

The Cosmic Controversy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezek. 28:1, 2, 11–17; Gen. 3:1–7; Rev. 12:1–17; Rom. 8:31–39; Rev. 14:12.*

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

The cosmic controversy, sometimes called “the great controversy,” is the biblical worldview. It forms the background against which the drama of our world, and even of the universe, unfolds. Sin, suffering, death, the rise and fall of nations, the spread of the gospel, last-day events—these all occur in the context of the cosmic controversy.

This week, we will look at a few crucial places where the controversy took hold. It began mysteriously in the heart of a perfect being known as Lucifer, who brought his rebellion to earth through the fall of other perfect beings, Adam and Eve. From these two pivot points, the fall of Lucifer and then of our first parents, the great controversy took root and has been raging ever since. Each one of us, then, is a part of this cosmic drama.

The good news is that one day it will not only end, but it will end with the total victory of Christ over Satan. The even better news is that, because of the completeness of what Jesus did on the cross, all of us can share in that victory. Finally, as part of that victory, God calls us to faith and obedience as we await all that we have been promised in Jesus, whose coming is assured.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.

The Fall of a Perfect Being

If the cosmic controversy forms the background biblical worldview, this leads to a number of questions. An important one is, *How did it all get started?* Because a loving God created the universe, it's reasonable to assume that evil, violence, and conflict certainly were not built into the creation from the beginning. Thus, the controversy must have arisen separately from the original creation and definitely not as a necessary result of it. Nevertheless, the controversy is here, it's real, and we are all involved.

Read Ezekiel 28:1, 2, 11–17 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What do these texts teach us about the fall of Lucifer and the rise of evil?

Lucifer was a perfect being living in heaven. How could iniquity have arisen in him, especially in an environment such as that? We don't know. Perhaps that's one reason why the Bible talks about "the mystery of iniquity" (*2 Thess. 2:7*).

Outside the reality of the free will that God has given all His intelligent creatures, no reason exists for the fall of Lucifer. As Ellen G. White so profoundly stated it: "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 492, 493.

Replace the word *sin* with *evil*, and the statement works just as well: "It is impossible to explain the origin of [evil] so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . [Evil] is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be [evil]."

Think about your own experiences with the reality of free will. Why should we prayerfully and carefully think about the choices we make using our free will?

More Than Head Knowledge

Although we cannot explain *why* evil arose (since no justification for it exists), Scripture reveals that it began in the heart of Lucifer in heaven. Besides the fascinating insights that we get from the writings of Ellen G. White (see, for instance, the chapter “The Origin of Evil” in *The Great Controversy*), Scripture doesn’t tell us much more about how it started in heaven. The Word of God is more explicit, though, in regard to how it arose on earth.

Read Genesis 3:1–7. What happened here that shows Adam and Eve’s culpability in what transpired?

What’s so sad here is that Eve knew what God had said. “ ‘God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” ’ ” (*Gen. 3:3, NKJV*). Although as far as the Scripture tells us, God had said nothing about touching the fruit, Eve knew the truth that eating from it would lead to death.

Then, Satan openly and blatantly contradicted those words: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*).

How much starker could the contrast be? However subtle Satan’s approach to Eve was at first, once he got her attention and saw that she was not resisting, he openly challenged the Lord’s command. As we have seen, Eve was not working from a position of ignorance. She couldn’t claim, “I didn’t know; I didn’t know.”

She did know.

Yet, despite this knowledge, she did wrong anyway. If even in the perfect environment of Eden, knowledge itself wasn’t enough to keep Eve (and then Adam, who also knew the truth) from sinning, we shouldn’t fool ourselves into thinking that knowledge alone is enough to save us now. Yes, we need to know what the Word of God tells us. But along with knowing that, we need the kind of surrender in which we will obey what it tells us, as well.

God said one thing, Satan said another. Despite the knowledge that Adam and Eve had, they chose to listen to Satan. Think about how little has changed over the millennia. How can we avoid making the same kind of error?

War in Heaven and on Earth

The fall of our first parents plunged the world into sin, evil, and death. People might disagree on the immediate causes, or who's at fault, but who can deny the reality of the turmoil, violence, upheaval, and conflict that afflict us all here?

We talk about a *cosmic* controversy, or a *cosmic* conflict, and that's fine and true. But whatever the cosmic origins of this conflict, it is being played out here on earth, as well. Indeed, so much biblical history—from the Fall in Eden up through final events leading to the second coming of Jesus—is in many ways the biblical exposition of the great controversy. We live amid this controversy. The Word of God explains to us what is going on, what is behind it, and most important, how it is going to end.

Read Revelation 12:1–17. What battles does this chapter portray as unfolding both in heaven and on earth?

We see a battle in heaven and battles on earth, as well. The first battle is between the dragon (Satan) and Michael (Hebrew meaning: “Who is like God?”) (*Rev. 12:7–9*). The rebel Lucifer became known as Satan (Adversary), who is merely a created being fighting against the eternal Creator, Jesus (*Heb. 1:1, 2; John 1:1–4*).

Lucifer was rebelling against his Maker. The great controversy is not about dueling gods; it's about a *creature* rebelling against his *Creator* and manifesting that rebellion by attacking the creation, as well.

Failing in his battle against Christ in heaven, Satan sought to go after Him on earth right after His human birth (*Rev. 12:4*). Failing in his battle against Christ here, and then failing against Him in the wilderness and later at the cross, Satan—after his irreversible defeat at Calvary—went to war against Christ's people. This war has raged through much of Christian history (*Rev. 12:6, 14–16*) and will continue until the end (*Rev. 12:17*), until Satan faces another defeat, this time at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Revelation 12:10–12. What hope do we find in these verses amid all the controversy and conflict seen in the other texts?

With You Always, Even Unto the End

The book of Revelation foretold the persecution that God's people would face through a good portion of church history. The 1,260 prophetic days of Revelation 12:6 (*see also Rev. 12:14*) point to 1,260 years of persecution against the church.

"These persecutions, beginning under Nero about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, continued with greater or less fury for centuries. Christians were falsely accused of the most dreadful crimes and declared to be the cause of great calamities—famine, pestilence, and earthquake. As they became the objects of popular hatred and suspicion, informers stood ready, for the sake of gain, to betray the innocent. They were condemned as rebels against the empire, as foes of religion, and pests to society. Great numbers were thrown to wild beasts or burned alive in the amphitheaters."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 40.

As a result of persecution, "the woman [church] fled into the wilderness" (*Rev. 12:6*). She is described as having two wings like an eagle. This gives the picture of flying away where help could be found. She was taken care of in the wilderness, and the serpent, or Satan, could not get to her (*Rev. 12:14*). God always has preserved a remnant even during major persecutions, and He will do so again in the end time.

In the context of the perils of the last days, Christ said to His people: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (*Matt. 28:20, NIV*). How do we understand this wonderful promise, even in the face of the vast martyrdom of many of His followers? (*See Rom. 8:31–39 and Matt. 10:28*.)

Nothing—not persecution, famine, or death—can separate us from God's love. However, Christ's presence with us, whether now or in the end times, does not mean that we are spared pain, suffering, trials, or even death. We have never been promised such exemptions in this life. It means that, through Jesus and what He has done for us, we can live with the hope and promise that God is with us in these trials and that we have the promise of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. We can live with the hope that regardless of anything we go through here, like Paul, we can be certain that "there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (*2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV*). We who have "loved His appearing" can claim this hope and promise for ourselves, as well.

The Law and the Gospel

As Seventh-day Adventists, we carry in our name so much of what we stand for. The *Seventh-day* part represents the seventh-day Sabbath, which points to our belief not just in that one commandment alone but, by implication, in all ten. The *Adventist* part points to our belief in the second advent of Jesus, a truth that can exist only because of what Christ did with His atoning death at His first advent. Hence, our name *Seventh-day Adventist* points to two crucial and inseparable components of present truth: the law and the gospel.

How do these texts indicate just how closely the law and the gospel are linked?

Jer. 44:23 _____

Rom. 3:20–26 _____

Rom. 7:7 _____

The gospel is good news, the good news that though we have sinned in that we have broken God’s law, through faith in what Christ did for us at the cross we can be forgiven our sins, for our transgression of His law. Also, we have been given the power to obey that law, fully and completely.

No wonder then that, in the context of the last days, as the great controversy rages in special ferocity, God’s people are depicted in a very specific manner.

Read Revelation 14:12. How does this text reveal the link between the law and the gospel?

As Seventh-day Adventists, a people who believe in obedience to God’s law, how can we show others that obedience to the law is not legalism but a natural outgrowth of loving God and being saved by Him? How do such texts as Deuteronomy 11:1 and 1 John 5:3 buttress this point?

Further Study: Read Revelation 12:9–12 and Ellen G. White, “Why Was Sin Permitted?” pp. 33–43, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.

Notice Ellen White’s words, the “allegiance of love.” This powerful phrase, full of meaning, points to the fact that love leads to allegiance, to faithfulness. A spouse who loves his or her mate, then, will manifest that love through allegiance. It was that way with the heavenly host, and it should be that way with us now in our relationship to God.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What scriptural evidence do we have that points to the reality not just of Satan but of his role in the great controversy? How can we help people understand the reality of Satan as a personal being and not just a symbol of the evil in the human heart?
- 2 As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been blessed with an incredible amount of knowledge in regard to biblical truth. As wonderful as it is, though, why is this knowledge not enough to save us? What more do we need than just intellectual knowledge?
- 3 What are ways in which you have experienced the presence of Jesus in your life even now? How can these experiences help you in whatever time of trouble you have to face?
- 4 In class, talk more about the phrase “the allegiance of love.” How can this idea help us to understand better the relationship between law and grace and between faith and obedience? What does it teach about the freedom inherent in the whole idea of love? In what ways, even now, can we reveal the “allegiance of love”?

Hawaiian Wedding: Part 1

by BENJIE LEACH

Sabbath afternoon began as planned.

About 30 band students from Campion Academy, where I worked as a chaplain, distributed copies of Ellen G. White's book *Steps to Christ* in a town located at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in the U.S. state of Colorado.

After that, we returned to the local Seventh-day Adventist church, where the students earlier had performed and changed clothing for a hike in nearby Rocky Mountain National Park.

But when our bus stopped at a scenic lookout spot near the mountaintop, I immediately wanted to turn around and leave. Dozens of people dressed in long robes greeted our eyes. At first glance, I thought they belonged to some sort of pushy Eastern religion, and I didn't want to argue with them.

But the band members pleaded for five minutes to witness to these people. I reluctantly agreed.

After a few minutes, a student came over to me and said, "This is not an Eastern religion. This is a Hawaiian wedding."

I was surprised. "Why is a Hawaiian wedding being held in Colorado?" I asked.

It turned out that the groom was originally from Hawaii. But, the student said, the bride and groom had a problem: the minister was 45 minutes late.

"Aren't you a minister?" the student asked.

I assured him that the minister would arrive. But the minister didn't show up. We saw the bride crying near a car, and I approached her. The woman tearfully explained that the minister had been involved in an accident and could not come to the wedding.

The bride had won my sympathy now. "All right," I said. "I guess I can have your wedding."

She looked surprised. "What makes you think that you can have my wedding?" she said.

"I am a minister," I said.

"You don't look like a minister."

"Lady, I wouldn't lie to you," I said, pulling out my wallet to show her my ministerial license.

Her eyes grew big. "You really are a minister! Can you do our wedding?" she asked.

Now I wasn't so sure. I said to her, "I want to see your wedding license."

I carefully examined the piece of paper. It was in order.

"I guess I'll have your wedding," I said. "So what are your names?"

The band members saw what was happening, and they became excited. Several band members played music for the couple before the ceremony began.

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