

2. The Great Controversy (4Q 2016—Book of Job)

Biblical material: Job 1:1–5, Job 1:6–12, Zech. 3:2, Matt. 4:1, Ezek. 28:12–16, Rom. 3:26, Heb. 2:14.

Quotes

- Christian theology can only be understood if we have incorporated a larger picture of a heavenly conflict that has spilled over to planet earth. What we will discover is that when we incorporate this cosmic conflict as a central theme that this adds a depth of understanding to every other Christian doctrine— including personal salvation. In fact, the extreme and radical way in which God won the universal conflict with Satan is the very same way in which God provided for our personal salvation. *Brad Cole*
- The problem facing the human family and the core issue in cosmic conflict theology center on the character of God. *Sigve Tonstad*
- God seeks comrades and claims love, the Devil seeks slaves and claims obedience. *Rabindranath Tagore*

Questions

What would you say is at the heart of the great controversy? How would you explain it to someone who was not familiar with the Bible? It is God who brings Satan’s attention to Job—why does God do this? Is he setting Job up? How are the issues in the cosmic conflict revealed here, and what does this say about God’s true nature?

Bible summary

Job 1:1-5 sets the scene on earth, showing us Job as both a very rich man and also extremely devout. He is defined as respecting God and avoiding evil, even going so far as to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they had sinned in some way. (This would also indicate that the priestly system had not yet been inaugurated). The next section, 1:6-12, shows us the scene in heaven, with the heavenly council in progress, and God pointing out Job’s faithfulness to Satan. Zech. 3:2 reveals an ongoing dialogue between God and Satan, while Matt. 4:1 is the introduction to Jesus’ temptations at the hands of Satan. In Ezek. 28:12–16 the fall of Lucifer in heaven is described—having been created perfect until evil was found in him. (Isaiah 14 could also be cited here too). Rom. 3:26 FBV explains that “at this present time God proves he is fair and does what is right, and that he makes right those who trust in Jesus.” In Heb. 2:14 FBV we learn that “through death he [Jesus] could destroy the one that had the power of death—the devil.”

Comment

The whole story of the book of Job is a living demonstration of the truthfulness of God and the lies of the Devil. Written down by Moses, Job’s experience is one of the oldest analyses of the problem of sin and evil in God’s good universe.

While we do not have conclusive evidence as to who Job was and where he lived, a Job is mentioned as the third son of Issachar in Gen. 46:13. As for the land of Uz, this is likely named after the son of Nahor, the brother of Abraham (Gen. 22:21, 31:53) and located in what is now southern Syria. Since Job is mentioned as the one performing

sacrifices, and not a priest, this indicates he lived before the Exodus. (In addition his age—he lives 140 years after his trial—indicates he lived at a time when human beings had a longer lifespan).

Whatever the specifics, the story is of timeless relevance. Here we see the issues in the Great Controversy playing out in the life of this man, a dedicated follower of God.

The central issue in the great controversy is who God is and how he acts. The devil has charged God with massive character defects, and actions that if true would be truly demonic. This cosmic conflict that has engulfed every thinking being is of supreme importance in understanding our own situation. Only with this as the permanent background can we begin to make sense of the world and our place in it, and our relationship to our creator God.

God seeks to demonstrate the issues in the great controversy, and the ultimate results of rebellion. Does sin kill? Surely and inevitably, yes. But how? Through the long, painful, and bloody history of humanity, God allows all to see the consequences. Not treating us as pawns in some divine game, but as free moral agents, making choices that determine what happens. Yet, because of the effects of sin, the innocent suffer with the guilty, and God wants that point to be understood too.

So often God is dealing with very poor material—us! The Bible shows us the record of how God has handled the crisis, the conflict in his universe that has at its heart the question of whether God is truly good or not. Does he love, or is it only on his dictatorial terms? Does he act arbitrarily, or is he reasoned and consistent? Does he take delight in punishing and destroying, or does he weep for the loss of every one of his unique children?

Sometimes we may wonder why God did not act more “decisively,” take power and control, and dictate what should happen. But this is not the fundamental issue in the conflict. No one, not even the Devil, has disputed that God is all-powerful. In fact, that is one of the charges—that God is all-powerful and so he is a dictator, a tyrant, a despot who rules by force. So it is not a question of God unveiling his awesome power to enforce obedience to his autocratic will.

At times, God has used power, as the Bible records. Yet such actions do not achieve what God wants—agreement over truth and right, a relationship based not on fear but love. For when it comes to might and power, even the devils believe. But they tremble: simply acknowledging God’s supremacy in power. God very clearly says that what he wants is not by might, nor by power, but by his spirit (see Zechariah 4:6)—the persuasion that comes from the third member of the Godhead that convicts and leads into all truth.

Our role here in the present is to help people think well of God, to understand his nature and character, and to see the much bigger picture that involves the whole universe! Without such a perspective, some of God’s actions are hard to understand. We certainly do not have a monopoly on the truth, but this more expansive framework of the issues related to God, his use of power, and how he runs his government considerably enhances our understanding and role in the cosmic conflict.

In the context of the Great Controversy, what is the fundamental issue? Is it that the Devil and all who follow him are not obeying God? That God demands unquestioning obedience? If that is the real issue, then God could have enforced such obedience long

ago. However God has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that is *not* the way he runs his universe.

God's priority is to win the battle for the minds of his created beings—to convince them through demonstration that his way of running the universe is the only way, and that he is right and loving and true. Only by convincing his children that the charges of the Devil are untrue can God conclude the conflict over God's character and government.

In fact one of the Devil's main accusations is that God demands obedience. So the issue runs far deeper—what kind of obedience, and why?

Some answers given by Christian believers tend to agree with the Devil's charges! Even those who wish to speak well of God can sometimes be confused about what God really wants, and how he achieves his objectives. Terms like "justification" may suggest that God's priority is to declare us not guilty, rather than to restore us to spiritual health. But the obedience God seeks is a willing agreement that right is right and wrong is wrong, and to dedicate ourselves to the other, rather than to ourselves.

Ellen White Comments

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages, a perpetual testimony to the nature and terrible results of sin...Thus the history of this terrible experiment of rebellion was to be a perpetual safeguard to all holy intelligences, to prevent them from being deceived as to the nature of transgression, to save them from committing sin and suffering its punishments. {GC 499}

God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all. . . . His power to deceive was very great. By disguising himself in a cloak of falsehood, he had gained an advantage. All his acts were so clothed with mystery, that it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work. . . . It was his policy to perplex with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah.

The underworking was so subtle that it could not be made to appear before the heavenly host as the thing that it really was; and so there was war in heaven, and Satan was expelled with all who would not stand on the side of loyalty to God's government. {FLB 69}

It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship. Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity; and horrible cruelties have been perpetrated under the various forms of idolatry. {GC 569}