

1. Crisis in Heaven (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Isa. 14:4, 12–15; Ezek. 28:2, 12–19; John 12:31; Rev. 7:10; 12:7–13; Luke 10:1–21.

Quotes

- God seeks comrades and claims love, the Devil seeks slaves and claims obedience. *Rabindranath Tagore*
- The problem of evil...Why does God permit it? Or, if God is omnipotent, in which case permission and creation are the same, why did God create it? *Sir William Temple*
- If God is all good, then He is not all powerful. If God is all powerful, then He is not all good. *Norman Mailer*
- The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith. *John Stott*
- The problem facing the human family and the core issue in cosmic conflict theology center on the character of God. *Sigve Tonstad*
- 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*

Questions

Why is the origin of evil such a challenge to us? In what way could God defend himself against charges that went to his very nature and character? Is the Great Controversy like some cosmic chess game that we have been conscripted into against our will? What issues have to be played out?

Bible summary

Isaiah 14: The king of Babylon is the image, yet the use of the words “morning star” (14:12) refers to the “light-bringer” Lucifer. His desire to be like the Most High reveals his warped concept of God’s true nature. He desired power, but not the true character of God. His desire was to “ascend,” while God in his humility is the one who comes down to all. In Isaiah 14:13, 14 the word “I” occurs five times, revealing Lucifer’s selfish perspective. Ezekiel 28: The king of Tyre is the rubric for describing Satan here, who was “in Eden,” “blameless until wickedness” was found in him. John 12:31 speaks of Satan being driven out; Rev. 12:7–13 explains the war in heaven; while Luke 10:18 records Jesus saying he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Comment

Finally a set of lessons that deals with the Great Controversy! While there may still be elements we would wish were better elaborated, here we do have an opportunity to examine the big picture and see the cosmic conflict over God’s nature and actions.

Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 give us a prophetic insight into the nature of the rebellion and the challenge to God's government that could only be answered by demonstration. That this should lead to war in heaven is a shock to us who think that heaven is a place of eternal bliss. Yet this conflict over how God operates and how he uses his power is fundamental to our understanding of evil in God's good creation, and why we are still here...

God's in his heaven—but all's wrong with the world. So if God is God, why doesn't he step in? Either God isn't all-powerful and he can't stop it; or he isn't all-loving, and doesn't really care what's happening here. That's the argument—and for many a very persuasive one. In a recent compilation of ideas about God, most gave the problem of suffering as the main reason they rejected God. He is either not there, or if he is, then he acts as a terribly cruel tyrant and consequently is not worth knowing anyway.

But there is another far more comprehensive and valid answer, one that does justice to reason, and which puts God in a good light. Consider. You are God (hard, but try!) Rebellion has broken out in your Universe. The Number One of your created beings has decided to set himself up in opposition to you. You could easily dispose of this trouble-maker by destroying him. Now if you are a tyrant, who rules by force and cruelty, such a violent act poses no problems. But if you are as God says he is—a God of love who wants trusting love from his children—then you would never think like that. For how will your other created beings see your killing him?

Especially when the Rebel has clearly stated that you are a vindictive and arbitrary dictator who would just love the opportunity to start zapping his children with death rays! How can you deal with such charges of being unloving, merciless and dictatorial and show yourself to be a truly loving Father? How can you make sure your created children worship you from love and not fear? Only by fully demonstrating your true character, and allowing the Rebel to demonstrate what he is really like—and what his way leads to. The Devil has accused God of everything evil—that he was harsh and legalistic, an unloving selfish Being who ruled the Universe through fear. That is, the Devil accused God of being just like the Devil!

To answer these charges God has permitted the Devil to work out his evil program, so that everyone may know where such rebellion leads. So that all may see God as he truly is, God came to this world in human form, a living demonstration of the truthfulness of God and the lies of the Devil. Jesus suffered and died and rose again to reveal God's love, and to show us the way back to him. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 17:3; 14:9 NIV).

So 'Why, God?' Why is there so much pain and suffering? God replies something like this:

"Not because I cannot prevent it, or do not wish to prevent it. Not because I do not care, or that I am unmoved by so much pain. I weep with you, and every second this evil world continues is agony to me. But I wait before I end it for a supremely important reason. I wait so that all may see what sin really means and where selfishness leads. I wait so that all can see the Devil in his true character. I wait so that all who will may come to me for salvation, salvation into the arms of a Father God who loves them with an undying love. If you want to know my answer to your question, 'Why God?' go to the Cross. There you will see me as I really am, two arms outstretched to save, bleeding and dying for all the suffering, misery and pain in the world."

Just like Jesus who wept while on this earth, God weeps. Not as a powerless being, but precisely because he has the power. His heart aches to cleanse this world from sin, to wipe away every tear from every eye, to be with his people and be their God, face to face. (See Revelation 21 and 22). But because he is God, and he wants all to understand him and love him without compulsion, he waits. “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9 NIV).

If the truth be told, all of us would have perished long before this if God was not there, “holding back the wings of strife,” restraining evil from its full self-destruction until all have had some opportunity to respond to the God of love. How can we say that God is uncaring, that he willingly allows sin and suffering? So often we or the Devil cause evil, and then all of us blame God! How insane!

Think for a moment. What is the alternative? For God to intervene in every situation? To stop the car crashing, to prevent the earthquake, to defuse the terrorist’s bomb? The result: a world in which evil is never seen for what it truly is, for it never has its diabolical consequences. A world where God by his power takes care of every problem, every possible pain and death; a world of eternal evil that can have no end.

Only as the conflict is resolved through the unmasking of evil’s real face, only as God is demonstrated to be the loving, compassionate Being he says he is, only as all his creation agrees with him that he was right all along—only then can God bring this rebellion to a close. Those who have chosen the Devil’s way will be allowed their choice of final non-existence in the end-time destruction.

Then, and only then, can God create a new heaven and a new earth, a place where righteousness dwells and the goodness of God reigns supreme (2 Peter 3:13).

Ellen White Comments

Satan fell because of his ambition to be equal with God... Sin originated in self-seeking... Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in heaven; for the spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry... 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}

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}