

# 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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?**

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## 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?**

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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?**

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## 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.*)**

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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* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Rom. 3:20–26* \_\_\_\_\_

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*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?

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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 Thought:** 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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## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** *Ezekiel 28:14, 15; Revelation 12:17*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Realize the scope of the conflict between God and Satan and the tragedy that involves humankind.

**Feel:** Trust in God's faithfulness to help him or her in the daily struggles against evil.

**Do:** Commit his or her life to God out of love and obey His commandments.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Cosmic Scope of the Great Controversy**

- A** What is the impact of evil in the world and in the universe?
- B** Where and why did evil start?
- C** What is God's strategy to save humankind from the tragedy of evil?

**II. Feel: God's Love in My Life**

- A** What promise did Jesus give to His disciples to maintain their hope until the end?
- B** What assurance did Jesus give to His disciples that their hearts might not be troubled?
- C** Do these promises imply that God's disciples will be spared from troubles? Why, or why not?

**III. Do: The Human Response**

- A** How should humans respond to God's love for them?
- B** Why is the attention to the law of God the only logical response to God's grace?
- C** How does our hope for eternity and our relationship with the infinite God relate to our limited faithfulness and obedience to God?

► **Summary:** Only the cosmic solution of another world is appropriate to solve the cosmic problem of this one. The way we conduct our lives should point to this other world.

## *Learning Cycle*

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### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *John 14:1–4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Waiting for the coming of Christ at the end of days is not just a doctrine or even a way to find comfort or hope in our miseries. While it is all these things, it is, first and foremost, the longing for meeting Christ face-to-face. This hope for His coming is at the heart of our spiritual life. But this hope contains a paradox. The more we live with Him, the closer our relationship with Him will become. Yet, the closer we are to Him, the more we will long for His physical and personal presence in His kingdom.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson introduces the topic of the “great controversy,” which affects the whole universe. The connection between heaven and earth should bring the hope of the future coming of the Christ’s heavenly kingdom into our present lives. This belief is much more than simply getting a better life and enjoying a nicer house in the perfect kingdom of God. While those benefits are implied, the hope of Christ’s coming kingdom is primarily about the Person of Jesus Christ, who loves us and whom we love and with whom we shall coexist for eternity. Jesus gives the reason He prepares a place for us—that “you also may be where I am” (*John 14:3, NIV*). The life of the Christian should, therefore, point to that kingdom and to that Person.

**Opening Discussion:** A rabbi of the fifteenth century, the Maharal of Prague, compared the believer to an upside-down tree, rooted in heaven but blossoming and bearing fruit on earth. So, the Christian should have his or her roots in heaven and bear fruit and flowers on earth that witness of heaven. The Christian’s words, acts, and way of life should awaken in those around him or her the profound need and the intense desire for the kingdom of heaven. In a sense, as Christians and Seventh-day Adventists, we are responsible for kindling within those around us the hope in the “Advent.”

**Questions for Discussion:** How is heaven related to earth? How can a Christian’s way of life suggest the beauty and the atmosphere of heaven to others? What spiritual lessons can we learn from the contemplation of the stars and of the infinite dimension of the universe (*Ps. 8:3, 4*)? Why was it necessary for the great God of the universe to leave heaven to dwell on earth (*John 3:31–36*)?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s study confronts us with the drama of the great controversy, which began in heaven with the rebellion of Lucifer and then shifted to planet Earth with the Fall of our first parents. It begins to end with the incarnation of God, who came to live among us in order to prepare us for the heavenly kingdom of God at the end of time. Encourage your students to think over and wonder about the powerful significance of these events.

### Bible Commentary

**I. The Origin of Evil** (*Review Ezekiel 28:2, 11–17; Isaiah 14:12–14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:7 with your class.*)

The biblical texts that speak about the origin of evil are very few and brief. Ezekiel simply tells us that evil happened suddenly, but he does not give any explanation: “‘Iniquity was found in you [Lucifer, symbolized in Ezekiel’s passage by the King of Tyre]’ ” (*Ezek. 28:15, NKJV*). God had nothing to do with the creation of that iniquity. Nothing in this angelic being could have presaged his fall. In fact, God had “created” Lucifer “perfect” (*Ezek. 28:15*) and “full of wisdom” (*Ezek. 28:12*). God even had placed him in the heavenly “Eden the garden of God” (*Ezek. 28:13*), which means that God had “‘established’ ” Lucifer “‘on the holy mountain of God’ ” in the heavenly temple where he “‘walked back and forth’ ” (*Ezek. 28:14, NKJV*).

The absurd process of how evil originated is suggested by the biblical text. Evil started in the intimacy of Lucifer’s mind; his “heart was lifted up” (*Ezek. 28:17; compare with Ezek. 28:2*). He thought that he was a god (*Ezek. 28:2*). The prophet Isaiah describes the same thought process in Lucifer (*Isa. 14:13*); here also, Lucifer has the ambition to sit on the holy mountain, and even to become “like the most High” (*Isa. 14:13, 14*).

What happened in heaven became the blueprint for the inception of iniquity on earth among humans. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created perfect, as Lucifer was. They were made “in the image of God.” God put them in Eden. The argument employed by the serpent, i.e. Satan, to convince Eve to sin reminds us of the self-deception and temptation of pride that led to Satan’s own fall: “‘You will be like God’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). Thus, humans fooled themselves and entertained the illusion that they would reach the divine status of wisdom (*Gen. 3:6*). In heaven and on earth, the coming of evil happened against God’s plans—an anomaly, which has no explanation whatsoever and cannot be understood. As Paul calls it, the existence of evil is “the mystery of iniquity” (*2 Thess. 2:7*).

**Consider This:** In what sense is the origin of iniquity a mystery? What examples in history can you think of that illustrate the “absurd” nature of evil? On a smaller scale, in what ways have you observed the irrational character of evil in your own behavior? Share an example of a time you were the victim of the irrational injustice of evil.

## II. The Product of Evil *(Review Revelation 12:1–17 and Genesis 3:15 with your class.)*

As soon as evil erupted, war broke out in heaven and then on earth. The book of Revelation reports briefly on the war in heaven between the angels of Satan and God’s angels (*Rev. 12:7*). The text does not elaborate on the nature and the scenario of this celestial war. We simply are told that the camp of Satan lost the battle and was cast out of heaven to the earth (*Rev. 12:13; compare with verse 4*). The war, also known as the great controversy, then shifts its main focus to earth, where the next conflict takes place between Satan (“the dragon”) and God’s people (“the woman”), who gives birth to the Messiah (*Rev. 12:13*). Then Satan attacks “the woman” again. She flees into the wilderness and suffers persecution for “a time, and times, and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV; compare with Rev. 12:6, 14*). Satan then turns against “the rest” of God’s people and attacks them (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Why is the Bible so reticent on the scenario concerning the origin of evil in heaven? Why is church history the focus of the prophetic vision in Revelation 12?

## III. The Solution to Evil *(Review Genesis 3:15 and Philippians 2:6–8 with your class.)*

The continuation of the great controversy here on earth also involves the God of heaven. Evil started with the aberration of a being who wanted to take God’s place. Ironically, the solution by which God chose to confront evil was through a reversal of divine status. God, the Omnipotent and Everlasting, became human—a carpenter’s son—and died a criminal’s death to save humankind. The divine intention to save humanity is described in the first prophecy of the Bible in which God addresses the serpent in terms of a war (*Gen. 3:15*). The apostle Paul catches the gist of the whole plot: Christ, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (*Phil. 2:6–8, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Why, in the process of salvation, is the event of the Cross enough to save us? What is the relationship between the gospel of the cross, which shows God’s love and grace for us, and our hope for the future kingdom of God?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss with your students the complementary relationship between the Cross and the kingdom of God. Ask the question, “How do you know you are saved?” Challenge each of your students to think carefully about their answers. Why is it impossible without the Cross to have access to God’s kingdom? Further explore your answer to the penultimate question asked at the close of the commentary section: Why is the Cross enough for salvation?

#### Thought/Application Questions:

- ① Discuss this practical principle: knowing the end of the journey helps to orient us on that journey.
- ② What is the relationship between obedience to the commandments of God and “the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*), who saves us by grace?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following story:

“A man found a wonderful trumpet for sale in the local marketplace.

“The salesman boasted of its magical properties. ‘This trumpet,’ he said, ‘has wonderful power. It can extinguish any fire. Just blow into the trumpet, and immediately the fire will be mastered.’

“The man was intrigued and bought the trumpet. As soon as he arrived home, he immediately decided to test the power of the trumpet. He set his house on fire and then started to blow into the trumpet. Unfortunately, and to his bewilderment, the fire kept burning, and the trumpet had no effect on it.

“Desperate, he ran back to the market and caught the salesman who had sold him the trumpet. He exclaimed that the trumpet was not working. . . . The salesman then explained that the function of the trumpet was not to put fires out but to warn others that there was a fire so that they would come and control it.”—Adapted from Jacques B. Doukhan, *Proverbs* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2014), p. 25.

**Activity:** Turn this story into a dramatic sketch to be performed by some of your students. At the end of the performance, ask your students what relation it has to the coming of Christ and the end of the world. Have they ever behaved like this foolish trumpet player?