CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
DECEMBER17 2022

Scripture Story: 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 20.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire*), chapter 41.

wiping the slate clean



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

"The wicked are filled with regret, not because of their sinful neglect of God and their fellow men, but because God has conquered. They lament that the result is what it is; but they do not repent of their wickedness. They would leave no means untried to conquer if they could.

"The world see the very class whom they have mocked and derided, and desired to exterminate, pass unharmed through pestilence, tempest, and earthquake. He who is to the transgressors of His law a devouring fire, is to His people a safe pavilion" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 654).

keytext

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare."

(2 Peter 3:10, NIV)

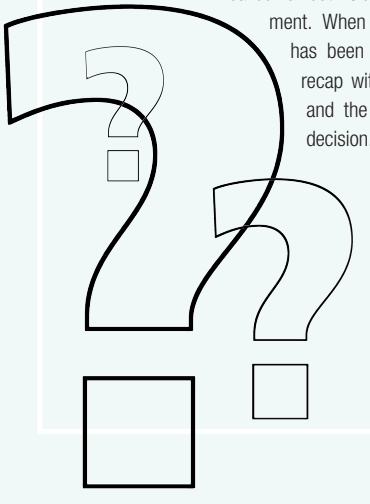
what do you think?

How fair is God? Have you ever questioned God's fairness? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least fair and 10 being perfectly fair, what do you think of the following situations?

____ A teen dies young from a driving accident.
____ A good person wins the lottery.
____ An unethical business person becomes increasingly wealthy.
____ A country experiences a natural disaster and thousands die.
____ The devil was not destroyed immediately.

did you know?

There are several steps to a criminal trial in the United States. These steps are there to ensure that every person gets a fair chance to defend themselves in a court of law. First, a person is charged with a crime; however, the accused person is considered innocent until proven guilty. Next, a jury of 12 regular citizens is selected. Both lawyers make opening statements that explain why they think the accused person is either guilty or innocent. Next, witnesses are called for both sides of the argument. When all the evidence has been given, the lawyers recap with closing statements and the jury is left to make a decision.



INTO THE STORY

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."

(Revelation 20, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

How does God judge the evil people?

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How are the righteous people involved in the process?

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Do you think the righteous people are judging the evil people, or are they judging God's decisions? Explain.

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Why would God permit Himself to be put on trial?

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What is the second death?

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Does the punishment of the lake of fire seem like an unduly harsh penalty to you? Why or why not?

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Does the reward of eternal life seem "too good" for the righteous people? Why or why not?

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Who do you think this trial is intended to convince?

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punch lines

"And try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" **(Malachi 3:10, NKJV).**

"God then confronted Job directly: 'Now what do you have to say for yourself? Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?'" **(Job 40:1, 2, *The Message*).**

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him" **(Psalm 34:8, NIV).**

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" **(Psalm 34:4, NIV).**

"You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" **(Psalm 32:7, NIV).**

further insight

"By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of the Ages,* p. 764

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Psalm 86:5.

Complete the *What Do You Think?* activity, and read through the *Did You Know?* section.The American justice system prides itself on being as fair as possible. The accused is innocent until proven guilty. The convicted can appeal a decision. One judge does not make the decision in a criminal trial, but a jury of 12 peers is chosen. These safety features are designed to catch mistakes so that people get a fair trial and the wrong person is not convicted. However, even with all of this, mistakes are made.

If God is perfect and good, do you think it is wrong to "put God on trial"? In what way do you think it is OK to "test" God?

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Sunday

Read 1 Corinthians 6:2.

Read the *Into the Story* section and complete the questions in *Out of the Story*. During the millennium, after Jesus takes us to heaven and before we come back to the new earth, we will be very busy reviewing, or "judging" for ourselves, God's decisions. In a way God will be on trial.

Malachi 3:10 tells us to try God and to test Him at His word. The millennium will be a chance to do just that—to dig in and ask all the questions we need to ask.

Why is this person not saved? Why is that person in heaven after all the bad things they did? Make a list of questions that you struggle with, and start praying now for some answers.

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Monday

Read 2 Peter 3:10.

The *Key Text* tells us that Jesus' coming will be a surprise, "like a thief," and that the earth will be demolished and scrubbed clean. Watch the news tonight. Make a mental note of all the things you would like to see wiped from the earth: the pain, the heartbreak, the wars, the famine, the gunshots and violence, the poverty. . . . Seeing everything that is happening around the world, how do you feel about a fresh start? What things in your own life would you like "wiped clean"?

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Tuesday

Read Psalm 7:9; Psalm 44:21.

In the *Flashlight* quotation Ellen White describes the experience of the wicked before God wipes everything clean again. Is it hard for you to think about the wicked people being destroyed? Ellen White gives us a better view of what the people who have ultimately rejected God are experiencing. God is a fair God who reads the heart. He would not destroy a well-meaning person for misunderstanding. The people who are being destroyed are the ones who have hurt other people and feel no remorse. They have caused pain and misery and their only regret is that God has "caught" them. They will never change.

Think seriously: Is there anything you are holding on to that you would hate to be caught for but don't want to give up?

Wednesday

The *Punch Lines* show two different kinds of "testing" God. One is being self-involved and whining, while the other is an act of faith.

A real, living relationship is an evolving thing. You trust God only by watching Him come through for you. We can think about Jesus' coming with certainty and happiness only when we have a relationship with God and know that we will be seeing our best friend come in the clouds.

Give one example of a self-involved and whining test of God, and then give an example of a test that is an act of faith.

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Thursday

Read Matthew 24:43, 44.

If you were responsible for protecting your house from burglars, you would probably put an alarm system in place, lock your doors, and keep an inventory of your valuables. You don't want to be caught unprepared.

Of course, even though Jesus' coming will be like a thief—unexpected and surprising—we *want* to let Him in! But we also want to be ready so that we can go with Him to heaven.

What do you think you need to do to be ready at a moment's notice for Jesus' coming?

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Friday

Read Psalm 19:14.

Remembering that it is a friendship with Jesus that will make the difference, what do you think you need to do to develop that friendship? Write a contract with God: "Lord, I want to be Yours. I want to be ready. I don't know how to get to know You better, so please come closer to me. Just as I am, I am Yours." Sign your name. Date it. Keep it. Remind yourself of your ultimate goal—to *know* Him.

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire*), chapter 41.

**Love Under Fire* is a special adaptation of *The Great Controversy,* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.