God’s workmen were slain, but His work went steadily forward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 41.

What should it mean to us that the Bible writers, who certainly knew pain and suffering, could nevertheless, again and again, write about the reality of God’s love? How can we experience that same love for ourselves?

The ruin of Jerusalem was a symbol of the final ruin that shall overwhelm the world. The prophecies that received a partial fulfillment in the overthrow of Jerusalem have a more direct application to the last days. We are now standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. A crisis is before us, such as the world has never witnessed. . . . The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations, as well as the concerns of His church, in His own charge. The divine Instructor is saying to every agent in the accomplishment of His plans, as He said to Cyrus, “I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.” Isaiah 45:5.—Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 120. In the vision of the prophet Ezekiel there was the appearance of a hand beneath the wings of the cherubim. This is to teach His servants that it is divine power which gives them success. Those whom God employs as His messengers are not to feel that His work is dependent upon them. Finite beings are not left to carry this burden of responsibility. He who slumbers not, who is continually at work for the accomplishment of His designs, will carry forward His own work. He will thwart the purposes of wicked men, and will bring to confusion the counsels of those who plot mischief against His people. He who is the King, the Lord of hosts, sitteth between the cherubim, and amid the strife and tumult of nations He guards His children still. He who ruleth in the heavens is our Saviour. He measures every trial, He watches the furnace fire that must test every soul. When the strongholds of kings shall be overthrown, when the arrows of wrath shall strike through the hearts of His enemies, His people will be safe in His hands.— Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 121. Looking down through long centuries of darkness and superstition, [John,] the aged exile saw multitudes suffering martyrdom because of their love for the truth. But he saw also that He who sustained His early witnesses would not forsake His faithful followers during the centuries of persecution that they must pass through before the close of time. “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer,” the Lord declared; “behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation: . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10. And to all the faithful ones who were striving against evil, John heard the promises made: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.” Verse 7; 3:5.—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 588.

Part II: Commentary

**A Few Quick Facts About Jerusalem**

The tragic fall of Jerusalem may be delineated, at least in part, by the following historical details:

1. Jerusalem was destroyed during the First Jewish War (a.d. 66–a.d. 73), its annihilation commencing toward the end of the reign of the emperor Nero (a.d. 54– a.d. 68). The war broke out when Gessius Florus, the freshly appointed Roman procurator to Judea, took a large amount of money from the temple treasury in Jerusalem.
2. The two major Roman generals sent to quash the revolt were Vespasian and his son, Titus. Both later became emperors.
3. The siege of Jerusalem started in earnest in the year a.d. 70. For the most part, throughout the siege, the defenders of the city were splintered into factions and fought among themselves, uniting only to repulse the imminent attacks of the [Romans. 4](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom.%204). Jerusalem was guarded by three walls. The first two walls fell to the Romans in April of a.d. 70, and the third was breached several months later, on August 30. The temple was burned on the same day.
4. According to Jewish historian Josephus, more than one million people died during the siege of Jerusalem, and an estimated 100,000 were taken captive. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. The booty that the Romans took from Jerusalem funded the construction of the Colosseum, one of the most visited monuments in Rome.
5. Bereft of its city, Jerusalem, and its temple, Judaism suffered profound changes. The center of the Jewish religion shifted from the temple, sacrifices, and priests to the law. The Sadducees, the sacerdotal class, lost most of their power, and Judaism became rabbinical.

**The Fall of Jerusalem**

It is no coincidence that Ellen G. White starts The Great Controversy with the chapter entitled “The Destruction of Jerusalem.” She understood that this tragic event of the Jewish nation was central to the great controversy and to the identity and mission of the church. How so? To answer this question, we need to first understand why Jerusalem fell.

From the vantage point of secular history, Jerusalem and the second temple were destroyed because the Jews rebelled against the superpower of the time, the Roman Empire, and were mercilessly crushed by its might, both in an act of vengeance and as a deterrent to other potential rebels. In the centuries that have lapsed since the fall of Jerusalem, believing Jews have generally interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem as a disciplinary measure that God allowed. Some scholars of Judaism have said that the Jews sinned by transgressing God’s law, becoming immoral; others believe that the Jews were too fractious and divided, never having learned the lesson of unity. Whatever the case, God preserved a remnant to carry on His purposes.

However, the Bible, especially the New Testament, offers a different explanation for the destruction of the temple. Yes, rebellion, iniquity, moral and social corruption, and internal strife and division were certainly major factors that led to the downfall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. But the situation that caused that tragedy was more profound than these factors alone. To help us understand what caused the temple’s destruction, several important points, from both the Old and New Testaments, need to be highlighted. Taken together, these points help us to understand the main reason for the temple’s demise: Israel’s leadership rejection of Christ and of God’s covenant.

**The Original Temple**

First, the original temple of Israel, built by Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians, in 586 b.c., some 20 years after Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar ([Daniel 1:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Dan%201.1-2)). The destruction happened approximately one hundred years after the Northern Israelites fell into apostasy and were conquered by the Assyrians. However, these two events—Israel’s demise and the destruction of Solomon’s temple by Babylonian forces—did not transpire simply because the Jewish nation failed to learn how to unite or because of its moral declension. Northern Israel disappeared as a nation because they rejected God’s covenant and went after other gods ([1 Kings 12:26-33](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Kings%2012.26-33); [2 Kings 17:7-23](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Kings%2017.7-23)). Like Israel, Judah had wicked kings and corrupt elites bent on idolatry. Over time, Judah’s periods of idolatry also increased in frequency and intensity. However, unlike Northern Israel, Judah did not have a permanent official national policy of replacing God’s religion with paganism. For this reason, God permitted the destruction of Judah’s temple and its capital city, in 586 b.c., and the temporary exile of its people, as a strategy for national renewal.

**The Second Temple**

Second, the second temple was destroyed in the year a.d. 70 by the Romans, some 35 years after Jesus foretold the following three events: (1) God would take the kingdom from Judah and give it to another nation ([Matthew 21:43](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2021.43)); (2) Judah’s house (the temple) would be “left desolate” ([Matthew 23:38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2023.38)); and (3) the temple would be completely destroyed ([Matthew 24:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.1-2)). The reason for this triple judgment? Judah’s leadership not only failed to bring forth the fruit of the kingdom of God ([Matthew 21:43](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2021.43)) but, as did Northern Israel of old, consciously refused to remain under the jurisdiction and shelter of God’s wings ([Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2023.37)). In a.d. 31, the leaders made an official, conscious, and deliberate decision to reject God’s covenant, His salvation, and His Messiah ([Matthew 26:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2026.1-3); [Matthew 26:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2026.14-16); [Matthew 26:57-68](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2026.57-68); [Matthew 27:15-25](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2027.15-25); [John 19:1-15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2019.1-15)). As a result, God allowed the earthly temple to be destroyed.

**God’s Grace**

Third, God gave Israel and Judah all the grace necessary for redemption and restoration before He permitted them to suffer the penalty for breaking His covenant. From the time of Moses to the destruction of the second temple in a.d. 70, a span of more than 1,500 years, Judah experienced God’s unremitting love. Despite their failures, God was willing to work with them as long as they were willing to remain in His covenant and be transformed by His grace and power. Even when the Jewish leaders eventually decided to reject God, which was followed by Jesus’ pronouncement of doom against them, God gave them more than 35 years before He executed that verdict. During this probationary period, Christians, such as Peter ([Acts 2:1-4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%202.1-4.37)), Stephen ([Acts 7:1-60](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%207.1-60)), and Paul ([Romans 9:1-11:36](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%209.1-11.36)), pleaded with them to accept Jesus as the Messiah and to participate in God’s new covenant. Sad to say, instead of heeding these calls, the leaders sealed their decision to reject Christ with a heavy-handed persecution of Christians that culminated in the murder of Stephen, in a.d. 34. However, even in the decision to reject Judah as His representative nation, God continued to call individual Jews to enter His new covenant and to be saved in His kingdom.

The fall of Jerusalem, therefore, illustrates God’s dealings with sinners in the great controversy. This perspective helps to partially answer our initial question as to why Ellen White felt that this tragedy was so central to the great controversy theme and to the identity and mission of the church. Furthermore, Ellen White understood that the fall of Jerusalem would help us to understand the paradox of the judgment: that is, how divine mercy can be extended to sinners while at the same time satisfying the demands of divine justice. On the one hand, God is full of love, compassion, and patience, pleading with sinners to return to His kingdom. God does not want sinners to die the second death ([Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ezek%2033.11)). On the other hand, God is just and righteous. Because He is holy, He cannot tolerate evil in His presence. However, He will respect the final decision of individuals who wish to go their own way, leaving God’s kingdom, covenant, protection, and source of life. Still, God gives sinners ample warning that they will die if they refuse the protections of His kingdom and the mercies of His covenant. Outside God’s covenant there is no joy or life, for the simple reason that no created being has life, unborrowed or underived, within themselves.

**The Plan of Salvation**

Fourth, despite the setbacks caused by the covenant betrayal, God continued His plan of salvation and His actions to resolve the great controversy. God promised that Jesus, who was the Seed of Eve ([Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gen%203.15)), of Abraham ([Genesis 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gen%2012.2-3); [Genesis 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gen%2012.7); [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gal%203.16); [Galatians 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gal%203.29)), and of David ([2 Samuel 7:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Sam%207.12-15); [Mark 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mark%2012.35-37)), would bring salvation to humanity, liberating them from the dominion of the devil, and would restore God’s reign on earth. At the same time, God promised that Jesus, the true Lamb of God and the fulfiller of the earthly sanctuary types ([John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%201.29); [John 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%202.19-22)), would save humanity from the guilt and the power of sin. Though the history of humanity may seem directionless, at times, and left to the whims and devices of the devil and of human nature, the Scriptures show a clear progress of God’s purposeful and intentional implementation of His plan and promise of salvation. When His own people failed Him, God worked relentlessly to bring them back to Him and to rescue humanity from the mire of sin. Abraham, Moses, and Judah are all examples of the rescued and redeemed. Nothing can stop God from keeping His promises and implementing His plans.

**Types and Antitypes**

Fifth, the earthly sanctuary and the sacrificial system were only antitypes of the coming sacrifice and ministry of Jesus. When the first temple was destroyed and Judah lamented for its past glory, God told them that the real glory was yet future and that it depended not on materials and architecture but on the One to whom the sanctuary pointed ([Ezra 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ezra%203.12); [Haggai 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Haggai%202.9); [Matthew 23:16-22](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2023.16-22)). For this reason, when the second temple was destroyed, in a.d. 70, Christians did not lose hope. On the contrary, they understood that the earthly sanctuary fulfilled its mission of pointing to Jesus, to His sacrifice, and to His ministry of salvation in the real heavenly sanctuary above. Type met antitype; symbol met reality. After Jesus’ incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, the great controversy now was focused on the heavenly sanctuary. The Epistle to the Hebrews discusses extensively the meaning of these changes. Thus, [Matthew 24:1-51](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.1-51) and the destruction of the second temple, the Epistle to the Hebrews and its focus on the heavenly sanctuary are extremely important to the Adventist understanding of the great controversy and to the entirety of Adventist theology in general.

It was precisely this complex understanding of the destruction of the temple that inspired the apostolic and post-apostolic Christians during the first several centuries, and the writings of Ellen White in the nineteenth century, with an understanding of the church’s identity and mission. Having survived the destruction of the temple, the apostolic Christians shifted their focus from the temple to the heavenly sanctuary. They overcame the fear of persecution and death because they experienced the forgiveness of sins in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and looked in faith to Christ’s ministry at the right hand of God in heaven. They knew they were God’s people, the New Israel, called by God to proclaim His wonderful news of salvation to all humanity gripped by the power of the devil, sin, and death. They shared their love by helping the people around them with the means they had available. And they directed the attention of others to the end of the great controversy, to the end of suffering and death, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to the earth and forever defeat the devil and sin.

Tuesday [↑](https://ssnet.org/lessons/24b/less02.html#top)

9th of April

Faithful Amid Persecution

Throughout the early centuries of Christianity, the Christian church grew rapidly, despite imprisonment, torture, and persecution. Faithful believers, totally committed to Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed His Word with power; lives were changed, and tens of thousands were converted.

Read [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%202.41); [Acts 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%204.4); [Acts 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%204.31); [Acts 5:42](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%205.42); [Acts 8:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%208.1-8). What do these verses teach us about the challenges the New Testament church faced and also why it grew so rapidly?

The disciples faced threats ([Acts 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%204.17)), imprisonment ([Acts 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%205.17-18)), persecution ([Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%208.1)), and death itself ([Acts 7:59](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%207.59); [Acts 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%2012.2)), yet, in the power of the Holy Spirit, courageously proclaimed the resurrected Christ, and churches multiplied throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria ([Acts 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%209.31)).

The bastions of hell were shaken. The shackles of Satan were broken. Pagan superstition crumbled before the power of the resurrected Christ. The gospel triumphed in the face of overwhelming odds. The disciples no longer cowered in the upper room. Fear danced away like a fading shadow.

Instead, faith filled the disciples’ hearts. One glimpse of their resurrected Lord changed their lives. Jesus gave them a new reason for living. Our Lord had not only given them the Great Commission ([Mark 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mark%2016.15)) but the great promise, “ ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” ([Acts 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%201.8)).

The gospel penetrated the remotest corners of the earth ([Colossians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col%201.23)). Although the last of the disciples, John, died at the end of the first century, others picked up the torch of truth and proclaimed the living Christ. Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the north coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around a.d. 110. Pliny’s statement is significant because it was nearly eighty years after the Crucifixion. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. He stated, “For many persons of all ages, and classes and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation, and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well.”—Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.

Despite the devil’s most vicious attacks, the Christian church grew rapidly.

What can we learn from the early church that could help us, the end-time church?

The persecution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that the disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Saviour’s commission to go to all the world. Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished. To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers “went everywhere preaching the word.”— The Acts of the Apostles, p. 105.

If the saints of the Old Testament bore so bright a testimony of loyalty, should not those upon whom is shining the accumulated light of centuries, bear a still more signal witness to the power of truth? The glory of the prophecies sheds their light upon our pathway. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. Christ has risen from the dead, proclaiming over the rent sepulcher, “I am the resurrection, and the life.” John 11:25. He has sent His Spirit into the world to bring all things to our remembrance. By a miracle of power He has preserved His written word through the ages. The Reformers whose protest has given us the name of Protestant, felt that God had called them to give the light of the gospel to the world; and in the effort to do this they were ready to sacrifice their possessions, their liberty, even life itself. In the face of persecution and death the gospel was proclaimed far and near. The word of God was carried to the people; and all classes, high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, eagerly studied it for themselves. Are we, in this last conflict of the great controversy, as faithful to our trust as the early Reformers were to theirs?—Prophets and Kings, pp. 626, 627.

The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many. . . . [But] God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence. Said the Saviour to His disciples, foreseeing the doubts that would press upon their souls in days of trial and darkness: “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” John 15:20. . . . Those who are called to endure torture and martyrdom are but following in the steps of God’s dear Son.—The Great Controversy, p. 47.

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10th of April

Caring for the Community

The early Christian church grew not only because its members preached the gospel but also because they lived the gospel. Believers modeled the ministry of Christ who “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” ([Matthew 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%204.23)). Jesus deeply cared for people, and so did the New Testament church. It was this unselfish love and commitment to meeting human needs combined with sharing the good news of the gospel in the Holy Spirit’s power that made such an impact on the world in the early centuries of the Christian church.

Read [Acts 2:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%202.44-47); [Acts 3:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%203.6-9); [Acts 6:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%206.1-7). Although circumstances vary, what principles can we learn from these passages about authentic Christianity?

These New Testament believers followed the model of Christ, who as Peter expressed was “ ‘anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’ ” ([Acts 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%2010.38)). Christ’s church was His body on earth, and it, too, in these early centuries, expressed Christ’s sacrificial love and concern for hurting, broken humanity. These believers were living examples of Christ’s compassion.

In the great controversy raging in the universe, the devil wants to deface the image of God in humanity. The purpose of the gospel is to restore the image of God in humanity. This restoration includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing.

In [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2010.10), Jesus reveals His plan for each one of us.

“ ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (NKJV). He longs for us to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally stable, and spiritually whole.

This is especially true in the light of His promised return. This world is facing an enormous crisis. Jesus’ own predictions in [Matthew 24:1-51](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%2024.1-51); [Luke 21:1-38](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Luke%2021.1-38) foretell catastrophic conditions on the earth before His return. When Christ touches us with His healing grace, we long to touch others with the touch of Christ so that they can be made whole. Jesus sends us out into a broken world as ambassadors for Christ to touch others with His love. New Testament Christianity was characterized by the Christians’ love for one another and their communities.

Discuss: What role does the church have in cooperating with Christ in proving Satan’s charges wrong?

There can be no such thing as a narrow life for any soul connected with Christ. Those who love Jesus with heart and mind and soul and their neighbor as themselves have a broad field in which to use their ability and influence. There is no talent to be used for selfish gratification. Self must die, and our lives be hid with Christ in God. . . . Those who are emptied of self, the thoughtful and conscientious, cannot raise their eyes to Christ, the living Saviour, without feelings of awe and the deepest humility. To behold Jesus continually will make the soul alive unto God. We shall love Jesus, we shall love the Father who sent Him into the world, for we see Him in a wondrous light, full of grace and truth. Jesus declares, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father” (Matthew 11:27); . . . “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). What for? That He may give gifts unto men, that they may lay all their powers under tribute to make known the wondrous love wherewith He hath loved us.—In Heavenly Places, p. 60.

All around us are heard the wails of a world’s sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life’s hardships and misery. Practical work will have far more effect than mere sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless. And we are called to do more than this. The wants of the soul, only the love of Christ can satisfy. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy. The sealed fountains of earnest, Christlike love will be unsealed.— Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 417.

There are many from whom hope has departed. Bring back the sunshine to them. Many have lost their courage. Speak to them words of cheer. Pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the word of God. Upon many is a soul sickness which no earthly balm can reach nor physician heal. Pray for these souls, bring them to Jesus. Tell them that there is a balm in Gilead and a Physician there. . . . It is the privilege of every soul to be a living channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour’s love. All heaven is waiting for channels through which can be poured the holy oil to be a joy and blessing to human hearts. . . . He desires that we shall reveal His own joy in our lives.—Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 418, 419.

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11th of April

A Legacy of Love

Read [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2013.35); [1 John 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20John%204.21). What do these passages reveal about Satan’s challenge against the government of God in the great controversy? What do they tell us about the essence of genuine Christianity?

Love was the norm of Christian communities in the first few centuries. Tertullian, an early Christian theologian, claimed: “It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another.”—“Chapter 39,” in Apology, trans. S. Thelwall, <https://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/39.html> (accessed October 10, 2022).

One of the greatest revelations of God’s love was demonstrated when two devastating pandemics plagued the early centuries around a.d. 160 and a.d. 260. Christians stepped forward and ministered to the sick and dying. These plagues killed tens of thousands and left entire villages and towns with scarcely an inhabitant. The unselfish, sacrificial, caring, loving ministry of Christians made a huge impact on the population. Over time, thousands, and eventually hundreds of thousands, and then millions in the Roman Empire became believers in Jesus during these two epidemics. Love, outgoing concern, and organized, selfless care of the sick and dying created an admiration for these believers and the Christ they represented.

Rodney Stark’s The Rise of Christianity is a modern historical narrative portraying these historic events in a new and improved light. In it he describes how during the second epidemic the whole Christian community, which was still heavily Judeo-Christian, became a virtual army of nurses, providing the basic needs for the suffering community to survive.

“At the height of the second great epidemic, around a.d. 260, . . . Dionysius wrote a lengthy tribute to the heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others.

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.”—The Rise of Christianity (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 82.

What is the obvious message for us here? How do we learn to die to self so that we, too, can manifest this same selfless spirit? It’s not easy, is it?

During every hour of Christ’s sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another. This love is the evidence of their discipleship. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,” said Jesus, “if ye have love one to another.” When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart.—Lift Him Up, p. 298.

This love, manifested in the church, will surely stir the wrath of Satan. Christ did not mark out for His disciples an easy path. “If the world hate you,” He said, “ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.” The gospel is to be carried forward by aggressive warfare, in the midst of opposition, peril, loss, and suffering. But those who do this work are only following in their Master’s steps.—The Desire of Ages, p. 677.

Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart to him of the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God. All this is but a fulfillment of the principle of the law,— the principle that is illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan, and made manifest in the life of Jesus. His character reveals the true significance of the law, and shows what is meant by loving our neighbor as ourselves. And when the children of God manifest mercy, kindness, and love toward all men, they also are witnessing to the character of the statutes of heaven. They are bearing testimony to the fact that “the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7. And whoever fails to manifest this love is breaking the law which he professes to revere. For the spirit we manifest toward our brethren declares what is our spirit toward God. The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor.—The Desire of Ages, p. 505.

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12th of April

Further Thought

“The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome. Said a Christian, expostulating with the heathen rulers who were urging forward the persecution: You may ‘kill us, torture us, condemn us. . . . Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. . . . Nor does your cruelty . . . avail you.’ It was but a stronger invitation to bring others to their persuasion. ‘The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.’—Tertullian, Apology, paragraph 50.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 41, 42.

“The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God because He suffers the basest of men to prosper, while the best and purest are afflicted and tormented by their cruel power. How, it is asked, can One who is just and merciful, and who is also infinite in power, tolerate such injustice and oppression? This is a question with which we have nothing to do. God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence.”—The Great Controversy, p. 47.

The Faith I Live By, “Jesus’ Resurrection and the New Life,” p. 51;

The Upward Look, “Christlike Love Blends Heart With Heart,” p. 104

Part III: Life Application

1. What do the people in your culture think about love and righteousness? Do they still have hope that there will come a time when human society, in its entirety, will be characterized by love and righteousness? Why, or why not? How might you explain to them that there cannot be true and enduring love and righteousness apart from Jesus? Or that there can be no love or righteousness apart from His revelation of these divine qualities as seen in His sacrifice? Or that love and righteousness cannot exist without the Holy Spirit’s bestowal of these qualities upon humans or His help to grow them in us?
2. Examine your personal evangelistic activities. How clearly do you understand what Jesus’ words “the gospel of the kingdom” mean? How can you live out this gospel in your own life? How can you and your church share this gospel with smaller and/or larger audiences around you?

**Discussion Questions**

1. What value does persecution serve? Why do you think God allows His people to suffer at times? And though in some cases, such as in the early church, good was able to come of it, what about times when it appears that nothing good has come from it? Why in situations like this is the personal experience of God’s love so important in order to maintain faith?
2. How would you respond if a friend asked you these questions: “Where is God in my suffering? If He loves me, why am I going through such a difficult time?”
3. How can your local church become a caring community to impact the world? Discuss practical ways to apply this week’s study.