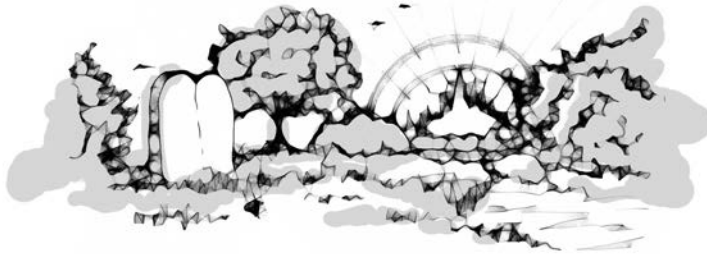


Christ's Kingdom *and the Law*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:8, 9; Dan. 2:44; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Rev. 22:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26.*

Memory Text: “‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (*Jeremiah 31:33, NKJV*).

In 2011 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, died. He was 56. Years earlier, after a bout with cancer, Jobs called death “the single best invention of life” because it forced us to achieve the best we could here. In other words, because our time is so limited, we must try to be as successful as we can now.

Jobs, though, got it backward. What pushed him to seek a greater stake in this world, death (or at least the inevitability of it), should have been what revealed the futility of putting down roots too permanently here, in what’s always shallow ground. Sure, Jobs accomplished a lot, but in contrast to a million years or to eternity, what does it matter?

Indeed, we have been promised that this world and all that’s in it will be destroyed, and God will establish a new and eternal world where sin and death (all the result of the violation of God’s law) will never exist.

This week we’ll look at the question of God’s eternal kingdom and the role of the law in relation to it.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.*

The Kingdom of God

When God created the first human beings, He gave them dominion over all things. Adam was to rule the world. However, through violating God’s law, he forfeited his right to earthly sovereignty, and ownership went to the archenemy, Satan. When the representatives from the other worlds gathered before God during the time of the patriarchs, it was Satan who appeared as the “delegate” from earth (*Job 1:6*).

Read Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 4:8, 9. What do these verses tell us about Satan’s power in this world?

What happened during the wilderness temptations is very revealing. Satan offered to give Jesus rulership over all the earthly kingdoms if Jesus would fall down and worship him (*Matt. 4:8, 9; see also Luke 4:5–7*). Jesus came to take the world back from Satan, but He could do so only at the cost of His life. How strong, then, the temptation must have been when Satan stood there and offered to give the world to Him! However, in bowing to Satan, He would have fallen into the same trap as had Adam and, consequently, would also have been guilty of violating His Father’s law. Had He done so, the plan of salvation would have been aborted, and we’d be dead in our sins.

Of course, we know that Jesus stayed victorious, and, in His victory, we have the assurance and promise of our own, which is life in God’s everlasting kingdom, the one depicted in Daniel 2, when the stone cut out without hands destroys all kingdoms of this world. And then, afterward, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

All the kingdoms depicted in Daniel 2 did everything predicted about them, including the continued disunity in Europe, symbolized by the iron and clay in the toes of the statue. Why should these incredible facts help us trust in the promise of the last kingdom, the one that will “stand forever”?

Citizens of the Kingdom

In many nations, those who move there from other countries have to surrender all allegiances to their land of birth if they want citizenship in their new country. However, some countries allow a person to hold dual citizenship; that is, they can pledge allegiance to both places.

There’s no such thing as dual citizenship, however, in the great controversy. We are on one side or the other. The kingdom of evil has been battling the kingdom of righteousness for millennia, and it is impossible for a person to be faithful to both at the same time. We all have to make a choice about whose kingdom will have our allegiance.

Read 1 Peter 2:11, Hebrews 11:13, Ephesians 2:12, Colossians 1:13, Deuteronomy 30:19, and Matthew 6:24. What do these texts tell us about the impossibility of “dual citizenship” in the great controversy between Christ and Satan? What role does keeping the law have in helping to show where our citizenship truly resides? See Rev. 14:12.

Once people make a decision to follow Christ, they have chosen to turn their back on the devil’s kingdom. He or she is now part of another commonwealth, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as a result the person now obeys His rules, His law, His commandments, not those of the devil. The person’s obedience, however, isn’t universally appreciated—certainly not by the devil, who is anxious to get these people back, and often not by other people, as well, who tend to distrust the “strangers and pilgrims” among them. Despite these obstacles, God has a people whose first allegiance is to Him, not to the “ruler of this world” (*John 12:31, NKJV*).

So often foreigners in a country stand out because they are different. How should we, as Seventh-day Adventists, as “strangers and pilgrims here,” stand out, as well? Or do we?

Faith and the Law

The dominant theme in Scripture is simple: God is love. God’s love is most potently demonstrated in His grace. With His unlimited power, He could easily have wiped humanity from the face of the earth, but, instead, He chose to exercise patience and give all a chance to experience the fullness of life in His eternal kingdom. Even more so, His love is revealed in the price that He Himself paid at the Cross.

God’s love is also directly related to His justice. Having provided countless opportunities for people to choose their own destiny, the God of love will not force them into a kingdom that they have rejected. When the wicked stand before God’s throne in the judgment, they are condemned by their own testimony. No one who stands before the throne can truthfully say that he was unaware of God’s requirements. Whether through written or natural revelation, all have been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God (*Rom. 1:19, 20; 2:12–16*).

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 and Revelation 22:14, 15. Who gets into God’s kingdom, who stays out, and why? What role does God’s law play here? Also, notice the stark contrast between the two groups!

What’s fascinating is that if you put 1 Corinthians 6:11 together with Revelation 22:14, you get faithful Christians who are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they are “justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28, NKJV*); yet, they also keep that law.

“It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven: they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 18. How do these words help us to understand better the painful topic about the fate of the lost?

The Everlasting Kingdom

God created a perfect world. Sin entered, and that perfect world became severely marred. The story of redemption tells us that Jesus entered human history so that, among other things, the original perfection will be restored. The redeemed will live in a perfect world where love reigns supreme.

As we have seen, love can exist only in a moral universe, only in a universe with moral beings, and to be moral they must also be free. This prompts the question: could evil arise again?

How do Daniel 7:27, John 3:16, and Revelation 21:4 help to answer the question about whether evil will arise again? What is the significance of the term *everlasting*?

When God created the universe, there were conditions attached to its stability. This is most evident in Genesis 2:17, where Adam was warned that violation of God's expressed command would result in death. The very mention of death indicates that the concept of eternity from a human perspective was conditional. Adam would have experienced eternal life only if he maintained loyalty to God.

However, in the re-created earth, death will no longer be a reality, which means that we will live forever, a fulfillment of the many promises of Scripture. Whether rebellion could occur is really a moot point. The fact is, it won't.

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34. What principle do we see here that helps us to understand why evil won't rise again?

The Messianic kingdom will comprise people who have maintained loyalty to God throughout their religious experience. In the face of persecution and personal struggles, they chose the path of obedience and demonstrated their willingness to live lives of divine service. God promises to inscribe His law in their hearts so that they will naturally do the things that are pleasing to Him. In the kingdom of Christ, sin is entirely vanquished, and righteousness reigns supreme.

The Law in the Kingdom

Of all the harsh consequences of sin, death has been the most persistent. Sin can be overcome, Satan can be resisted, but with just two known exceptions (Enoch, Elijah) out of billions, who has escaped the inevitability of death? “When it comes to death,” wrote an ancient philosopher, “we human beings all live in an unwalled city.”

What message is found in Revelation 20:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:26?

With the power ascribed to death, it is no wonder that just before Christ establishes the Messianic kingdom on earth, He will first utterly destroy death.

There is no question that death is related to sin, which means it's related to God's law, as well; because sin is violation of God's law. Consequently, there can be no sin without the law. Although sin is dependent on the law, the law is independent of sin. That is, the law can exist without sin. In fact, it did for all the ages until Lucifer rebelled in heaven.

“When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 109.

With this in mind, the absence of death and sin in the kingdom of God does not require the absence of the law. Just as the law of gravity is necessary for the harmonious interaction between the physical elements of the universe, God's moral law is needed to govern the righteous interaction between the saints. When God inscribes His law in the hearts of the redeemed, His sole purpose is to seal their decision to walk in the way of righteousness for eternity. Consequently, His law becomes the very essence of His kingdom. So, we have every reason to believe that the principles of God's moral law will exist in God's eternal kingdom. The difference, of course, is that those principles will never be violated there as they have been here.

Try to imagine the perfect environment of heaven: no fallen natures, no devil to tempt us, no sin, and no death. Now ask yourself: what things in your life and character would not fit very comfortably in such an environment?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pp. 307–319, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“Satan had claimed that it was impossible for man to obey God’s commandments; and in our own strength it is true that we cannot obey them. But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God’s precepts. . . .

“The life of Christ on earth was a perfect expression of God’s law, and when those who claim to be children of God become Christlike in character, they will be obedient to God’s commandments. Then the Lord can trust them to be of the number who shall compose the family of heaven. Clothed in the glorious apparel of Christ’s righteousness, they have a place at the King’s feast. They have a right to join the blood-washed throng.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 314, 315.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the Ellen G. White statement in today’s further study. In what ways are both law and grace revealed in it? Why is it crucial that we always understand them both together? What happens when these concepts are taught apart from each other?
- 2 The introduction to this week’s study talked about the late Steve Jobs and his claim that the specter of death, our own death, should drive us to accomplish all that we can here. Though there’s some truth to that idea, in and of itself it’s not enough. It never solves the problem of death itself and what death does to the meaning of the lives that precede it. In fact, after Jobs’ death, the cover of the *New Yorker* magazine depicted Peter, iPad in hand, checking Steve Jobs in at the pearly gates. Though that might be cute, what lesson can we learn from the fact that there probably won’t be any iPads, or anything that Steve Jobs created here, in heaven?
- 3 What things are on the earth now that will last forever? What won’t last past the final destruction of this world? Why is it crucial that we know the difference between them?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 2:44*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize that sin and death will be done away with.

Feel: Joyfully anticipate the new earth.

Do: Resolve to commit fully to God’s kingdom.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Down With Death

- Ⓐ Why can love exist only in a moral universe?
- Ⓑ Why didn’t Jesus take the easy route to gain rulership of the earth by bowing down to Satan (*Matt. 4:8*)?
- Ⓒ How does God’s law directly relate to His justice?
- Ⓓ Why will evil never arise again after God destroys sin?

II. Feel: Our Great Hope

- Ⓐ How can we feel a part of our communities and yet be “not of the world” (*John 17:14*)?
- Ⓑ As new citizens in God’s kingdom, we should feel allegiance to Him. How will we demonstrate our allegiance?
- Ⓒ As we struggle with sin and death as the consequences of breaking God’s law, how can we maintain an attitude of hope?

III. Do: Our Pledge of Allegiance

- Ⓐ Why can’t we possess dual citizenship in the great controversy between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil?
- Ⓑ How can a focus on heaven make us better prepared to live meaningful lives and be better citizens in the here and now?
- Ⓒ What happens to our spiritual lives if we emphasize law over grace or grace over law?

► **Summary:** God will establish a new and eternal world where all the results of the violation of God’s law will no longer exist. Each of us is called to accept the offer of citizenship in God’s kingdom.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Daniel 2:44*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: We cannot sit on the fence spiritually. It is impossible for a person to be faithful to both God and Satan at the same time. We all have to make a choice in regard to whose kingdom we will show our allegiance to.

Just for Teachers: The issue of the validity of God's law is not just an issue that we face nowadays. Sin originally started with Satan questioning God's character, which was reflected in His law. So, sin entered our perfect world and severely marred it. Jesus entered human history to save us and restore us. In the re-created earth, God's law will be followed, and love will reign supreme.

The story is told of a very shy lady who came to know Jesus. She didn't seem to have any great talents to use for God. So, she quietly found her niche in the church and faithfully served by always organizing the church potlucks. Many years later, she contracted a terminal illness and was admitted to the hospital. When the pastor came to visit, she told him that she was ready to die. Her eyes shone as she told him how she was looking forward to Jesus coming and waking her up. She wanted to share with others her hope. She asked the pastor to see to it that when people came for the viewing at her funeral that her Bible was placed in her left hand and, in her right hand, she wanted a plastic fork. The pastor could understand the Bible, but why the plastic fork? "Pastor, I have helped out with potlucks for so many years. And week after week, I have reminded people to keep their forks for the dessert. When they see the fork, they will ask and then you tell them that I want everyone to know that the best is still to come!"

This quarter, as we have been studying God's law and wonderful grace, we must remember to keep an eye on the big picture. Sin and death will not have the last word. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have the privilege of telling the world that the best is yet to come in a re-created perfect world.

Opening Activity: What do we remember the following people for: Johann Sebastian Bach, Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs, Napoleon, Mother Teresa? What would you like to be remembered for? Why?

Discuss: Would it be possible to be so "heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good"?

►STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

Human creation does not really begin in Genesis 1. Creation began when God, compelled by love for creatures not yet made, conceived of a planet that was beautiful and lush and inhabited by beings who would reflect in a special way the image and likeness of their Creator. This creation was based on heaven's law that governed the universe. This law meant life and order and beauty and creativity, and it was based on the love of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—because only love can dream up such a wonderful world.

I. Cosmic Dimensions *(Review Isaiah 14:12–19 and Ezekiel 28:12–20 with your class.)*

Unfortunately, this is no “and they lived happily ever after” story, because distrust and doubt and envy had somehow entered the heavenly realm. Revelation 12 describes the rebellion led by somebody who once was known as Lucifer, who wanted to be above the stars of God and be like the Most High (*Isa. 14:12–19; compare the description in Ezek. 28:12–20*). Ambition drove a created being to doubt the divine motives expressed in the divine law. This doubt was injected into a perfect world—with only one “imperfection”: the creatures that God had made were not robotlike followers; they had been endowed with the freedom to make decisions. As the serpent speaks, “we see misrepresentation turning into distrust, distrust maturing into alienation, and alienation ripening into fear (Gen. 3:1, 6, 8, 10).”—Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 464. Revelation 12 describes, in the context of a cosmic war, how Lucifer's doubt infected other members of the cosmic family, and how humanity fell into the same trap.

Consider This: Discuss with your study group the implications of God's creation of human beings, created with the capacity to choose. What does it say about the Creator? What does it say about the laws that had been put into place by the Creator?

II. God's Plan—No Afterthought *(Review 1 John 3:8 and John 8:44 with your class.)*

Yet, God had a plan all along, even while He knew, as an omniscient Being, the end from the beginning. God, in the Son, would offer Himself as a sacrifice and once again level the playing field. Humans could again make a choice—something that is expressed repeatedly in the divine call through

prophets and others to choose God over Baal (or money or pleasure or self).

The issues of the cosmic struggle that unfolded involved questions concerning God's integrity. First John 3:8 states that "the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (*NASB*). A devil who sinned in the beginning suggests a framework (or laws) that existed during the rebellion in heaven. But beyond the issue of the transgression of a divine law, we need to consider the issue of the questioning of God's character, which is reflected also in the serpent's insinuating remarks to Eve in Genesis 3. John 8:44 contains Jesus' description of the archenemy: " 'He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies' " (*NASB*). Christ's description of Satan involves murder and lying—both of which are violations of God's moral law.

Consider This: Why is it important that salvation is not an afterthought or emergency response by God?

III. Can God Be Just and Merciful? (*Review Revelation 12:10, Zechariah 3:1–5, and Job 1 with your class.*)

Another important issue in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan involved the relationship between Creator and created being. Autonomy and self-actuation are part of the claim that Lucifer maintained (*Isa. 14:12–19*). The shining morning star wanted to be his own master and on par with God. Finally, God's justice and mercy were imperiled when Satan challenged the Trinity in heaven. Because Satan is constantly accusing God's people, the issue of divine justice needs to be understood in this conflict (*Rev. 12:10, Zech. 3:1–5; compare Job 1*). Is God really fair? Does He have favorites? How does salvation work? How can He forgive a sinner who has transgressed His divine law?

During the entire quarter, we have studied different aspects of God's initiative to answer these questions once and for all. The first promise, given to Adam and Eve, pointed to the One who would smash the head of the serpent. Sacrifice and rituals in the earthly sanctuary served as object lessons of the divine plan. The prophets throughout the Old Testament period spoke about the Messiah and added puzzle pieces that would result in a bigger picture. And then, finally, the creative Word that had spoken the planet into existence became flesh and camped with us. Jesus demonstrated both the seriousness of sin and the wonder of the divine plan of salvation. His example served to lift up God's law and character. His preaching pointed to the principles of the kingdom that were distinct from those espoused by fallen Lucifer. His sacrifice paid the price for sin and our sins—an innocent Victim had been slain and ransomed the

guilty, who needed to rely completely on this sacrifice.

While the great controversy is not over yet, the victory is sure. God's law and His character have been vindicated by God Himself, who demonstrated its viability and was willing to pay the price that transgression costs.

Consider This: As you think about the great controversy, how does this cosmic conflict play out in your own life?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

- ❶ What accusation about God's law did Satan launch in heaven? How did Jesus disprove it?
- ❷ How did Satan manage to parade himself in heaven as earth's representative?
- ❸ How has all humankind been exposed to the basic principles of the law of God?
- ❹ How accurate is Daniel 2 in proving and in considering the current European economic and political realities?
- ❺ Some teach that because God is love, He will eventually let everyone into heaven. The Bible, however, teaches that the wicked will be excluded from heaven. What disqualifies them from heaven?

Application Questions:

- ❶ What happens if we emphasize the law at the expense of grace or vice versa? What practical effects will this have on our lives?
- ❷ As a new citizen, one is obligated to follow the laws of his or her new country. What does this have to do with the Christian and God's law?
- ❸ How can we live as "strangers and pilgrims here" and yet be the "salt of the earth" as we impact our world on social, economic, and political issues?

►STEP 4—Create

Activity: Heaven is often depicted in contemporary culture as a place where we all wear white sheets and spend eternity sitting on a fluffy white cloud strumming a small harp. Nothing could be further from the truth. Spend a moment sharing what you imagine heaven to be like. How will the absence of sin and death impact your life? What are you most looking forward to?