

The Great Controversy (War): The Foundation (Beginning)



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12:1–17; Isaiah 14:4–21; Ezekiel 28:12–19; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 1:20–28; John 16: 2.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I [God] will put hatred between you [Satan] and the woman [church]. Your children and her children will be enemies. Her son [Jesus] will crush your head. And you will crush his heel’ ” (Genesis 3:15, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The great controversy (war) theme is found throughout all basic Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. It helps to hold them together.

“NECESSITY [NEED] IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION” IS AN OLD, WISE SAYING. Here, the word *mother* means “the source,” “the beginning,” or “the foundation.” This saying means that a need, or necessity, for something is what makes people do something. For example, the need for cleaner air makes people search for energy sources other than fossil fuels.

Just as with physical inventions, a belief system also needs to be explained by a basis (foundation) or a principle (important rule). This is why Seventh-day Adventists have developed a list of 28 fundamental beliefs. These beliefs owe their beginning to the “great controversy.” Each of the 28 fundamentals deals with a special part of this controversy. This week we will study the beliefs against the background of the theme of the great controversy. We will look at some of the key points with this theme in mind.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 30

THE CONTROVERSY¹ AND ITS PLAYERS (Revelation 12:1–7)

All throughout human history, people have sensed that humankind is in some kind of battle. It is a war between opposing armies. The poet T. S. Eliot wrote, “In all of my years, one thing does not change. / No matter how you try to cover it up, this thing does not change. / It is the continuing struggle between Good and Evil.”—Adapted from T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952), page 98. That understanding is very common. But people have very different ideas about why we are having this war. Who is involved? What is important about the war? And how is it going to end? As Seventh-day Adventists, however, we have a special understanding about the part of this war that is taking place in heaven. This understanding comes from the Bible, which gives us a clear picture of “the great controversy [war] between Christ and Satan.”

Study Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12:1–17. Who are the key (important) players in the controversy? Symbols (word-pictures) are sometimes used to describe the players. But why do we believe that the powers in the war are real? What would happen to our whole belief system if we were to make

excuses for the great controversy between Christ and Satan and our part in it?

It is not unusual for people to use words such as *the devil*, *angels*, or even *God* when they mean something very different from the real meaning of those words. For example, there are some who use the word *God* in books or in conversation. But they have no interest in whether or not God really lives.

No matter what symbols are used to describe devils and good angels, the Bible teaches that devils and angels are involved in a real war. That is how we as Seventh-day Adventists understand them. Most of the doctrines studied this quarter will not make sense if we do not accept that these players in the controversy are real. This often makes our beliefs different from the popular way of thinking.

In fact, during the last two hundred years, many worldly thinkers have tried to remove God from human thought. With the success of science, more and more people in the world wish to use science to solve issues (problems). Angels and demons do not fit well into the scientific way of thinking. So the modern world is witnessing a slow death of belief in God and in things of heaven.

How strongly is your society influenced by science and worldly thinking? How much have you been influenced by it? We must guard against what parts of this worldview?

1. controversy—war between Christ and Satan.

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MONDAY—OCTOBER 1

LUCIFER'S² FALL (1 Timothy 3:6)

The Bible does not clearly tell us the issues (problems) that are involved in the controversy between God and Satan. But we can get some information about this controversy from some verses, such as Isaiah 14:4–21 and Ezekiel 28:12–19. In their original settings, these verses speak of the pagan (idol-worshiping) kings of Tyre and Babylon. But, when read carefully, the verses give details that go beyond these Near Eastern kings in Bible times. These verses are really about the beginning, position, and fall of Satan.



God's law is a perfect example of His character.

In 1 Timothy 3:6 Paul warns against making a new believer a church officer. He explains that such an act might cause the person to become proud “and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (NIV). How does Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 3:6 help us to under-

stand Isaiah 14:4–21 and Ezekiel 28:12–19? In what way do these three groups of verses together help us to understand some issues in the controversy?

At least three issues are raised in the verses named above: pride, self-government, and independence. The Old Testament shows Satan as a created, dependent person who wants to be self-governing and independent. But independence is always independence from something or somebody. First John 3:8 says that “the devil has sinned from the beginning” (NKJV). First John 3:4 defines “sin” as lawbreaking. This verse shows that Satan's sin is his desire to be freed from the control of God and His laws. So, by refusing to obey God's law, Satan shows that he wants to live under a different set of rules. This rebellion (lawbreaking) might also cause people to think that the system of laws in heaven is not perfect and that something is really wrong with it. But God's law is a perfect example of God's character (who God is). A fault in the law would mean a fault in God's character. So Satan's rebellion was really a rebellion against God Himself.

Pride, self-government, independence—what do these words make you think of? In what ways are we in danger of falling into the traps of pride, self-government, and independence? Under the right conditions, what is wrong with any of these ideas?

2. Lucifer—Satan's name before he was cast out of heaven. Lucifer was the “covering cherub [angel]” (Ezekiel 28:16) before his fall.

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Satan's rebellion was really a rebellion against God Himself.

help us to understand some of the issues in the great controversy? How is the plan of salvation an important part of the controversy?

Compare Genesis 4:4 with Hebrews 11:4. Compare Genesis 12:3, 22:18 with Galatians 3:16. Compare Exodus 25:9 with Hebrews 8:2. Compare Isaiah 53:6 with Romans 5:8. Read Matthew 16:18; Matthew 18:16–20; and Hebrews 8:1, 2.

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 2

GOD'S WEAPON (Genesis 3:15)

In what way is the great controversy described in Genesis 3:15?

The language of Genesis 3:15 gives us a hint of God's rules of war in this battle. We can know that the war between the serpent (Satan) and the woman had just begun. And it would continue to be fought between the followers or "seed" of the woman and the followers or "seed" of the serpent. Later on, the war would end in a life-and-death struggle between Satan and the woman's male child, Jesus of Nazareth. God's weapon of choice was Jesus, who would come to fight for the woman. He would suffer "bruises," but finally strike a deadly blow to the serpent. The weapon of choice was an act of sacrifice by Jesus. It was an act of selfless love.

How do the following verses



Jesus was God's weapon of choice to fight Satan.

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 3

SATAN'S FIGHT (Romans 1:20–28)

If you read yesterday's daily study carefully, you would have seen how God showed Himself and His truth during the great controversy. God worked through (1) Bible leaders of long ago and the Israelite sanctuary (house of God) services, (2) through Christ's cleansing sacrifice, (3) through the church, and (4) through Christ's

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own work as High Priest in heaven.

But Satan works tirelessly (without tiring) to try to destroy the Lord's plans. So much of the great controversy has been, and still is, fought over these very issues.

For example, the system of sacrifice in Israel's sanctuary service was designed by God to remind people of God as Creator and to keep the hope of salvation alive.

How did Satan try to destroy the truth about the plan of salvation, as shown in the system of sacrifices? Read Romans 1:20–28 and Deuteronomy 32:17, 18.

Of course, Christ's coming as Man, His ministry on earth, and His death on the cross were the important parts of how God chose to defeat Satan in the great controversy. The death of Christ prevented Satan from being successful even though Satan had worked tirelessly against Christ.

What do Matthew 2:1–18; Matthew 4:1–11; Matthew 16:21–23; and Matthew 27:39–42 tell us about the ways in which Satan worked against Jesus?

After His death and return to life, Christ established His church on earth to preach to lost people about the good news of salvation. From the beginning of the church, Satan has worked hard to weaken and destroy it. The following verses show some of Satan's tactics (tricks and moves) against the church. Read Acts 5:17, 18;

Acts 7:54–60; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; and Revelation 12:13–17.

Meanwhile, the book of Hebrews tells of a real sanctuary (house of God) in heaven that Christ entered after He went there (Hebrews 4:14–16; Hebrews 9:24). Jesus is working there even now as High Priest for the sake of lost people (Hebrews 7:27). In Daniel 8:11–14, we can see Satan's actions against Christ's priestly ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary. Satan still is trying hard to destroy that ministry.

It is one thing to read 1 Peter 5:8, 9 and really understand its warning. But it is another thing to really live out that warning in our daily lives. How do we fight against the devil? How often during a single day do you think of Satan's work against you?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 4

THE FUTURE END (Joshua 24:15)

“ ‘But suppose you don't [do not] want to serve him [the Lord]. Then choose for yourselves right now whom you will serve. You can choose the gods your people served east of the Euphrates River. Or you can choose the gods the Amorites serve. After all, you are living in their land. But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD' ” (Joshua 24:15, NIV). How

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does Joshua 24:15 describe the most basic issue in the great controversy?

Bible prophecy (special messages from God) helps us to understand the closing scenes of the war between God and Satan. For a period of 1,260 years (Daniel 7:25; Daniel 12:7; Revelation 11:2; Revelation 12:14; Revelation 13:5), Satan continuously attacked God's people. In the last challenge, described in Revelation 12 and 13, Satan will use two earthly powers to do his work: a leopard-like beast (Revelation 13:1–10) and a two-horned beast (Revelation 13:11–17). And both beasts will use all the tactics (tricks and moves) of Satan that were discussed in yesterday's daily study.

Revelation 14 describes the plan that God will use to bring this struggle to an end. What does Revelation 14:6–13 tell us about the ways in which some of the issues (problems) in the great controversy are going to be made clear?

From God's viewpoint, a clear announcement of the three angels' messages is necessary before the war can come to a close. This is because people need to be well informed in order to make up their minds about the issues.

In the final battle, there will be people who stand loyal to God. In Revelation 14 they are symbolized (shown) by the number 144,000 (verse 3). The number may symbolize a great many

people from all the nations of the earth (Revelation 7:4). But they remain obedient to the commandments of God in a time of great trouble. They are very faithful to the worship of their Creator God. They receive acceptance from God and are victorious with Him. Meanwhile, the lost are destroyed in the last harvest (Revelation 14:14–20). The point is that one day this great controversy will be over.

One thing about the great controversy: everyone must choose a side—God's or Satan's. You are either on one side or on the other. Anyone can claim to be on the Lord's side. (Read John 16:2.) But how do you know, for sure, that you really are on the Lord's side? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



Satan uses two earthly powers to do his work: a leopard-like beast and a two-horned beast.

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 5

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Frank B. Holbrook, "The Great Controversy," pages 969–1008, in Raoul Dederen (editor), *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.

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“The Bible explains itself. Verse is to be compared with verse. The student should learn to understand the word as a whole and also understand the relationship of its parts. The student should study (1) the Bible’s main theme, (2) God’s original purpose for the world, (3) the rise of the great controversy, and (4) the work of salvation. He or she should understand that two armies [Christ’s and Satan’s] are fighting to win the war. He or she should learn of the work of both armies through the records of history and prophecy to the great end. The student should understand how this controversy enters into every part of human experience. The student should understand how in every act of life he or she shows loyalty to the one or the other of the two enemies. The student also should realize which side he or she will find himself or herself on at the end of this war.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 190.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 In the passage quoted in Friday’s additional study from the book *Education*, Ellen G. White writes that the great controversy enters into every part of human life. How true has this been in your own life? Has your understanding of the theme of the great controversy been a source of (place to go for) strength or frustration for you in the world of sin and suffering?
- 2 Some write and discuss about a “delay” in the second coming of Christ. With so much injustice and suffering in the world, it seems that every additional day of life on earth is one too many. Ask class members to share how the theme of the great controversy helps them to cope with (deal with) this “delay.”
- 3 How can we be sure about what will happen at the end of the war between good and evil? What gives you hope that evil will be overcome in the end? What reasons do we have for believing that? How, for example, does the prophecy of Daniel 2 help to give us hope for the final victory?
- 4 In class, go over your responses to the last question on Thursday. The answer is very true because of our understanding of just who the attackers will be in the last days. How, then, can we be sure we will be on the right side?