

End-Time Deceptions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 2:13, 24; 2 Cor. 11:13–15; Ps. 146:4; Gen. 1:1–2:3; Rev. 13:1–17.*

Memory Text: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (*Revelation 12:9, NKJV*).

Even in heaven, before his expulsion, Satan worked to deceive the angels. “Leaving his place in the immediate presence of God, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. Working with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealing his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God, he endeavored to excite dissatisfaction concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that they imposed an unnecessary restraint.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 495.

In Eden, Satan disguised himself as a serpent and used trickery against Eve. As he has done all through history, even up through today, Satan also will use deception at the end of the millennium (*Rev. 20:8*) in an attempt to gain his ends.

Unfortunately, he’s much smarter, more powerful, and craftier than any of us, which is why we need to cling to Jesus and to His Word in order to protect ourselves from his wiles. “‘But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you’” (*Deut. 4:4, NKJV*). The principle espoused here, indeed, still holds true today, as well.

This week, we will look at some of the devil’s most effective deceptions and how we can be protected from them.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 2.

The Grandest Deception

The first lesson of this quarter talked about the “cosmic controversy,” which, unfortunately, has reached beyond the cosmos to our earth itself.

The problem, though, is that many people, Christians included, don’t believe in this great controversy because they don’t believe in Satan. For them, Bible texts talking about Satan or the devil are merely the expressions of a prescientific culture trying to explain evil and suffering in the world. For way too many people the idea of a literal, supernatural entity who has malevolent designs on humanity is the stuff of science fiction, akin to Darth Vader of *Star Wars* fame or the like.

Read the following texts, all from Revelation. What do they teach us about the reality of Satan and particularly about his role in last-day events? *Rev. 2:13, 24; 12:3, 7–9, 12, 17; 13:2; 20:2, 7, 10.*

Revelation shows us just how much power Satan will have over so many inhabitants of the world in the final days, leading them not only away from salvation but toward persecuting those who stay faithful to Jesus.

Of all Satan’s “devices” (*2 Cor. 2:11*)—a translation of the Greek word for “mind” (*noemata*)—perhaps his greatest deception is his ability to cause people to believe that he does not exist. After all, who’s going to seek shelter from an overpowering enemy who you don’t believe is real? It’s astonishing how many claim to be Christians and yet don’t take the idea of a literal devil seriously. They hold such a position, however, only by ignoring or radically reinterpreting the many texts in the Word of God that reveal Satan’s workings and ploys in this world, especially as we near the end of time. That so many people would reject the literal existence of Satan, even in the face of such overwhelming biblical evidence, should be a powerful reminder to us of just how crucial it is that we understand what the Bible really teaches.

Although Revelation talks about the machinations of Satan, particularly in the last days, what great hope can we find from Revelation 12:11? What is our source of power against the devil?

The Two Great Errors

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about Satan's power to deceive?

2 Cor. 11:13–15 _____

2 Thess. 2:9, 10 _____

Rev. 12:9 _____

Rev. 20:10 _____

As we noted in an earlier lesson, Jesus had warned His followers about end-time deceptions. Among those He specifically warned about were the rise of false christs and false prophets who would “ ‘deceive many’ ” (*Matt. 24:5*).

False christs and false prophets, however, are not the only end-time deception of which we have to be aware. Our enemy in the great controversy has many ploys designed to deceive all whom he can. As Christians, we need to be aware of those ploys, and we can do that only through knowing the Bible and obeying what it teaches.

Ellen G. White explains what two of those grand deceptions are: “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

How incredible for us, even many years after Ellen White wrote those words, to see just how prevalent “the two great errors” continue to be in the Christian world.

Why are knowledge of Bible truths and a willingness to *obey* those truths the most powerful weapons we have against the deceptions of the devil, especially in the last days?

The Immortality of the Soul

What do the following texts teach us about the “state of the dead”? What great protection can these texts give us against one of “the two great errors”? *Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10; Ps. 115:17; Ps. 146:4; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; Dan. 12:2.*

In recent decades much attention has been given to stories about people who have “died”—in that their hearts have stopped beating and they have stopped breathing—only to be revived and brought back to consciousness. In numerous cases, many of these people have told of incredible experiences of a conscious existence after they had supposedly died. Some talked about how they floated in the air and saw, from above, their own bodies below. Others reported floating out of their bodies and meeting a wonderful being filled with light and warmth and who espoused truths about kindness and love. Others recounted meeting and talking to dead relatives.

This phenomenon has become so common that it even has a scientific name, near-death experiences (NDEs). Although NDEs remain controversial, many Christians have used them as evidence for the immortality of the soul and the idea that at death the soul goes off to another realm of conscious existence.

But NDEs are, of course, another manifestation of one of “the two great errors.” As long as anyone believes that at death the soul goes on living in one form or another, that person is wide open to most occult or spiritualistic deceptions, deceptions that can easily promote the idea, either openly or by implication, that you don’t need Jesus. In fact, most of the people who have had NDEs have said the spiritual beings whom they met, or even their dead relatives, gave them comforting words about love, peace, and goodness but nothing about salvation in Christ, nothing about sin, and nothing about judgment to come—the most basic biblical views. One would think that, while supposedly getting a taste of the Christian afterlife, they should have gotten a taste of the most basic Christian teachings, as well. Yet, often what they’re told sounds much like New Age dogma, which could explain why many of these people come away less inclined toward Christianity than they were before having “died.”

As Christians, why must we stick to the Word of God, even when our senses tell us something different?

Sabbath and the Theory of Evolution

As much success as Satan has had deceiving the world in regard to the immortality of the soul, he's been just as successful, if not more so, in usurping the biblical Sabbath for Sunday (see weeks 6 and 8) and has done so for most of Christian history.

In recent years, the devil has come up with another deception that lessens the hold of the seventh-day Sabbath in the minds of people: the theory of evolution.

Read Genesis 1:1–2:3. What does this passage teach us about how the Lord created our world and how long it took to do so?

Even the broadest reading of these verses reveals two points about the biblical account of Creation. First, everything was planned and calculated; nothing was random, arbitrary, or by chance. Scripture leaves no room whatsoever for chance in the process of Creation.

Second, the texts reveal unambiguously that each creature was made after its own kind; that is, each one was made separately and distinctly from the others. The Bible teaches nothing about a common natural ancestry (such as from a primeval simple cell) for all life on earth.

Even from a nonliteralist interpretation of Genesis, these two points are obvious: nothing was random in the act of Creation, and there was no common natural ancestry for all species.

Then along comes Darwinian evolution, which, in its various forms, teaches two things: randomness and a common natural ancestry for all species.

Why, then, do so many people interpret Genesis through the lens of a theory that, at its most basic level, contradicts Genesis at its most basic level? Indeed, not only has the error of evolution swept up millions of secular people, but many professed Christians believe that they can harmonize it with their Christian faith, despite the blatant contradictions just mentioned.

However, the implications of evolution in the context of final events make the danger of the deception even more apparent. Why take seriously a day, the seventh-day Sabbath, as a memorial—not for a six-day creation, but for a creation that took about 3 billion years (the latest date that life supposedly first started on earth)? Evolution denudes the seventh day of any real importance because it turns the six days of Creation into nothing but a myth, similar to the one that says Romulus and Remus were nursed by wolves. Also, who, believing that creation required billions of years instead of six days, would actually risk persecution or death by standing for the Sabbath as opposed to for Sunday?

The Counterfeit Trinity

The concept of the triune nature of God is found all through the Bible. However, in the context of end-time deceptions and persecution, the book of Revelation reveals a counterfeit trinity composed of the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast of Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 12:17; 13:1, 2. What is described here?

The dragon here has been seen as the counterfeit of the Father in that he is the one clearly in control. He also gives power and authority and a throne to the sea beast, the one counterfeiting Christ. Why is this second power seen as a counterfeit Christ?

Read Revelation 13:2–5. What are the characteristics of this sea beast?

Besides receiving its authority from the dragon, reminiscent of what Jesus said about receiving His authority from the Father (*see Matt. 28:18*), this sea beast also faced, like Jesus, a death and then a resurrection (*see Rev. 13:3*). Also, this beast is described as exerting his authority for “forty-two months,” or three-and-a-half years—a prophetic counterfeit of Christ’s literal three-and-a-half-year ministry, based on the day-for-year principle.

Read Revelation 13:11–17. How is the land beast described here?

This land beast promotes the interests of the sea beast, just as the Holy Spirit glorified not Himself but Jesus (*John 16:13, 14*). Also, just as the Holy Spirit performed a powerful act in bringing down “fire” from heaven (*Acts 2:3*), the land beast performs something similar (*see Rev. 13:13*). “At the end, the land beast performs a counterfeit of Pentecost! For what purpose? To prove to the world that the counterfeit trinity is the true God.”—Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 111.

What are other end-time deceptions of which we need to be aware, and how can we help others recognize them as deceptions, as well?

Further Thought: Let's dwell more on the implications of the theory of evolution in the context of last-day events, especially in regard to the role of the Sabbath. One reason that Charles Darwin, the originator of the theory, promoted evolution was that—not understanding the great controversy—he had a difficult time reconciling evil and suffering with the idea of a benevolent and loving Creator. Because of this error, he looked in another direction for answers. It wasn't a coincidence, either, that during the mid-to-late 1800s as Darwin was revising and reworking his theory of evolution, God raised up a movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which countered everything for which Darwin's theory stood. How interesting that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose creationist underpinnings are revealed in its very name, started growing and expanding at about the same time that Darwin's theory did.

Perhaps if Darwin had read and believed these few short lines from Ellen G. White, the world might have been spared one of the grandest blunders of human thought since geocentricism and spontaneous generation: "Although the earth was blighted with the curse, nature was still to be man's lesson book. It could not now represent goodness only; for evil was everywhere present, marring earth and sea and air with its defiling touch. Where once was written only the character of God, the knowledge of good, was now written also the character of Satan, the knowledge of evil. From nature, which now revealed the knowledge of good and evil, man was continually to receive warning as to the results of sin."—*Education*, p. 26.

Yet, Darwin did devise his evolutionary speculations, which are all based on a false understanding of the nature and character of God and the fallen world in which we live. Unfortunately, the implications of his theory will make people prey to Satan's deceptions, especially in the final crisis.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do so many Christians reject the idea of a literal Satan? What does this view teach us about how dangerous it is to reject the clear teaching of the Bible?
- 2 What can you say to a person who claims that his or her near-death experience shows that we go on living after death?
- 3 What other reason could there be for why those who believe in evolution would be so much more susceptible to deceptions in the last days?

Jailed for Manslaughter

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A 2:00 A.M. bar brawl in the U.S. state of Alaska turned violent when 28-year-old Tony Pouesi struck a man with a single punch.

The man fell and hit his head on the ground. He died the next day.

Tony was charged with felony manslaughter, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years.

“I was devastated,” Tony said. “I was scared. My whole life flashed before my eyes.”

From his jail cell, Tony remembered his upbringing in faraway Shelton, a small town in Washington state. His family never had read the Bible or attended church. He had used alcohol and illegal drugs as a teen and quit high school before completing 11th grade. As an adult, he had moved to Alaska to work as a commercial fisherman.

In jail, Tony began to pray desperately.

“I said, ‘If there is a God, I want to know that He is real,’ ” Tony, now 30, said in an interview. “I was crying on my knees for hours a day for help.”

Tony borrowed a Bible from the jail library and, to his astonishment, felt an overwhelming sense of peace and joy as he read it. He found special hope in Deuteronomy 31:6, one of the first Bible verses that he memorized. It reads, “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” (NKJV).

“As I prayed and read the Bible, God did miracles in my life,” Tony said.

After some time, Tony’s publicly appointed lawyer announced that she had good news: the potential prison sentence had been reduced to two to four years. Then the sentence was cut to one to three years on a reduced charge of negligent homicide.

One day, Tony found a small card on a bookshelf in the jail library: an invitation for Discover Bible lessons from the *Voice of Prophecy*, a Seventh-day Adventist ministry. He sent away for the lessons and eagerly studied them.

“What’s amazing is that I drank, I did drugs, and I didn’t graduate from high school, but I understood the Bible,” he said. “That’s amazing, right? You don’t have to be a scholar to understand the Bible.”



Shortly after completing the Bible studies, Tony’s case came up in court. There, Tony said, God worked a miracle. The judge handed down a three-year suspended sentence. Tony was free.

“God delivered me from jail,” Tony said. “The whole time I was in there was nine months.”

Read more about TONY POUESI, left, next week.