

# Crisis *in* Heaven



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 14:4, 12–15; Ezek. 28:2, 12–19; John 12:31; Rev. 12:7–16; Luke 10:1–21.*

**Memory Text:** “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (*Revelation 7:10, NKJV*).

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe. All it took was one rebel, and everything changed. Lucifer thought that he could do a better job than God did. He wanted God's position and the prestige that went with it.

His lust for power resulted in a “war in heaven” (*Rev. 12:7*). By tricking Adam and Eve at the forbidden tree in Eden, Satan brought that war to earth, and we have been living with the consequences ever since. The plan of salvation is God's way of dealing with the rebellion and restoring the order and harmony that Satan had disrupted.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 2.

## The Fall in Heaven

**Read** Isaiah 14:4, 12–15. What descriptions of the king of Babylon indicate that he is speaking of someone much greater than a mere human ruler?

No earthly king has ever fallen from heaven, a truth that suggests that verses 12–15 are focusing on someone bigger than the king, even of Babylon. Furthermore, the images of ascending to heaven, of being in a position higher than angels, and of presiding over the assembly on the mountain in the far north are all recognized descriptions of deity in the ancient Near East. Satan’s ambitions are exposed clearly here, in this kind of “dual” prophecy.

Jesus uses a similar tactic in His description of the destruction of Jerusalem (*Matthew 24*). Although the disciples ask about the destruction of the temple, in His reply, Jesus describes both the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70 and the greater reality of the end of the world. In the same way, Isaiah describes the attributes of an earthly king but applies it all to something much grander and larger than just a mere human king.

**Read** Ezekiel 28:2, 12–19. How is Satan depicted here?

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Ezekiel 28:13 describes a perfect being present in Eden (“the garden of God”)—one decorated with all the kinds of precious stones later found on the breastplate of the high priest and one commissioned as a guardian cherub at the throne of God. The perfect being, however, corrupted himself because of his “beauty.”

By using human parallels, these glimpses allow us to understand divine realities. The prophets used that which is closer and more easily understandable in order to explain something that, in and of itself, might be harder for us to understand. What happens in heaven may be difficult for us on earth to grasp, but we are all able to understand the effects of the blatant and destructive political ambitions of earthly rulers. Isaiah and Ezekiel give us insight into the inexplicable transition, at some point in history, when all that was beautiful and perfect in God’s order of things was marred by destructive ambition.

**If a perfect being, created by a perfect God, in a perfect environment, could mess himself up because of pride, what should that tell us fallen beings about how deadly this sentiment really is?**

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## The Prince of This World

**Read** John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11. Why does Jesus call Satan the prince of this world?

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When God first established Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He entrusted them with the management of Eden (*Gen. 2:8, 15*) and the care of all creatures in the waters, skies, and upon the earth (*Gen. 1:26, 28*). When Adam named all the animals, he demonstrated his stewardship over them. Usually the one with authority over something can give it a name; so, by naming all creatures, Adam was clearly demonstrating his status as the ruler of the world.

When Adam lost that dominion, Satan very quickly filled the vacuum. Part of the restoration of the human race, made possible by Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, will be when the redeemed are given Adam's and Eve's privilege of reigning with God for the rest of eternity as "kings and priests" (*Rev. 1:6, 5:10*).

The opening chapters of the book of Job reveal to us just how extensive Adam's loss was. As we are given a glimpse into the throne room of the universe, we can also see how subordinate to nature the human race has become since the Fall.

**Read** Job 1:6, 7 and 2:1, 2. Why does Satan introduce himself to the assembly of the sons of God as the one walking to and fro on the earth?

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Walking "to and fro" or "walking back and forth" is not just the act of a tourist. In Scripture it is a sign of ownership. When God gave the land to Abraham, He told him to walk its length and breadth (*Gen. 13:17*), and similarly to Moses and Joshua (*Deut. 11:24, Josh. 1:3*). Satan, in a sense, is flaunting himself as "the god of this world" (*2 Cor. 4:4*).

The introduction of Satan in the first two chapters of Job parallels what happened in Genesis 3. Satan initiates trouble in paradise and then leaves the human victims to suffer in his wake.

**What evidence can we see of Satan's work in this world? How can you draw hope from the promise that one day this whole mess will be over?**

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## War in Heaven

We have no idea what war in heaven means; that is, we don't know what kind of physical battles were fought other than the casting out of Satan and his angels. The fact is, the Bible does not say anything about the physical aftermath of this heavenly conflict. It deals, instead, with the spiritual results here on earth.

**Read Revelation 12:7–16. What does it tell us about the great controversy as it impacted heaven and then earth?**

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Note the positive way that John talks about the continuing war between the “accuser of our brethren” and the overcomers. He links it to salvation and the coming of the kingdom of God (*Rev. 12:10, 11*). This positive theme is underscored throughout the chapter and is an important aspect of the great controversy.

It is crucial that we note the overall context of chapter 12. Three great threats are described there, but each is followed by an incredible deliverance. In a dramatic vision, John is shown the struggle between Christ and Satan and how totally mismatched it all appears to be.

For instance, a great red dragon (Satan, *Rev. 12:9*) prepares to eat a baby (Jesus) about to be born. What baby could survive that? But He does and is caught up to the throne of God.

The dragon then attempts to persecute the mother (a symbol of the people of God; see *Rev. 12:13*). How much can a mother who has just given birth defend herself against a dragon? But she also escapes miraculously (*Rev. 12:14*).

In a third attempt to destroy God's chosen, the dragon causes a flood to gush out after the woman (*Rev. 12:15*). A woman against a flood? But, again, God steps in and delivers her (*Rev. 12:16*).

The dragon now turns his attention to the remnant of the woman's seed. He is furious and wars against them. History clearly shows how God's people have been hunted, oppressed, and persecuted over the years. Too often we see the impossibility of the struggle and wonder how the faithful will survive, forgetting that the story does not end there. It continues in Revelation 14, where we see the faithful standing before God's throne; thus, they, too, have been delivered.

**At times when you feel overwhelmed by forces greater than yourself, how can you learn to take courage in the Lord, who is greater than all things?**

## Satan Evicted

As we have seen, the war in heaven was not confined to heaven but affected the earth too. For some time it appears that Satan (*the “accuser of our brethren,” Rev. 12:10*) was still able to stand before God’s throne and make accusations against God’s people. Job was one biblical character who suffered this indignity.

**Read** Luke 10:1–21. What was the meaning of Christ’s words about Satan here?

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Before Jesus sent out the Seventy, He instructed them not to take any spare clothing or money (*Luke 10:4*) and to ask God’s blessing on their hosts (*Luke 10:5*). He warned that they were like lambs walking among wolves (*Luke 10:3*)—a concern reflected in Revelation 12, where the dragon attempts to make war with God’s people.

On their joyous return (*Luke 10:17*) the disciples reported that the demons were subject to them, and this must have brought Jesus great joy (*Luke 10:21*). It is in this context that Jesus makes His statement about Satan falling like lightning from heaven. He warns the disciples that their joy must not be based on their success over demonic forces but rather on having their names written in heaven (*Luke 10:20*). This reminder places human salvation firmly where it belongs—in the hands of our Savior. It is Jesus, not we, who has defeated the enemy.

Jesus’ followers, however, are given the privilege of witnessing about the salvation Jesus has won. This episode in Luke 10:17–20 seems to link the work of witnessing that Jesus entrusts to His people with power over Satan in this great controversy. The work of witnessing erodes the power that Satan has over the people of this world and gives humankind opportunity to resume their original work of expanding the borders of God’s kingdom.

Power over our adversary is only possible because of the victory Jesus won at the cross. Paul states that Jesus “disarmed principalities and powers” and triumphed over them (*Col. 2:15, NKJV*). In Him, God’s people are triumphant. Satan’s demise is assured. “The ruler of this world will be cast out” (*John 12:31, NKJV*), never to malign God’s people again. We can surely rejoice that the battle is the Lord’s!

**“Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Dwell on these words. What are they saying, and why is that such a great reason to rejoice?**

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## The Continuing Battle

Just as the reflexes of a twitching, freshly killed poisonous snake can cause it to reach around and inject its poison if you pick it up, Satan's bite is still deadly. He may have been defeated at Calvary, but the danger is not over yet.

**Read John 16:33. How did Jesus warn His disciples of the continuing struggle against evil?**

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Jesus was clear that His followers would not have an easy time, but instead of focusing on the challenges, He focused on the victory that they would have in Him. Reflecting on this guarantee, Paul assured the believers in Rome that God would crush Satan beneath their feet (*Rom. 16:20*). And John told the last-day church of the same thing—their victory was assured through the blood of the Lamb (*Rev. 12:11*).

**Read Hebrews 12:1, 2. Who are the “witnesses,” and how do they encourage us? See Hebrews 11.**

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Hebrews 11 quickly sketches the lives of some of the famous heroes of faith. Abel offers a perfect sacrifice, and he is not forgotten even though he is dead. Enoch habitually draws near to God so is taken straight to heaven to be with Him. Noah warns of unseen events and offers salvation to a world drowned in sin. Abraham leaves a great civilization to go to a land of promise. Sarah gives birth to a promised son even though she is too old to have a child. Moses chooses to suffer with his people rather than to live in a king's palace. And Rahab witnesses to God's greatness (*Josh. 2:9–11*). These are among those who form the great cloud of witnesses spoken of in Hebrews 12:1. They are not passive witnesses, like spectators watching a game; instead, they actively witness to us that God is faithful, sustaining them in whatever struggles they faced. We are not alone in this great battle.

**Look at some of those mentioned in Hebrews 11. Who were they, and what were they like? What encouragement can you draw from the fact that they were not flawless and faultless human beings but were people with fears, passions, and weaknesses just like we all are?**

**Further Thought:** We do not know why sin arose in Lucifer. Ellen G. White tells us that “little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35. The fact that this occurred in a perfect being reveals in a powerful way the reality of free will and free choice as part of God’s government. God created all intelligent creatures as good; they were moral beings with a good moral nature. There was nothing in them leaning toward evil. How, then, did sin arise in Lucifer? The answer is that there is no answer. There is no excuse for sin. If an excuse for it could be found, then God could ultimately be held responsible for it. As humans, we are used to cause/effect relationships. But sin does not have a cause; there is simply no reason for it. It’s irrational and nonsensical. Lucifer could not justify his actions, especially as one so favored of God. Somehow, though, through abusing free will, Lucifer corrupted himself, and from being the “light bearer,” he became Satan, “the adversary.” Though there’s a lot we don’t understand, we should understand enough to know just how careful we ourselves need to be with the sacred gift of free will and free choice.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Jealousy played a large part in Satan’s rebellion against God. In your own experience, what kind of damage has jealousy caused? How can we learn to fight against this very common emotion?
- 2 Dwell more on the amazing gift of free will and free choice. How do we use these gifts every day? Look at some of the terrible consequences of the wrong use of this gift. How can we learn to use it correctly?
- 3 Think about the role of the law in the context of free will and free choice. The mere fact that God has a law should be a testimony to the reality of free will. After all, what is the purpose of a moral law unless you have moral creatures who can choose to follow it? Dwell more on the implications of the law and what it says about human freedom.
- 4 There’s a powerful tendency, especially in certain parts of the world, to reject the idea of a literal devil. Why is such a view so contrary to even the most basic understanding of the Bible?

## Light Bearer to the Amazon

The longest river in South America is the Amazon, flowing from the Andes mountains of Peru to the Atlantic Ocean—a distance of nearly 4,000 miles (6,400 km). A mission to reach people living there was started by Pastor Leo and Jessie Halliwell in the 1930s. Navigating the Amazon in their handcrafted wooden boat, the *Luzeiro* (“light bearer” in Portuguese), the Halliwells brought hope and healing to countless people living along this famous waterway. Many mission stories have come from the Halliwells’ experiences. Below is a favorite, written by Charlotte Ishkanian.

### Angels on the Amazon

Pastor Halliwell steered the *Luzeiro* along the river while his 15-year-old son, Jack, stared into the jungle hoping to see a jaguar, the “jungle leopard.” Overhead, a brilliant macaw flew by, squawking loudly. Then the boat’s engine slowed, and Jack noticed three well-dressed men waving at the *Luzeiro* from a canoe.

“Hello!” one man called out. “Can you give us a tow upstream?”

Pastor Halliwell knew it was dangerous to give hitchhikers a ride. But something impressed him to stop. “Throw them a line, Jack,” he called to his son. Jack threw the men the rope, and the men attached it to their boat.

Two men climbed aboard and stood beside Pastor Halliwell as he steered the boat up the river. Suddenly, one of the men grabbed the wheel and turned the boat around. The boat shuddered and moved suddenly away from the riverbank and out into the middle of the river. The sudden movement nearly threw Jack overboard!

Pastor Halliwell stared at the waters they had just crossed. Not 20 feet from where they had been heading, the jagged points of hundreds of rocks lay just beneath the surface of the water. If the boat had hit those rocks, it would have been ripped apart.

“Whew!” Pastor Halliwell exclaimed. “Thank you! You saved our boat and probably our lives!”

The man smiled but said nothing as he steered the boat through the rocky waters. Then the man gave the wheel back to Pastor Halliwell. “Thank you for the ride, sir,” the man said. “If you stop, we’ll get out now.”

*This is strange!* thought Pastor Halliwell. *There are no signs of a village nearby.* Nevertheless, he stopped the boat, and the two men climbed back into their canoe and pushed off into the current.

“Watch where they go,” Leo called to Jack.

“Dad, they’ve disappeared!” Jack called.

Leo turned from the wheel. The river was empty. There was no bend in the river, no ripples in the water. The three men and their boat had disappeared.

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CHARLOTTE ISHKANIAN, *former Mission quarterly editor.*