

“Principalities *and* Powers”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Ps. 51:1-4; Zech. 3:1-4; Matt. 22:11, 12; Rom. 3:4; Eph. 3:10; Heb. 2:14; 13:2; Rev. 12:7-13.*

Memory Text: “We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men” (*1 Corinthians 4:9, NIV*).

One of the most amazing discoveries of the past century was, literally, astronomical: the realization that billions of galaxies exist, each one containing billions of stars. Though new galaxies are being discovered every day, the latest estimates are at about 125 billion . . . and counting. When one considers that each galaxy contains billions of stars and that these stars could have planets revolving around them, it’s not hard to understand why some people believe that life must exist elsewhere in the universe.

Thus, using elaborate and sensitive radio telescopes, people are engaged in a search for extraterrestrial life. Given the size of the universe and the number of stars scattered through it, surely we’re not alone.

As Christians, though, we don’t need radio telescopes to learn about the existence of life beyond our earthly borders. Through the Bible (and the Spirit of Prophecy) we know not only that other beings exist but that they’re interested in what’s happening here, on earth. In fact, the entire universe is involved in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, a struggle with implications that go far beyond our little planet.

This week we’ll go where the greatest telescopes can’t: into the heart of the great moral issues facing not only humanity but all of God’s creation.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 1.*

“When the Morning Stars Sang”

Scripture mentions inhabitants from other worlds; that is, the existence of intelligent entities, not of earthly origin, is attested to all through the Bible. In the first chapter of Genesis, in which God Himself creates the world and in which He utters the famous words, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (*Gen. 1:26, NIV*), we’re shown immediately not only the existence of something else other than us, we’re shown it predating us, prior to us. We are, relatively speaking, latecomers.

And though, of course, we know that the Godhead had to precede us in order to create us, the Bible talks about other cosmic entities, as well.

Read the following texts (*Job 1:6; 38:7, 8; Dan. 9:21; Acts 12:7; 1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; Heb. 13:2*). **What do they tell us about these nonhuman entities?**

As said yesterday, while scientists are busy trying to find out whether other life even exists elsewhere, the Bible shows not only that it does but that it’s involved with us here on earth, sometimes in a rather intimate way. Some of the above texts show these beings interacting with humans, rescuing them, giving them knowledge, etc. These texts reveal just a small sampling of the intense interaction between humans and these nonhuman beings from another part of the creation. That we can’t always see them means nothing, because we know that all sorts of things exist that we can’t see.

The crucial points in all this are simple and yet, at the same time, deep. First, we are not alone in the universe; other intelligent beings exist. Second, these beings are not isolated from us; instead, some, at least, are involved with humans here.

Thus, Scripture clearly paints a picture of reality not generally accepted by modern thinking: the existence of supernatural beings who are, indeed, closely tied with humanity.

What are some of your favorite angel stories from the Bible? If you’ve had some personal encounters with angels, be prepared to share your story with the class. What kind of comfort does the reality of angels give you?

Key Text: *1 Corinthians 4:9*

Teachers Aims:

1. To affirm a belief in the existence of populated worlds beyond our own.
2. To consider the intervention of angels in the affairs of humankind.
3. To ponder the implications of the great controversy on individual salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Forgiveness Upon Confession (*Ps. 51:1-4*)

- A. Sin brings against us a justified condemnation from God.
- B. Sin is to be confessed to obtain God's forgiveness.
- C. Only God is able to wash away our sins and to clothe us with righteousness.

II. Michael's Angels Versus the Dragon's Angels (*Rev. 12:7-13*)

- A. The great controversy goes beyond earthly borders.
- B. The dragon works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to ensnare the human race in sin.
- C. Victory over the dragon is won only through accepting Christ's atoning sacrifice.

III. Angels' Ministration (*Judg. 13:21, Job 1:6, Acts 12:7*)

- A. Angels minister to humankind on earth.
- B. Both God's and Satan's angels have direct bearing on humankind (*Gen. 19:15, 16; Rev. 12:7*).

Summary: The great controversy, with its transcendent features, is a great mirror through which we see reflections of God's love for humankind. Christ perfected this on the cross of Calvary, where He shattered the last shackles of death. Through the ministration of His Holy Spirit and His angels, Jesus helps us to overcome death and to triumph over Satan in this great conflict. Our destiny is, therefore, shaped by the choices we make regarding the two opposing forces in the battle zone.

COMMENTARY

A question that looms large as we meditate upon life is: Are we alone in this universe? The possibility of intelligent life elsewhere has preoccupied humans through the ages. Scientists search the cosmos for evidence of either current or past intelligent life, while mystics profess to leap from meditation to fellowship with unseen beings. The Bible, however, clearly teaches that there are intelligent beings in the universe: some hostile and some friendly, but all intensely interested in our history and destiny. Throughout this

The Devil's Wrath

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (*Rev. 12:7-9; see also vs. 10-13*).

As we saw yesterday, the Bible is clear on the existence of extra-terrestrial life. As we know, though, not all of this life is friendly toward us. On the contrary.

Based on Revelation 12:7-13, answer the following questions:

- 1** Where does the strife begin?

- 2** Where does this battle wind up being fought?

- 3** What are the three specific things the devil is depicted as doing against us?

- 4** The devil is angry because he has “but a short time” (*vs. 12*). What does that mean? *See Matt. 25:41*.

- 5** How do God’s people overcome the attacks of the enemy?

These texts reveal the background and reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Though begun in heaven, the battle is now unfolding here on earth. What’s more, these texts show that we are involved in this battle, in which the devil, unable to prevail against Michael and His angels in heaven (*Rev. 12:8*), is now waging war on us here.

In what ways do you experience the reality of this great controversy every day? How does your understanding of the reality of this controversy help you cope with personal trials?

quarter we will study human life in a cosmic, historic, and divine perspective. This week, we focus on the cosmic interest in our creation, redemption, and destiny.

I. Cosmic Interest in Creation

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*). Into this perfect home of goodness and beauty, God placed humans made “in his own image” (*Gen. 1:27*). The birth of the human race caused two reactions: (1) Inhabitants of heaven and other unfallen worlds rejoiced at the inclusive nature of God’s love, which motivated Him to create Adam and Eve and place them on this earth as part of His extended family (*Job 38:7*); (2) Satan and his angels sought to make the earth their battleground against God and His law. If they could not prevail in heaven, they would prevail on earth. Their first recruits in this war were Adam and Eve. If Satan could have them, he could directly challenge God’s justice and love.

God’s justice demanded that Adam and Eve, as sinners, should die. Satan maintained that God could not be just and save sinners—an accusation that was of utmost interest to the entire universe (*1 Pet. 1:12*).

“This world is but an atom in the vast dominions over which God presides, yet this little fallen world—the one lost sheep—is more precious in His sight than are the ninety and nine that went not astray from the fold.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 190.

II. Cosmic Interest in Redemption

With Adam and Eve’s fall, all humanity fell victim to sin (*Rom. 3:23*), and Satan made this world a battleground for the great controversy between Christ and himself. From that point on, the forces of sin and the power of righteousness have struggled to win the hearts and minds of humans. Satan makes every effort to get every person—especially with those who wish to follow God—to deny their Creator and to view His commandments as harsh and arbitrary. But Christ Himself entered the conflict by becoming a human, living in perfect obedience as a human, and dying for the sins of the world, thus making Redemption possible to all who believe in Him. We must choose between Satan’s perpetual deception and Christ’s eternal love and redemption.

Our struggle and victory are the objects of interest to the angels and unfallen worlds. “The whole universe is watching with inexpressible interest the closing scenes of the great controversy between good and evil. The people of God are nearing the borders of the eternal world; what can be of more importance to them than that they be loyal to the God of heaven?”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 148.

“The Accuser of Our Brethren”

Yesterday we looked at the foundations of the great controversy between Christ and Satan and how we, as human beings, are involved. We saw, too, that among the things that Satan does against us, he is also “the accuser of our brethren . . . which accused them before our God day and night” (*Rev. 12:10*).

Though the text doesn’t say just what it was Satan accused the brethren of doing, given what we know about the condition of humanity, what’s the logical answer? What texts can you find to back up your answer? See, for example, *Rom. 3:10-19*.

Whatever else is going on in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, we, as human beings, are in the middle of it. Satan, obviously, in his attack on God is attacking us, as well. This idea is brought out in the book of Genesis, where the serpent, Satan (*Rev. 12:9*), cast out of heaven to earth, brought about the fall of our earthly parents (*Gen. 3:1-7*), which, in turn, led to the fall of the whole human race, along with all its horrible consequences (*Rom. 5:12*). It’s clear, too, that Satan is now taking advantage of what happened to us, and among the things he does is to accuse us regarding our sins and fallen condition. After all, if we were perfect, what would Satan have to accuse us of? It’s because we’re flawed that he has so much to say against us.

Read Zechariah 3:1-4. The Hebrew verb translated in verse 1 as “resist” or “oppose” or “accuse” (in the context of what Satan is saying directly to Joshua) comes from the same root word for “Satan.” What is going on here, and how does this fit in with what we understand about the great controversy?

Though we can see here in Zechariah the work of Satan against us, we also see the work of God for us. What hope and promise can you find from these verses that God is working in our behalf, even though we are sinners?

III. Cosmic Interest in Human Destiny

The Cross defines human destiny, because it is the only means by which reconciliation with God is ensured (*2 Cor: 5:19*). Our redemption or destruction depends on our acceptance or rejection of what God has accomplished on the cross. Jesus' death thus has universal significance. On the cross, He defeated Satan and his claim to this world. He also established the justness and the holiness of God's law, while paying the wages of sin we were meant to

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Psalm 51:1-4; Zechariah 3:1-4; Romans 3:25, 26; Revelation 12:7-13*

- 1 The Bible teaches that humankind is not the result of some random cosmic accident. It is the result of a deliberate creative act by a loving, personal God. As you reflect on the Creation story (Genesis 1 and 2), which part of it reveals the characteristics of God that you admire most? How do those characteristics reveal themselves in your everyday life?
- 2 The Bible also teaches that because of sin humankind has become embroiled in a titanic struggle between good and evil. Spend a few moments cataloging some of the results of evil that we have to live with. Then spend a few moments reflecting on how God provides the antidote for every inconvenience caused by being born on a sinful planet.
- 3 Just as we did not ask to be born, so we did not ask to be involved in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan; yet, here we are. Think of a word or phrase that describes how you feel about being drafted into this cosmic struggle. Think of a Bible text or saying that reflects your personal philosophy in this struggle.
- 4 In symbolic language, Zechariah 3:1-4 describes the transaction that takes place when we place ourselves under the protection of the Lord. What is represented by the "filthy clothes" (*vs. 3, NIV*)? The "rich garments" (*vs. 4, NIV*)? What religious word or phrase could be used to describe God's action on behalf of His people?
- 5 While we are involved in the struggle between good and evil, God's sovereignty will ensure His kingdom's ultimate triumph. How can we help to vindicate God's character while remembering that the struggle is more about God than about us?

“The Lord Rebuke Thee, O Satan”

As we saw yesterday, though Satan accused Joshua, who had been dressed in filthy garments, it was Satan—not Joshua—who had been rebuked. How could that be? It’s only because of the plan of salvation, in which Christ defeats Satan and his accusations. The language of Zechariah itself, with filthy garments and change of garments, is gospel language; that is, it’s pointing to the plan of salvation and what Christ does for His fallen people.

Read the following texts (*Isa. 61:10; Matt. 22:11, 12; Rev. 3:18*). **How do they help us understand the gospel imagery in Zechariah 3?**

Though fallen from heaven, Satan had brought the great controversy to the earth. Through the fall of Adam and Eve, Satan brought all humanity into the fray; through the plan of salvation, not only does the Lord save us from the final consequences of that fall; He also defeats Satan in the whole great controversy.

Read Hebrews 2:14. **How does it help us understand the inseparable link between what Christ did here on earth and the ultimate defeat of Satan?**

Though this text doesn’t specify why, the death of Jesus is the means through which, ultimately, Satan (and thus his rebellion) will be defeated. There are bigger issues in the plan of salvation than just saving us from sin. We need to remember—sin didn’t begin here; it began somewhere else in the universe (*Isa. 14:12, Ezek. 28:15, Rev. 12:7*). Though we are in the midst of the great controversy, the issues in it go beyond us. They are, literally, universal.

What are some local issues in your community that are small parts of much grander themes? How do these relationships (that is, local issues contrasted against the grander themes behind them) help you understand how the issues in the great controversy could go beyond our personal salvation?

pay (*Rom. 6:8-11*). Thus, He showed that God’s love is as real and as deep as His justice.

“The great controversy begun in heaven was to be decided in the very world, on the very same field, that Satan claimed as his.

“It was the marvel of all the universe that Christ should humble Himself to save fallen man. . . . And as Christ in His expiring agony upon the cross cried out, ‘It is finished’ (*John 19:30*), a shout of triumph rang through every world, and through heaven itself.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 69, 70.

This heavenly chorus of joy in which all the unfallen creation extolled the character of God will end when Christ comes the second time and both the redeemed and the heavenly hosts will join in the cosmic chorus of victory found in *Revelation 5:12*.

Thus, the Bible begins with the story of Creation and the tragedy

Witnessing

Even for people who do not consider themselves *religious*, the notion that there is something beyond this world, something “up there” awaiting discovery, fuels the imaginations of even hardened atheists. Grown men wept at the connection, like the alien character in the movie *E.T.* when it was able to “phone home.” Millions of fans lined up for the first *X Files* movie, firmly believing that the real story is “out there.”

Those dreams of life beyond the stars not only fuel science fiction on the printed page and the cinema screen; they also have launched dozens, if not hundreds, of aerospace careers. Astronauts, the engineers behind them, and the politicians who fund their work all have caught the “space bug,” hoping, secretly perhaps, that the moon and other planets will offer more than just rocks as souvenirs. The *Pioneer 10* space probe, launched in 1972, bears a gold plaque with identifying information that might tell E.T.’s present-day “cousins” just who sent the object into the galaxies.

Ironically, the Bible itself offers—in this “theater of the universe” scenario that frames the great controversy between Christ and Satan—a sense of a life beyond our world that far surpasses anything Hollywood has shown so far. Instead of a cute little space creature who stumbles upon us, a whole universe of beings could well be watching how that conflict plays out right here on earth. How we participate in this drama is being watched, and closely.

Do you know anyone whose idea of a good time is a marathon of *Star Trek* movies? Why not introduce them to a real tale of life beyond our world—and to where this drama will lead all of humanity?

The “Justification” of God

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (*Rom. 3:25, 26, NIV*).

If you read carefully the above verses, they reveal the idea that whatever else Christ accomplished at the Cross, it was also a demonstration of God’s justice. “He did this to demonstrate his justice,” the text says.

This leads to a fancy theological term important for Adventists to understand. The term is *theodicy*, and it means, basically, “the justification of God.” It’s not justification in the sense that humans are justified (pardoned from sin) but justification in the sense of vindication. *Theodicy is the vindication of God’s goodness and justice, despite the existence of evil.* Here is the foundation of the great controversy: God’s goodness and His justice will be revealed not just before human beings but before all the onlooking universe.

Besides the texts for today, how do these additional texts bring out the idea of theodicy? *Ps. 51:1-4; Rom. 3:4; Eph. 3:10; Rev. 19:1, 2.*

The whole idea of the great controversy and the ultimate vindication of God and His ways forms a wonderful background to the plan of salvation. Though it doesn’t answer everything, it helps form a template in which many issues, such as (1) Why did Jesus have to die? (2) Why are we still here so long after the Cross? (3) Why does evil still exist? can be answered. The concept of theodicy, too, as we’ll see later, helps us understand the background for the pre-Advent judgment; that is, it helps us understand why God even has the judgment.

In short, we are not alone in the universe; other beings exist, and it’s before these other “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (*Eph. 3:10*) that issues in the great controversy will be resolved in a way so that, as the psalmist said of God: “You are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (*Ps. 51:4, NIV*).

of sin and ends with the restoration of all that was lost. The entire process from paradise lost to paradise regained is of intense interest to the universe; and the human race has become a lesson book on God's love and justice to all created beings.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: One of God's faithful missionaries, Allen Gardiner, experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the Savior. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me." In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God."—Allen Gardiner, "God, goodness of," eSermons, http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/god_goodness_of.htm (accessed February 22, 2005).

Thought Questions:

- ❶ The struggle between God and Satan is being observed by other created beings of the universe. How is there victory in the death of someone like Gardiner? How do you think the universe views our difficulties in accepting the casualties of the great controversy?
- ❷ War, in general, creates a sense of unity, patriotism, and vigilance in people. Yet, Seventh-day Adventist Christians living at the height of the war between God and Satan are lukewarm Laodiceans. Explain why. When we are faced with situations similar to Gardiner's, our attitude is often Why me? What attitude adjustments need to be made individually and corporately?

Application Questions:

- ❶ God has recruited you as His soldier. What do you think are the basic requirements He expects from you? How can a thorough knowledge of the great controversy better equip you to fight the good fight?
- ❷ Thursday's lesson says that theodicy is the vindication of God's goodness and justice, despite the existence of evil. Here is the foundation of the great controversy: God's goodness and His justice will be revealed not just before human beings but before all the onlooking universe. How can you live your life in a way that vindicates God's goodness in this sinful world?

Further Study: “The Great Controversy” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 12), pp. 980–1009; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 498, 499; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 22, 116; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69.

“But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.’ John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Talk about the ministry of angels in your own experience.
- 2 For many people, the idea of a literal battle between unseen forces going on around us is a bit hard to believe. What other examples, though, are there of unseen realities around us (e.g., germs, radio waves)? How could you use some of these to help someone who is skeptical about the reality of the great controversy?
- 3 As a class, talk about the idea of *theodicy*, using also the Ellen White quote above. Why is the idea so important? How does it help us answer questions such as, Why are we still here so long after the Cross?
- 4 Does anyone in the class know someone who’s taking a bad beating in the great controversy right now? If so, what can you do as a group to bring that person some comfort and hope?