

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
April | May | June 2024

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY



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Contents

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | The War Behind All Wars—<i>March 30–April 5</i> | 5 |
| 2 | The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?—<i>April 6–12</i> | 18 |
| 3 | Light Shines in the Darkness—<i>April 13–19</i> | 31 |
| 4 | Standing for the Truth—<i>April 20–26</i> | 44 |
| 5 | Faith Against All Odds—<i>April 27–May 3</i> | 57 |
| 6 | The Two Witnesses—<i>May 4–10</i> | 72 |
| 7 | Motivated by Hope—<i>May 11–17</i> | 85 |
| 8 | Light From the Sanctuary—<i>May 18–24</i> | 98 |
| 9 | The Foundation of God’s Government—<i>May 25–31</i> | 111 |
| 10 | Spiritualism Exposed—<i>June 1–7</i> | 124 |
| 11 | The Impending Conflict—<i>June 8–14</i> | 137 |
| 12 | Earth’s Closing Events—<i>June 15–21</i> | 150 |
| 13 | The Triumph of God’s Love—<i>June 22–28</i> | 163 |

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The Great Controversy



If asked, “What central theme runs through all the Bible?” how would you respond? *Jesus? The plan of salvation? The Cross?* Yes to all three, of course! But these three important topics unfold against another all-encompassing theme: the great controversy. This theme pervades the Bible, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation.

The great controversy began in heaven with Lucifer’s rebellion against God. At the heart of this cosmic conflict is the issue of God’s love. Is He fully loving? Does He have the best interests of His creatures in view? Or is He an authoritative dictator desiring only what is in His own self-interest?

This quarter’s lessons trace world history from God’s viewpoint, as prophecy reveals it, from the time of Christ down through the centuries to our day and beyond. God’s very nature is love, and therefore, all His acts are loving, though this fact may not always be evident to finite human beings or even angels. But God’s love is progressively revealed as the great controversy unfolds. We see its height and depth most clearly through the Cross. At Calvary, God’s love was displayed before the entire universe, when Christ poured out His life to redeem humanity, and Satan’s ultimate defeat was assured.

Yet, the battle rages on. Satan tried to destroy Jesus on the cross and, through the centuries, we see him trying to destroy God’s people. Although Satan has viciously persecuted Christ’s church and slaughtered millions, God has always been present with His people and will never leave them.

This quarter will trace the major developments in the great controversy, beginning with the rebellion in heaven. We will explore the central issues of the conflict between Christ and Satan. We will see the indomitable courage of the Waldenses despite fierce persecution, and the determination of the Reformers to follow Bible truth even in the face of torture, chains, the stake, and martyrdom.

Commenting on the faith of these spiritual giants, Ellen G. White states, “The Bible was their authority, and by its teaching they tested all doctrines and all claims. Faith in God and His word sustained these holy men as they yielded up their lives at the stake.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 249.

The Reformation kindled a torch of truth that still burns brightly. The Reformers’ bedrock faith in Scripture and their steadfast assurance of salvation by grace through faith paved the way for the rise of the Advent movement, championed by William Miller and a host of others around the world.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was raised up by God to build on the foundation laid by the Reformers in order to restore biblical truths that had been lost sight of through the centuries. Central to its mission is proclaiming the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12, God’s final warning to a world soon to come to an end.

This proclamation arouses the wrath of Satan, pictured as a dragon by the apostle John: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Rev. 12:17*). We will also study the final events in the great controversy, including the triumph of God’s love over all the principalities and powers of hell, which ushers in the creation of new heavens and a new earth.

Though the basis of this quarter’s lessons is the Bible, we will use the book *The Great Controversy*, by Ellen G. White, as our thematic outline in studying this tremendous topic. The chapters on which each lesson is based are noted to facilitate its use as a companion book for further study and sharing that we all might more fully “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (*Eph. 3:19, NKJV*).

A native of Connecticut, U.S.A., Mark Finley, an internationally known evangelist, was a vice president at the General Conference from 2005 to 2010. After retiring from full-time employment, he became an assistant to the president of the General Conference. Pastor Finley and his wife, Ernestine, have three children and five grandchildren.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

The War Behind All Wars



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:7–9, Ezek. 28:12–15, Isa. 14:12–14, Gen. 3:15, John 17:24–26.*

Memory Text: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer” (*Revelation 12:7, 8, NKJV*).

If God is so good, why is the world so bad? How can a God of love allow so much evil to exist? Why do bad things happen to good people? In this week's lesson, we will explore the age-long conflict between good and evil. Beginning with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, we will examine the origin of evil and God's long-suffering in dealing with the sin problem.

God is a God of incredible love. His very nature is love (*1 John 4:7, 8*). All of His actions are loving (*Jer. 31:3*). Love can never be forced, coerced, or legislated. Ellen G. White states it well when she writes, “Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. To deny the power of choice is to destroy the ability to love, and to destroy the ability to love is to eradicate the possibility of being truly happy. God wins our allegiance by His love. He is dealing with the great controversy between good and evil in such a way that sin will never arise in the universe again. God's purpose is to demonstrate before the entire universe that He has always acted in the best interests of His creatures. Looking at the world through the lens of God's love, in the light of the great controversy between good and evil, reassures each of us that right will triumph over wrong and will do so forever.

* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy*, chapters 29–30, to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.

War in Heaven

Read Revelation 12:7–9. What does this passage reveal about the freedom existing in heaven and the origin of evil? When Lucifer rebelled, in what ways could God have responded?

These verses describe a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Satan and his angels warred against Christ and, eventually, were cast out of heaven. It seems extremely strange that war would break out in such a perfect place as heaven. Why did it happen? Did a loving God create a demonic angel who initiated this war? Was there some fatal flaw in this angel that led him to rebel? The Bible clearly explains the origin of evil. It draws the curtain aside in this conflict between good and evil.

Compare Ezekiel 28:12–15 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What went on in the mind of this angelic being called Lucifer that led to his rebellion?

God did not create a devil. He created a being of dazzling brightness named Lucifer. This angelic being was created perfect. Included in his perfection was freedom of choice—a fundamental principle of God’s government, which runs by love, not coercion. Sin originated with Lucifer in heaven itself. There is no logical explanation why this perfect angel should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator.

Lucifer, a created being, desired the worship that belonged only to the Creator. He attempted to usurp God’s throne by questioning God’s authority. His rebellion led to open warfare in heaven.

Although God bore long with Lucifer, He could not allow him to spoil heaven with his rebellion. “The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness, and the justice of the Creator, and the sacred, unchanging nature of His law. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 494, 495.

What lessons can you draw about God’s character in His dealing with evil?

Lucifer Deceives; Christ Prevails

There is no logical explanation for why Lucifer, this perfect angel, should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator. Satan's pride ripened into open rebellion. He accused God of being unjust and unfair. He infected the angels with his doubts and accusations.

Read Revelation 12:4. What does this passage reveal about Satan's ability to deceive? How many of the angels fell for his lies about God?

When war broke out in heaven, the angels had to decide—would they follow Jesus or Lucifer? What was the nature of this war in heaven? Was it a physical war, or a war of ideas, or both? We don't know the details, but the conflict was physical enough that Satan and his angels eventually were "cast out," and a place was not "found for them in heaven any longer" (*Rev. 12:8, 9, NKJV*). This war obviously includes some kind of physical element.

One thing is certain about the war in heaven. Every angel had to decide for or against Christ. Whom would they follow? Whose voice would they listen to? The loyal angels chose to be obedient to Christ's loving commands, while one-third of the angels listened to the voice of Lucifer, disobeyed God, and lost heaven. We, too, in this critical time of earth's history, are called to decide for or against Christ. We, too, are to declare whose side we are on—Christ's or Satan's.

Read Genesis 2:15–17, Exodus 32:26, Joshua 24:15, 1 Kings 18:20, 21, and Revelation 22:17. What fundamental principle in the great controversy do these verses teach us?

When God created humanity, He embedded deep within our brains the ability to think, to reason, and to choose. The essence of our humanness is our ability to make moral choices. We are not mere robots. We were created in God's image, distinct from the animal creation, in our ability to make moral choices and live by eternal spiritual principles. After Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, and after the Fall, God has called His people to respond to His love and be obedient to His commands by choosing to serve Him.

What lessons can we learn from the battle in heaven that relates to our own personal battle with evil? If Satan was able to deceive these righteous, holy heavenly beings, what does this say about his evil attempts to deceive us?

Planet Earth Becomes Involved

When God created the earth, He created it perfect. The Bible says that He “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV*). There was no stain of sin or evil anywhere. But He gave Adam and Eve the same freedom of choice He had given to Lucifer. He didn’t want robots on earth any more than He wanted robots in heaven.

In fact, He went out of His way to make this freedom clear. He planted a tree in the Garden and called it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He made a point of telling Adam and Eve about it because He wanted to make sure they knew they had a choice.

Satan came to the tree, and as Eve lingered there, he told her: “ ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, 5, NKJV*). In other words, if you eat of this tree, you will enter a new sphere of existence. You will have excitement. You will have a thrill that you’ve never known before. Eve, God is keeping something from you. Here, take the forbidden fruit and eat it.

When Eve and later Adam made that choice, they opened a door that God wanted to keep forever closed. It was the doorway to sin—the doorway to suffering, heartache, sickness, and death.

Read Genesis 3:1–3 with Romans 3:23 and Romans 5:12. What do these texts have in common? Describe the ultimate results of sin that plague the entire human race.

At its very core, sin is rebellion against God. Sin separates us from God. Since God is the Source of life, separation from God leads to death. It also leads to worry, anxiety, sickness, and disease. The suffering in our world is ultimately the result of living on a sin-ravaged planet. This certainly does not mean that every time we suffer, we have sinned. It does mean that every one of us is affected by living on this planet.

Read Genesis 3:15; Leviticus 5:5, 6; and John 1:29. What promise did God give Adam and Eve in the Garden after they sinned that would give them hope in their despair? What service did God initiate in Eden that would point them forward through the centuries to the solution to the sin problem?

Love Finds a Way

Adam and Eve have sinned, and God has told them that they must leave their garden home. From now on, toil and suffering will be their lot. Will they have to suffer and finally die with no hope? Is death the end of everything?

It was at this point that God gave them the promise recorded in Genesis 3:15. Looking directly at Satan, the serpent, He said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (NKJV). They may not have fully understood at that moment exactly what this meant, but they knew they could hope again. In some way, through the “Seed of the woman,” their redemption would come.

The “Seed of the woman,” of course, is Jesus Christ (*Gal. 3:16*). At the cross, Satan bruised His heel. But Jesus’ victory is our guarantee that one day the serpent’s head will be crushed. The door of suffering and death that Adam and Eve opened will one day be closed.

Read Hebrews 2:9, Galatians 3:13, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do these verses tell us about the immensity of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross?

Do you ever wonder if God really loves you? Look at the Cross—look at the crown of thorns, look at the nails in His hands and feet. With every drop of blood that Jesus shed on Calvary, God is saying, “I love you. I do not want to be in heaven without you. Yes, you’ve sinned; you sold yourself into the hand of the enemy; yes, in and of yourself you are unworthy of eternal life. But I’ve paid the ransom to get you back.” When you look at the Cross, you never have to wonder again if you’re loved.

The Bible speaks of a Jesus who came to this world and experienced heartache, disappointment, and pain in common with all humanity. It reveals a Christ who faced the same temptations we face—a Christ who triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell both in His life and through His death on the cross—all for each one of us, personally.

Think about it: Jesus, the One who created the cosmos (*see John 1:3*), stepped down from heaven and not only came into this fallen world but suffered in it in ways none of us ever will (*see Isa. 53:1–5*). And He did it because He loved us—each of us. What a powerful reason to hope!

How did Christ answer Satan’s charges on the cross? In the light of the great controversy between good and evil, what did His death accomplish?

Our High Priest

What Jesus did for us on the cross enables Him also to intercede for us in heaven. Our resurrected Lord is our great High Priest, providing everything we need to be saved and to live in God's kingdom forever.

Read Hebrews 4:15, 16 and Hebrews 7:25. How do these verses give us assurance in a world of temptation, suffering, disease, and death?

The text says that He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (*Heb. 4:15, NKJV*). And it adds, “Let us therefore come boldly”—that means confidently—“to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (*Heb. 4:16, NKJV*).

To state it very simply, Jesus presents us before the universe as clothed in His righteousness, saved by His death, and redeemed through His blood. Everything we should have been, He was. In Christ there is no condemnation for the sins of our past. In Christ our guilt is gone, and through His mighty intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. The chains that bind us are loosed, and we are free.

Read John 17:24–26. What is Christ's longing desire in the great controversy between good and evil?

“When the great sacrifice had been consummated, Christ ascended on high, refusing the adoration of angels until He had presented the request: ‘I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.’ John 17:24. Then with inexpressible love and power came forth the answer from the Father's throne: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ Hebrews 1:6. Not a stain rested upon Jesus. His humiliation ended, His sacrifice completed, there was given unto Him a name that is above every name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 501, 502. Jesus wants more than anything else for us to be with Him in heaven. The desire of His heart, the reason for His death and intercession, is to save us. Do you have a special need in your life? Tell it to Jesus. Where there is sorrow, He brings comfort. Where there is fear, He brings peace. Where there is guilt, He brings forgiveness. Where there is weakness, He brings strength.

Why do you think Christ sacrificed Himself for us? What makes us so valuable to Him?

Further Thought: “In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 500, 501.

“The cross of Calvary, while it declares the law immutable, proclaims to the universe that the wages of sin is death. In the Saviour’s expiring cry, ‘It is finished,’ the death knell of Satan was rung. The great controversy which had been so long in progress was then decided, and the final eradication of evil was made certain. The Son of God passed through the portals of the tomb, that ‘through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’ Hebrews 2:14.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 503.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If God knew that Lucifer was going to rebel, why did He give him the power of choice in the first place? Or when Lucifer rebelled, why didn’t God just annihilate him immediately? What kind of reaction might the unfallen universe have had if God had immediately wiped Lucifer out? Why is the concept of the universe’s interest in the plan of salvation (*1 Pet. 1:12, Rev. 5:13, Rev. 16:7*) so important to understanding the great controversy?
- 2 What reason or reasons can you think of for Christ’s death on the cross? Was it only to reveal the character of God? Was it to pay the ransom price for sin? If so, to whom was the ransom paid? Share your thoughts and give biblical reasons for them.
- 3 When we use the term “the great controversy,” what do we mean? Discuss the various aspects of the great controversy and how this week’s lesson applies to your own life.
- 4 What Bible texts talk about the reality of the great controversy? (See, for instance, *Job 1, 2; Eph. 6:12.*)
- 5 How is the Seventh-day Adventist understanding unique among other Christian denominations? What is it in this great controversy theme that sets Adventists apart?

Volcano, Fires, and COVID-19

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Cuban missionary Misael Delgado Rodríguez faced a major challenge on his first Sabbath in the Canary Islands. Only five people came to worship.

Misael dove into mission outreach work, visiting former church members and others on La Palma island. A month later, he rejoiced with a first baptism. But then COVID-19 suspended outreach efforts, and his problems seemed to multiply. A fire broke out in the north of the island, leaving some members without homes. Then a fire broke out in the south. Then a volcano erupted for 85 days, leaving islanders grappling with earthquakes, toxic gas, and ashes. Two church families lost everything.

Amid the storms, something amazing happened. Faith blossomed. Three years after Misael's arrival, 45 people were regularly worshipping on Sabbath. In addition, seven people had been baptized, five were preparing for baptism, and 15 were taking Bible studies. What happened?

Misael said intercessory prayer was key. "We pray every day at 7 A.M., 2 P.M., and 9 P.M.," he said. "Each member prays for five people."

Each church department also embraced practical evangelism. One project, an initiative of the Spanish Union of Churches Conference, saw church members calling contacts over the phone and offering Ellen White's *Steps to Christ* and related Bible studies. Other projects included educational courses on the church's Facebook page aimed at the needs of families, young people, and little children; musical evangelism in which Adventist young people held mini-concerts on the street or while visiting the sick and needy; a program with ADRA in which members handed out cards that could be presented for food in supermarkets; health presentations; Bible studies; and the distribution of *The Desire of Ages* and other books. On holidays, such as Mother's Day, church members placed a special card inside each book.

The church also opened a discipleship school where laypeople could learn how to evangelize, and four small groups were meeting regularly in homes.

Friendship evangelism has proven very successful, Misael said. While the volcano was erupting, church members spent two months passing out masks and literature with health information related to volcanoes. "That way the church became well known," Misael said. Indeed, many of the 15 people taking Bible studies lost everything in the volcano, and they have acknowledged that the crisis led them to God, he said. "Otherwise, they would not have been interested in learning about God," he said.

Misael looks back at his experience in the Canary Islands with joy. "The beginning was very difficult," he said. "We have been through a lot. But the results are very satisfying. We have seen how God has blessed us."

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in the Canary Islands and around the world.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Revelation 12:7, 8*

Study Focus: *Rev. 12:7–9, Col. 1:16, Ezek. 28:12–15, Isa. 14:12–14, John 17:24, Gen. 3:15.*

Introduction: This week’s lesson introduces the topic of the cosmic conflict, or the great controversy, between Christ and Satan. We shall begin our study by examining both the origin of evil and God’s solution to humanity’s fall into sin.

Several aspects of the cosmic conflict merit our consideration. First, the great controversy is not perpetual; it originated in heaven when Lucifer, a created being, headed a band of rebel angels who challenged God, the eternal Creator and King of all beings. Thus, we can surmise that if evil and the devil had a beginning, they will certainly have an end.

Second, the cosmic conflict shows the radical incompatibility of good with evil. Neither party can coexist with, or tolerate, the other: each group yearns for the extinction of the other. When evil came into existence, it challenged the very idea of God’s right to exist and rule, notwithstanding the eternal nature of God.

Further, the great controversy eliminates any form of philosophical or religious dualism in which both evil and good are coeternal, coequal, and necessary. The biblical worldview clearly excludes the necessity of evil. We do not need evil in order to know and appreciate what is good. Nor is evil necessary to increase good.

Third, the fact that evil and the great controversy originated in heaven arouses in the minds of rational and free moral agencies the notion that the conflict is primarily spiritual in nature and must, therefore, have a spiritual solution. While evil arose without any contribution from God (in fact, evil rose against God), it cannot be extinguished from existence without God. By its nature, evil damages beings and the universe fatally. Thus, only God and His supernatural, creative power can exterminate evil altogether and remove its catastrophic consequences.

For this reason, God’s plan of salvation does not consist in simply identifying, acknowledging, shaming, or punishing the originators of evil. Such measures are neither efficient nor sufficient in exterminating evil from the universe. Rather, God solves the sin problem by taking the consequences of sin upon Himself, in Christ. By His creative power, God actively engages in the destruction of evil and the cleansing and restoration of the universe.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights three major themes:

1. Evil and the cosmic conflict originated in a perfect heaven. They then

- spread to earth, taking root in the hearts and minds of free moral agents, who were created in the image of God.
2. Sin and evil became manifest as rebellion against God.
 3. The only way to salvation, and to the end of the cosmic conflict, is through the Cross and through the mediation of Christ and His creative, restorative power.

Part II: Commentary

The Adventist Understanding of the Great Controversy. Seventh-day Adventists have a unique understanding of the origin of sin and the solution thereof. Unlike other Christians, Adventists do not have a fundamental belief dedicated to the doctrine of sin. However, they integrate their understanding of sin within the framework of the great controversy. John M. Fowler correctly points out that “no doctrine of sin can be complete without an understanding of this great controversy theme between Christ and Satan, between good and evil. The sovereignty and character of God are at its center. When Lucifer caused the revolt in heaven against God . . . and when the revolt reached its climax, God had no alternative except to cast the fallen angelic host from heaven.”—John M. Fowler, “Sin,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 241.

While other Christians also believe in the fall of Lucifer and of Adam and, to some extent, the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, Adventists have articulated these concepts in the form of a unique doctrine, encapsulated in fundamental belief 8:

All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1–11. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.—Fundamental Belief 8, “The Great Controversy,” <https://www.adventist.org/the-great-controversy/>.

The biblical teaching of humanity's fall into sin is also present in fundamental belief 7:

Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment.—Fundamental belief 7, “Nature of Humanity,” <https://www.adventist.org/nature-of-humanity/>.

Two additional aspects of the Adventist doctrine of the great controversy deserve our consideration: (1) the origin of the great controversy theme and (2) its historicity.

First, the great controversy theme springs out of Scripture and lies at the very foundation of the Adventist biblical interpretation and doctrinal development. Commenting on biblical interpretation, Ellen G. White notes:

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the *two principles that are contending for supremacy*, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found.—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190, emphasis supplied.

As a result of this biblical approach to interpretation, the great controversy theme is interwoven into all other biblical doctrines of Adventist theology. The integration of the great controversy theme into Adventist theology commences with the doctrine of God, with the very essence of His nature as free, loving, gracious, righteous, just, and faithful. Throughout

Scripture, the great controversy theme continues to be interwoven with the following doctrines:

1. The teaching of Creation as an expression of God's love, freedom, and power
2. The origin of human nature, its present condition, and its final destiny
3. The fall of humanity from its original righteousness and communion with God
4. God's actions of salvation, as manifested in the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and mediatorial ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, as well as in His second coming
5. God's redemptive plan of justification, sanctification, and the promise of future glorification for the human race
6. God's constitution of His people throughout all periods of human history, culminating in the calling out of an end-time remnant from among the Protestant churches to proclaim His final invitation of mercy to humanity
7. The pre-Advent, millennial, and executive judgments of God, climaxing in the end of evil and in the restoration of all things

Second, the great controversy is historical in nature. Because traditional Christianity integrated Greek philosophical presuppositions and concepts, such as the immaterial, timeless, spaceless nature of heaven, many Christians interpret biblical references to the cosmic conflict and of the fall of humans into sin, as allegories or theological myths. However, the Adventist historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible presents God as personally and historically involved in the history of humanity's fall into sin and in the history of salvation. God, Lucifer, the angels—both rebellious and righteous—Adam and Eve, and their fall into sin are all real historical characters and events. Jesus referred to Satan as a literal, historical person, one whom Jesus knew from before the start of this earth's history, and who was the originator of evil and sin. Jesus once explained to the Pharisees that they were neither the children of Abraham (*John 8:39, 40*) nor the children of God (*John 8:41, 42*), but rather were of their father "the devil" who "was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (*John 8:44, NIV*).

John the revelator also depicts both the devil and the cosmic conflict that he instigated as historical. Following the example of Jesus, John represents the devil as "the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (*Rev 12:7-9, NASB*), as the one who is the originator of the war, evil, and deception, both in heaven and on earth. The immediate context of Revelation 12:7-9 suggests that the apostle John considered both the devil and the cosmic conflict as an historical entity and event, respectively: as historical

as God Himself (*Rev. 12:5, 6, 10, 17*), as historical as the birth and ascension of Jesus (*Rev. 12:5*), as historical as the existence of the church and the persecutions against it (*Rev. 12:1, 6, 11, 13–15*), and as historical as the cross of Jesus through whose blood we are saved (*Rev. 12:11*). While we do not know when this cosmic conflict in heaven took place, we believe that it can be dated “before the creation of Adam and Eve and that it was as historical as humanity’s fall into sin at the instigation of the same Satan.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, pp. 241, 242.

Part III: Life Application

Discuss the following questions in class with your students.

1. **What do people in your culture think of the apparent existence of the conflict between good and evil, both in our world and in human society? How do they understand the origin of evil? Do they believe evil will ever end? Why, or why not? Have they already given up on any hope for the termination of evil? If so, why? Perhaps they think evil is here to stay, or is even necessary to keep some sort of balance in the universe and in history. If so, explain why they may feel this way. How can you share with them the biblical perspective on evil?**

2. **In what way do the various theories about the origin of the conflict between good and evil affect the understanding of human morality and responsibility? Take, for instance, the theory of evolution. How does this theory impact our understanding of the origin of evil and, consequently, our understanding of human morality? What other theories regarding the origin of evil can you think of, besides evolution, that are prevalent in your culture?**

3. **Think of ways to describe and explain to the people around you the Adventist doctrine of the origin of evil, of the great controversy, and of the biblical hope. How can you share these Bible truths with your friends, neighbors, and colleagues from other Christian denominations or from other religions, philosophies, or world-views? What elements would you include in the outline of your description of the great controversy?**

The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 19:41–44; Matt. 23:37, 38; Heb. 11:35–38; Rev. 2:10; Acts 2:44–47; John 13:35.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’ ” (Isaiah 41:10, NKJV).

Suppose you are a herdsman tending your goats on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. You hear voices. Immediately you recognize the voice of Jesus. As the setting sun gleams off the temple and reflects in snowy whiteness off its magnificent marble walls, Jesus emphatically states, “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ” (*Matt. 24:2, NKJV*).

The disciples are confused, and so are you. What could Jesus possibly mean by these words? How do they relate to the end of the world that Jesus' disciples asked about? You listen in rapt attention as Jesus masterfully blends events that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem with those that would take place just before His return.

In the destruction of Jerusalem, we discover a foreshadowing of Satan's strategy both to deceive and destroy God's people at the end time. Jesus' instruction in Matthew 24 clearly outlines last-day events in the context of Jerusalem's fall.

We will study Satan's twofold strategy both to deceive and destroy God's people. What the evil one fails to accomplish through persecution, he hopes to achieve through compromise. God is never caught by surprise, and even in the most challenging times He preserves His people.

* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy, chapters 1–2, to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.*

A Brokenhearted Savior

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem, His heart was broken. John’s Gospel says, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (*John 1:11, NKJV*). Jesus did everything He could to save His people from the coming destruction of their beloved city.

Jesus’ love for His people flowed from a heart of infinite love. He repeatedly appealed to them in love to repent and accept His gracious invitation of mercy.

Read Luke 19:41–44; Matthew 23:37, 38; and John 5:40. What do these verses tell you about Jesus’ attitude toward His people and their response to His loving invitation of grace and mercy? What revelation of God’s character do you see?

It is difficult to understand such an event as the destruction of Jerusalem in the light of God’s loving character. History reveals that tens of thousands died as the Roman general Titus led his armies against the city. Jerusalem was devastated. Men, women, and children were slaughtered. Where was God when His people suffered so greatly? The answer is clear but not easy to grasp fully. God’s heart was broken. His eyes were filled with tears. For centuries He reached out to His people. By their rebellion against His loving-kindness, they forfeited His divine protection. God does not always intervene to limit the results of His people’s choices. He allows the natural consequences of rebellion to develop. God did not cause the slaughter of innocent children in the destruction of Jerusalem; the tragic death of the innocents was Satan’s act, not God’s.

Satan delights in war because it stirs the worst passions of the human heart. Down through the centuries, it has been his purpose to deceive and destroy and then blame his evil actions on God.

Read Matthew 24:15–20. What instruction did Jesus give to His people to save them from the coming destruction of Jerusalem?

It is well to remember that the vast majority of Christians living in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 came from a Jewish background. A loving God desired to preserve as many of His people as possible. That is why He gave the instruction that when the Roman armies approached, they were to flee the city.

Reflect on the following statement: we do not judge God’s character by events we see around us; rather, we filter all the events we see through the prism of His loving character as revealed in the Bible. Why is this such good counsel?

Christians Providentially Preserved

God’s mercy, grace, providence, and foreknowledge are clearly revealed in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Cestius Gallus and the Roman armies surrounded the city. In an unexpected move, when their attack seemed imminent, they withdrew. The Jewish armies pursued them and won a great victory.

With the Romans fleeing and the Jews pursuing, the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella in Perea, beyond the Jordan River. “The promised sign had been given to the waiting Christians, and now an opportunity was offered for all who would, to obey the Saviour’s warning. Events were so overruled that neither Jews nor Romans should hinder the flight of the Christians.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 30.

Read Psalm 46:1 and Isaiah 41:10. What do these passages tell us about God’s providential care?

God is sovereign and overrules events on earth for the ultimate accomplishment of His divine purposes. Although at times God alters His original plans based on our human choices, His ultimate plan for this planet will be fulfilled. There will be times when the people of God experience hardship, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself for the cause of Christ. But even in the most challenging of times with Satan’s most vicious attacks, God sustains and preserves His church.

Read Hebrews 11:35–38 and Revelation 2:10. What reality do these texts reveal about our battle with the forces of evil? How do these passages harmonize with the idea of God’s protection in the previous question? Is there a contradiction in the idea of God’s protection and God allowing some to face painful suffering and even a martyr’s death for the cause of Christ?

“In vain were Satan’s efforts to destroy the church of Christ by violence. The great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God’s workmen were slain, but His work went steadily forward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 41.

What should it mean to us that the Bible writers, who certainly knew pain and suffering, could nevertheless, again and again, write about the reality of God’s love? How can we experience that same love for ourselves?

Faithful Amid Persecution

Throughout the early centuries of Christianity, the Christian church grew rapidly, despite imprisonment, torture, and persecution. Faithful believers, totally committed to Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed His Word with power; lives were changed, and tens of thousands were converted.

Read Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:42; and Acts 8:1–8. What do these verses teach us about the challenges the New Testament church faced and also why it grew so rapidly?

The disciples faced threats (*Acts 4:17*), imprisonment (*Acts 5:17, 18*), persecution (*Acts 8:1*), and death itself (*Acts 7:59, Acts 12:2*), yet, in the power of the Holy Spirit, courageously proclaimed the resurrected Christ, and churches multiplied throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (*Acts 9:31*).

The bastions of hell were shaken. The shackles of Satan were broken. Pagan superstition crumbled before the power of the resurrected Christ. The gospel triumphed in the face of overwhelming odds. The disciples no longer cowered in the upper room. Fear danced away like a fading shadow.

Instead, faith filled the disciples' hearts. One glimpse of their resurrected Lord changed their lives. Jesus gave them a new reason for living. Our Lord had not only given them the Great Commission (*Mark 16:15*) but the great promise, “ ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

The gospel penetrated the remotest corners of the earth (*Col. 1:23*). Although the last of the disciples, John, died at the end of the first century, others picked up the torch of truth and proclaimed the living Christ. Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the north coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny's statement is significant because it was nearly eighty years after the Crucifixion. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. He stated, “For many persons of all ages, and classes and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation, and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well.”—Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.

Despite the devil's most vicious attacks, the Christian church grew rapidly.

What can we learn from the early church that could help us, the end-time church?

Caring for the Community

The early Christian church grew not only because its members preached the gospel but also because they lived the gospel. Believers modeled the ministry of Christ who “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (*Matt. 4:23, NKJV*). Jesus deeply cared for people, and so did the New Testament church. It was this unselfish love and commitment to meeting human needs combined with sharing the good news of the gospel in the Holy Spirit’s power that made such an impact on the world in the early centuries of the Christian church.

Read Acts 2:44–47, Acts 3:6–9, and Acts 6:1–7. Although circumstances vary, what principles can we learn from these passages about authentic Christianity?

These New Testament believers followed the model of Christ, who as Peter expressed was “‘anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NKJV*). Christ’s church was His body on earth, and it, too, in these early centuries, expressed Christ’s sacrificial love and concern for hurting, broken humanity. These believers were living examples of Christ’s compassion.

In the great controversy raging in the universe, the devil wants to deface the image of God in humanity. The purpose of the gospel is to restore the image of God in humanity. This restoration includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing.

In John 10:10, Jesus reveals His plan for each one of us.

“‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*NKJV*). He longs for us to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally stable, and spiritually whole.

This is especially true in the light of His promised return. This world is facing an enormous crisis. Jesus’ own predictions in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 foretell catastrophic conditions on the earth before His return. When Christ touches us with His healing grace, we long to touch others with the touch of Christ so that they can be made whole. Jesus sends us out into a broken world as ambassadors for Christ to touch others with His love. New Testament Christianity was characterized by the Christians’ love for one another and their communities.

Discuss: What role does the church have in cooperating with Christ in proving Satan’s charges wrong?

A Legacy of Love

Read John 13:35 and 1 John 4:21. What do these passages reveal about Satan’s challenge against the government of God in the great controversy? What do they tell us about the essence of genuine Christianity?

Love was the norm of Christian communities in the first few centuries. Tertullian, an early Christian theologian, claimed: “It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See, they say, how they love one another.*”—“Chapter 39,” in *Apology*, trans. S. Thelwall, <https://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/39.html> (accessed October 10, 2022).

One of the greatest revelations of God’s love was demonstrated when two devastating pandemics plagued the early centuries around A.D. 160 and A.D. 260. Christians stepped forward and ministered to the sick and dying. These plagues killed tens of thousands and left entire villages and towns with scarcely an inhabitant. The unselfish, sacrificial, caring, loving ministry of Christians made a huge impact on the population. Over time, thousands, and eventually hundreds of thousands, and then millions in the Roman Empire became believers in Jesus during these two epidemics. Love, outgoing concern, and organized, selfless care of the sick and dying created an admiration for these believers and the Christ they represented.

Rodney Stark’s *The Rise of Christianity* is a modern historical narrative portraying these historic events in a new and improved light. In it he describes how during the second epidemic the whole Christian community, which was still heavily Judeo-Christian, became a virtual army of nurses, providing the basic needs for the suffering community to survive.

“At the height of the second great epidemic, around A.D. 260, . . . Dionysius wrote a lengthy tribute to the heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others.

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.”—*The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 82.

What is the obvious message for us here? How do we learn to die to self so that we, too, can manifest this same selfless spirit? It’s not easy, is it?

Further Thought: “The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome. Said a Christian, expostulating with the heathen rulers who were urging forward the persecution: You may ‘kill us, torture us, condemn us. . . . Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. . . . Nor does your cruelty . . . avail you.’ It was but a stronger invitation to bring others to their persuasion. ‘The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.’—Tertullian, *Apology*, paragraph 50.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 41, 42.

“The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God because He suffers the basest of men to prosper, while the best and purest are afflicted and tormented by their cruel power. How, it is asked, can One who is just and merciful, and who is also infinite in power, tolerate such injustice and oppression? This is a question with which we have nothing to do. God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 47.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What value does persecution serve? Why do you think God allows His people to suffer at times? And though in some cases, such as in the early church, good was able to come of it, what about times when it appears that nothing good has come from it? Why in situations like this is the personal experience of God’s love so important in order to maintain faith?
- 2 How would you respond if a friend asked you these questions: “Where is God in my suffering? If He loves me, why am I going through such a difficult time?”
- 3 How can your local church become a caring community to impact the world? Discuss practical ways to apply this week’s study.

Faithful Gymnast in Italy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Seven-year-old Sara loved gymnastics. It was easy for her, and she was good at it. She especially liked doing cartwheels. She could do cartwheel after cartwheel in a row, and she only stopped when she fell down.

But there was something that Sara loved even more than gymnastics. She loved God.

So, she was not tempted to skip church when the gymnastics coach announced that a major gymnastics show would be held on the Sabbath in her hometown of Iesi, Italy. The show only took place once a year, and children would show off what they had been learning to their parents and families.

Sara felt sad when the coach said the show had been scheduled on the Sabbath.

At home, Mother saw Sara's downcast face.

"God can solve any problem," she said.

She suggested that Sara could take her Sabbath problem to God.

That evening, Sara prayed, "Dear God, I am very sad to hear the news that I will miss the show, but Your will be done."

Sara and the other children met for gymnastics practice every Tuesday and Thursday. The coach had announced the date for the gymnastics show at a Tuesday practice.

Sara prayed on Tuesday night and on Wednesday night. At the Thursday practice, the coach suddenly announced that the date for the gymnastics show had been changed.

"We have to postpone the show by one day, until Sunday, because of some organizational problems," she said.

Sara couldn't believe her ears. She was ecstatic with joy! When she excitedly broke the news to Mother a short time later, Mother smiled bigger than the sun.

"You have to trust God always!" she said.

And Sara always has. This was her first experience with prayer, and it greatly strengthened her faith in God. On Sabbath, she told the church about what had happened. A church member prepared a special sermon about the prayer and invited Sara onto the platform to tell her story.

"I have always prayed when facing problems in life," Sara, now 19, told Adventist Mission.

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To help youth and young adults place God first." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org. Read more about Sara next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Isaiah 41:10*

Study Focus: *Luke 19:41, 42; Matt. 23:37, 38; Matt. 24:9, 21, 22; Heb. 11:35–38; Isa. 41:10; Rev. 2:10; Acts 2:44–47; John 13:35.*

Introduction: Last week, we studied the origin of the great controversy in heaven and on earth. This week, we focus on how the great controversy plays out in the lives, and in the history, of God's people, especially at the intersection of Judah (the people of God in the latter part of the Old Testament) with the church (the people of God in the New Testament).

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights two major themes:

1. As a result of its rejection of Christ, Judah officially, as a political entity, lost its favored-nation status as God's special people and suffered the horrific experience of the destruction of Jerusalem.
2. God established His people, the remnant of Israel, incorporated into it both Jews and Gentiles, and saved it from the cataclysms that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70. God led His church in its mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, calling people of all nations to receive the good news and to join His new people.

Part II: Commentary

A Few Quick Facts About Jerusalem

The tragic fall of Jerusalem may be delineated, at least in part, by the following historical details:

1. Jerusalem was destroyed during the First Jewish War (A.D. 66–A.D. 73), its annihilation commencing toward the end of the reign of the emperor Nero (A.D. 54–A.D. 68). The war broke out when Gessius Florus, the freshly appointed Roman procurator to Judea, took a large amount of money from the temple treasury in Jerusalem.
2. The two major Roman generals sent to quash the revolt were Vespasian and his son, Titus. Both later became emperors.
3. The siege of Jerusalem started in earnest in the year A.D. 70. For the most part, throughout the siege, the defenders of the city were splintered into factions and fought among themselves, uniting only to repulse the imminent attacks of the Romans.
4. Jerusalem was guarded by three walls. The first two walls fell to the Romans in April of A.D. 70, and the third was breached several months later, on August 30. The temple was burned on the same day.
5. According to Jewish historian Josephus, more than one million people died during the siege of Jerusalem, and an estimated 100,000 were

taken captive. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. The booty that the Romans took from Jerusalem funded the construction of the Colosseum, one of the most visited monuments in Rome.

6. Bereft of its city, Jerusalem, and its temple, Judaism suffered profound changes. The center of the Jewish religion shifted from the temple, sacrifices, and priests to the law. The Sadducees, the sacerdotal class, lost most of their power, and Judaism became rabbinical.

The Fall of Jerusalem

It is no coincidence that Ellen G. White starts *The Great Controversy* with the chapter entitled “The Destruction of Jerusalem.” She understood that this tragic event of the Jewish nation was central to the great controversy and to the identity and mission of the church. How so? To answer this question, we need to first understand why Jerusalem fell.

From the vantage point of secular history, Jerusalem and the second temple were destroyed because the Jews rebelled against the superpower of the time, the Roman Empire, and were mercilessly crushed by its might, both in an act of vengeance and as a deterrent to other potential rebels. In the centuries that have lapsed since the fall of Jerusalem, believing Jews have generally interpreted the destruction of Jerusalem as a disciplinary measure that God allowed. Some scholars of Judaism have said that the Jews sinned by transgressing God’s law, becoming immoral; others believe that the Jews were too fractious and divided, never having learned the lesson of unity. Whatever the case, God preserved a remnant to carry on His purposes.

However, the Bible, especially the New Testament, offers a different explanation for the destruction of the temple. Yes, rebellion, iniquity, moral and social corruption, and internal strife and division were certainly major factors that led to the downfall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. But the situation that caused that tragedy was more profound than these factors alone. To help us understand what caused the temple’s destruction, several important points, from both the Old and New Testaments, need to be highlighted. Taken together, these points help us to understand the main reason for the temple’s demise: Israel’s leadership rejection of Christ and of God’s covenant.

The Original Temple

First, the original temple of Israel, built by Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians, in 586 B.C., some 20 years after Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan. 1:1, 2*). The destruction happened approximately one hundred years after the Northern Israelites fell into apostasy and were conquered by the Assyrians. However, these two events—Israel’s demise and the destruction of Solomon’s temple by Babylonian forces—did not transpire simply because the Jewish nation failed to learn how to unite or because of its moral declension. Northern Israel disappeared as a nation because they rejected God’s covenant and went after other gods (*1 Kings*

12:26–33, 2 Kings 17:7–23). Like Israel, Judah had wicked kings and corrupt elites bent on idolatry. Over time, Judah’s periods of idolatry also increased in frequency and intensity. However, unlike Northern Israel, Judah did not have a permanent official national policy of replacing God’s religion with paganism. For this reason, God permitted the destruction of Judah’s temple and its capital city, in 586 B.C., and the temporary exile of its people, as a strategy for national renewal.

The Second Temple

Second, the second temple was destroyed in the year A.D. 70 by the Romans, some 35 years after Jesus foretold the following three events: (1) God would take the kingdom from Judah and give it to another nation (*Matt. 21:43*); (2) Judah’s house (the temple) would be “left desolate” (*Matt. 23:38*); and (3) the temple would be completely destroyed (*Matt. 24:1, 2*). The reason for this triple judgment? Judah’s leadership not only failed to bring forth the fruit of the kingdom of God (*Matt. 21:43*) but, as did Northern Israel of old, consciously refused to remain under the jurisdiction and shelter of God’s wings (*Matt. 23:37*). In A.D. 31, the leaders made an official, conscious, and deliberate decision to reject God’s covenant, His salvation, and His Messiah (*Matt. 26:1–3, 14–16, 57–68; 27:15–25; John 19:1–15*). As a result, God allowed the earthly temple to be destroyed.

God’s Grace

Third, God gave Israel and Judah all the grace necessary for redemption and restoration before He permitted them to suffer the penalty for breaking His covenant. From the time of Moses to the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70, a span of more than 1,500 years, Judah experienced God’s unremitting love. Despite their failures, God was willing to work with them as long as they were willing to remain in His covenant and be transformed by His grace and power. Even when the Jewish leaders eventually decided to reject God, which was followed by Jesus’ pronouncement of doom against them, God gave them more than 35 years before He executed that verdict. During this probationary period, Christians, such as Peter (*Acts 2–4*), Stephen (*Acts 7*), and Paul (*Romans 9–11*), pleaded with them to accept Jesus as the Messiah and to participate in God’s new covenant. Sad to say, instead of heeding these calls, the leaders sealed their decision to reject Christ with a heavy-handed persecution of Christians that culminated in the murder of Stephen, in A.D. 34. However, even in the decision to reject Judah as His representative nation, God continued to call individual Jews to enter His new covenant and to be saved in His kingdom.

The fall of Jerusalem, therefore, illustrates God’s dealings with sinners in the great controversy. This perspective helps to partially answer our initial question as to why Ellen White felt that this tragedy was so central to the great controversy theme and to the identity and mission of the church.

Furthermore, Ellen White understood that the fall of Jerusalem would help us to understand the paradox of the judgment: that is, how divine mercy can be extended to sinners while at the same time satisfying the demands of divine justice. On the one hand, God is full of love, compassion, and patience, pleading with sinners to return to His kingdom. God does not want sinners to die the second death (*Ezek. 33:11*). On the other hand, God is just and righteous. Because He is holy, He cannot tolerate evil in His presence. However, He will respect the final decision of individuals who wish to go their own way, leaving God's kingdom, covenant, protection, and source of life. Still, God gives sinners ample warning that they will die if they refuse the protections of His kingdom and the mercies of His covenant. Outside God's covenant there is no joy or life, for the simple reason that no created being has life, unborrowed or underived, within themselves.

The Plan of Salvation

Fourth, despite the setbacks caused by the covenant betrayal, God continued His plan of salvation and His actions to resolve the great controversy. God promised that Jesus, who was the Seed of Eve (*Gen. 3:15*), of Abraham (*Gen. 12:2, 3, 7; Gal. 3:16, 29*), and of David (*2 Sam. 7:12–15, Mark 12:35–37*), would bring salvation to humanity, liberating them from the dominion of the devil, and would restore God's reign on earth. At the same time, God promised that Jesus, the true Lamb of God and the fulfiller of the earthly sanctuary types (*John 1:29, 2:19–22*), would save humanity from the guilt and the power of sin. Though the history of humanity may seem directionless, at times, and left to the whims and devices of the devil and of human nature, the Scriptures show a clear progress of God's purposeful and intentional implementation of His plan and promise of salvation. When His own people failed Him, God worked relentlessly to bring them back to Him and to rescue humanity from the mire of sin. Abraham, Moses, and Judah are all examples of the rescued and redeemed. Nothing can stop God from keeping His promises and implementing His plans.

Types and Antitypes

Fifth, the earthly sanctuary and the sacrificial system were only antitypes of the coming sacrifice and ministry of Jesus. When the first temple was destroyed and Judah lamented for its past glory, God told them that the real glory was yet future and that it depended not on materials and architecture but on the One to whom the sanctuary pointed (*Ezra 3:12, Hag. 2:9, Matt. 23:16–22*). For this reason, when the second temple was destroyed, in A.D. 70, Christians did not lose hope. On the contrary, they understood that the earthly sanctuary fulfilled its mission of pointing to Jesus, to His sacrifice, and to His ministry of salvation in the real heavenly sanctuary above. Type met antitype; symbol met reality. After Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension, the great controversy now was focused on the

heavenly sanctuary. The Epistle to the Hebrews discusses extensively the meaning of these changes. Thus, Matthew 24 and the destruction of the second temple, the Epistle to the Hebrews and its focus on the heavenly sanctuary are extremely important to the Adventist understanding of the great controversy and to the entirety of Adventist theology in general.

It was precisely this complex understanding of the destruction of the temple that inspired the apostolic and post-apostolic Christians during the first several centuries, and the writings of Ellen White in the nineteenth century, with an understanding of the church's identity and mission. Having survived the destruction of the temple, the apostolic Christians shifted their focus from the temple to the heavenly sanctuary. They overcame the fear of persecution and death because they experienced the forgiveness of sins in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and looked in faith to Christ's ministry at the right hand of God in heaven. They knew they were God's people, the New Israel, called by God to proclaim His wonderful news of salvation to all humanity gripped by the power of the devil, sin, and death. They shared their love by helping the people around them with the means they had available. And they directed the attention of others to the end of the great controversy, to the end of suffering and death, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to the earth and forever defeat the devil and sin.

Part III: Life Application

1. **What do the people in your culture think about love and righteousness? Do they still have hope that there will come a time when human society, in its entirety, will be characterized by love and righteousness? Why, or why not? How might you explain to them that there cannot be true and enduring love and righteousness apart from Jesus? Or that there can be no love or righteousness apart from His revelation of these divine qualities as seen in His sacrifice? Or that love and righteousness cannot exist without the Holy Spirit's bestowal of these qualities upon humans or His help to grow them in us?**

2. **Examine your personal evangelistic activities. How clearly do you understand what Jesus' words "the gospel of the kingdom" mean? How can you live out this gospel in your own life? How can you and your church share this gospel with smaller and/or larger audiences around you?**

Light Shines *in the* Darkness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 8:44; Prov. 23:23; Acts 20:27–32; 2 Thess. 2:7–12; Ps. 119:105, 116, 130, 133, 160; Prov. 16:25; 2 Cor. 4:3–6.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going’ ” (*John 12:35, NKJV*).

In the Bible's last book, Revelation, the devil is pictured as a dragon and a serpent (*Rev. 12:9*). He is a dragon because he desires to destroy God's people, and he is a serpent because he uses all his cunning lies to deceive them. In the years after Christ's death, thousands were tortured, thrown to lions, and burned at the stake by imperial Rome for refusing to worship its deities. Yet, in the face of this cruel punishment, many stayed faithful, the gospel continued to spread, and the church grew.

As a result, Satan changed his strategy. Scores of pagans were baptized but without thorough instruction in Bible truth. Error flooded into the church as leaders merged the truths of Scripture with popular customs. The fourth and fifth centuries were eras of compromise when church prelates blended pagan practices with Christian teachings.

Yet, even in life's most difficult times, God was continually with His people. They found Jesus, “the way, the truth and the life,” and through the power of the Holy Spirit, they stood firm, even in the face of overwhelming pressure to yield their conscientious convictions. They stayed loyal to God's revealed will in Scripture and unflinchingly stood for the truth of His Word, regardless of the pressure placed on them, either overtly or subtly.

* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy, chapter 3, to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.*

Compromise: Satan's Subtle Strategy

Compare John 14:6 with John 8:44. What contrast between Jesus' character and Satan's is seen in these two passages?

What Jesus says is true because He is the author of truth. Truth proceeds from the heart of an all-wise, all-loving, all-knowing God. He is the foundation of reality and of all truth.

In contrast, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is prepared to use lies, deceit, misinformation, and a distortion of the truth to lead God's people astray. He deceived Eve in Eden by distorting truth, creating doubt, and blatantly denying what God said. Satan's statement, "You shall not surely die," in the context of eating the fruit, was a clear contradiction of what God had said. Throughout the centuries, Satan has used the same strategy. He undermines confidence in God's Word, contradicts God's revealed will, distorts Scripture, and at times misquotes the Bible to his advantage.

Read Proverbs 23:23, John 17:17, and John 8:32. What similarity do you see in these Bible passages regarding the truth of God's Word? What is their central message?

"Satan well knew that the Holy Scriptures would enable men to discern his deceptions and withstand his power. It was by the word that even the Saviour of the world had resisted his attacks. At every assault, Christ presented the shield of eternal truth, saying, 'It is written.' To every suggestion of the adversary, He opposed the wisdom and power of the word. In order for Satan to maintain his sway over men, and establish the authority of the papal usurper, he must keep them in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Bible would exalt God and place finite men in their true position; therefore its sacred truths must be concealed and suppressed. This logic was adopted by the Roman Church. For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. The people were forbidden to read it or to have it in their houses, and unprincipled priests and prelates interpreted its teachings to sustain their pretensions. Thus the pope came to be almost universally acknowledged as the vicerent of God on earth, endowed with authority over church and state."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 51.

Discuss ways that Satan attempts to distort or misinterpret God's Word today.

Savage Wolves

Read Acts 20:27–32. What specific warnings did the apostle Paul give to the church leaders from Ephesus regarding the coming apostasy?

The purpose of Paul’s counsel was to prepare the church for what was coming. In these passages, he describes his major concern.

His concern is that “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (*Acts 20:29, NKJV*). In other words, believers would face fierce persecution from within the church.

The apostle expressed his concern when he said, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (*Acts 20:30*). Heresies would enter the church. False doctrines would be substituted for divine truths. Pagan practices would prevail. In the fourth and fifth centuries, compromise subtly crept into the Christian church, with mission advance being the probable justification. But the terrible result was a departure from the truths of God’s Word.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12. How does the apostle Paul describe the coming apostasy? What characteristics should believers look for?

Paul’s comment, “the mystery of lawlessness does already work,” is significant. Even in Paul’s day, there was a gradual departure from the truth of God’s Word regarding obedience to God’s law. This departure would flourish in the later centuries.

Contrary to the second commandment, idols were introduced into Christian worship. For millennia, idols were in the forefront of all pagan religions. To make Christianity more acceptable to heathens coming into the Christian church, pagan deities were renamed as so-called saints. Sunday, the day of worship for the sun god, was gradually adopted as the day of Christian worship in honor of the Resurrection. This false day, not sanctioned in Scripture, prevails even now.

What kind of compromises do we see entering the church today? More important, what compromises might you be making? Is it sometimes by blending truth and error?

Safeguarded by the Word

Compare John 17:15–17 and Acts 20:32. What insights do Jesus and the apostle Paul give us regarding protection from the deceptions of Satan?

The Bible is the infallible revelation of God’s will. It presents Heaven’s plan for humanity’s salvation. Since “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,” it is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV). That is, “all Scripture” is inspired by God; not some parts or some parts more than others. The whole Bible must be accepted as the Word of God. Otherwise, the door is wide open for deception.

The Bible clearly reveals God’s infinite love in the light of the great controversy. It also exposes satanic delusions and reveals the devil’s deceptions. Satan hates the Word of God and has done everything possible throughout the centuries to destroy its influence.

After all, what would we know about the plan of salvation without the Bible? How much, if anything, would we understand about the birth, life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus? Without the Scriptures, would we even begin to comprehend the depth of Christ’s sacrifice, the glory of His resurrection, the power of His intercession, and the majesty of His return?

All these crucial truths are revealed, taught, and emphasized in the Word of God. It, and it alone, must be the final and ultimate standard for understanding all sacred truth.

Hence, we must fight against any and all attempts to undermine its authority or inspiration, even from those who, while professing great love of the Bible, bring doubts about it, even subtly. Tragically, especially through the inroads of modern thinking, many theologians and Christians focus so much on the human side of Scripture that the Bible becomes the word of man instead the Word of God. The Bible, they argue, is the writings of kings, shepherds, a fisherman, priests, poets, and others who shared their understandings and conceptions of God, of nature, and of reality the best that they, in their time and place, understood them.

Really, now? If this were true, why should we, living today in the twenty-first century, really care about what these people thought, much less make what they thought the foundation for our hope of eternity?

We shouldn’t.

Read Psalm 119:105, 116, 130, 133, and 160. What insights does the psalmist give us regarding the significance of God’s Word in the plan of salvation?

Human Reasoning Apart From Scripture

The Holy Spirit works through our minds. He invites us to explore the mysteries of the universe. As someone has aptly stated: “As Christians, we do not check our brains at the door of the church.” Nevertheless, the brilliance of human reasoning alone is incapable of discovering the divine truths of Scripture. Truth is not a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of divine revelation.

Read Proverbs 16:25, Judges 21:25, and Isaiah 53:6. What do these texts reveal about Satan’s strategy of deception?

One of the devil’s most effective deceptions is to lead us to believe that human reasoning, unaided by the Holy Spirit and uninformed by the Word of God, is sufficient to understand God’s will. There may be a way that seems right to us, or even to entire cultures, but it may be totally wrong in the eyes of God.

A few years ago, my wife and I decided to do some hiking in the forest near the hotel we were staying at for the night. Typically, I am fairly good at directions, and after hiking for about an hour or so taking various trails, I was quite confident that I could find our way back with little difficulty. But soon we found ourselves hopelessly lost in the forest. The sun was going down, and I feared the worst. Thankfully, we met some other hikers who knew the way. We had been at least five miles off course but near a main road. Since their car was parked nearby, they offered us a ride back to our hotel. Discovering someone who knew the way and someone who had the ability to get us back to our destination made all the difference for us.

God has not left us alone on our journey from earth to heaven. The Holy Spirit points us to the sacred Scriptures that lead us homeward. Truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil—these can be correctly understood only in light of God’s Word. That which contradicts God and His Word is error, and error is always dangerous; that which is in harmony with God is truth and goodness. How important that we make God’s Word our final arbiter of truth and morality.

Why is the human mind without the aid of the Holy Spirit incapable of discovering divine truth? Discuss the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. How does reason actually help us understand divine revelation? For example, look at Daniel 2, a prophecy that covers world history from the time of Babylon to the Second Coming. How does a prophecy like this powerfully appeal to human reason?

Battle for the Mind

Read 2 Corinthians 4:3–6. What does “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe” (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV) mean? How are their eyes blinded? How are eyes opened?

The Greek word for “mind” in this passage is *noema*. It literally means our perception or mental faculties. *The SDA Bible Commentary* makes an enlightening statement about this verse. “The battle between Christ and Satan is a battle for the minds of men. (Rom. 7:23, 25; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:14, 11:3; Phil. 2:5, 4:7, 8). Satan’s principal work is to blind or darken men’s minds. He does this by keeping them from the study of God’s Word, by deranging the powers of the mind through the excesses of body and soul, by wholly occupying the mind through the things of this life, and by appealing to pride and self-exaltation.” —Volume 6, p. 854.

The lack of knowledge on the part of the lost is not because they could not know. It is because they would not know. Many have had every opportunity to know truth but chose not to believe, and Satan blinded their eyes. Satan’s kingdom is a kingdom of darkness. As *The SDA Bible Commentary* adds, “The gospel is the only means by which Satan’s diabolical schemes and deceptions can be exposed, and by which men can see the way from darkness to light.” —Volume 6, p. 854. The essence of the New Testament message is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is at the heart of the gospel and is the center of Scripture. All Scripture testifies of Him (*John 5:39*).

Read John 1:4, 5, 9 and 14. How do these verses describe Jesus? Note particularly John 1:14.

During the early centuries of the Christian church, the New Testament believers were totally committed to Christ as the One who was the light in their darkness. They were redeemed by His grace, transformed by His power, and motivated by His love. Even death could not break their bond of loyalty to Christ. They recognized the devil’s deceptions in the glorious light of the gospel. Christ has always had men and women who, by His grace, have stood courageously for His truth. In these early centuries, the light of Christ’s love, grace, and truth shone through the darkness.

Further Thought: “The same spirit of hatred and opposition to the truth has inspired the enemies of God in every age, and the same vigilance and fidelity have been required in His servants. The words of Christ to the first disciples are applicable to His followers to the close of time: ‘What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.’ Mark 13:37.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 56, 57.

In many parts of the world, especially where people have free access to the Bible, Satan has employed other means to weaken its influence. One very effective way has been through various scientific endeavors or even biblical scholarship, which sometimes takes positions that, if accepted, would undermine trust in the Word of God. For example, though the book of Daniel dates itself to more than 500 years before Christ, many Bible scholars date it, instead, to the middle of the second century B.C. They argue that it had to be written at this time; otherwise the prophet would have been accurately telling the future, and that can't happen. Therefore, they argue, Daniel was not written when it says it was but, rather, hundreds of years later. Unfortunately, this lie about the Bible is one of many that modern scholarship seeks to foist upon us. And more unfortunately, many people accept this error because, after all, Bible scholars are teaching it. No wonder Paul warns us, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (*1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Refer to the quote in Tuesday's study and then consider the following: How is Satan using similar methods today to subtly undermine the authority of the Scriptures?
- 2 What are our greatest safeguards against misinterpreting God's Word?
- 3 Satan's major attempt in the great controversy between good and evil is to malign God's character and present Him as an authoritarian, unloving tyrant. How does the evil one attempt to do this, and what is God's response to his lies?
- 4 The apostle Peter affirms that “no prophecy is of private interpretation” (*2 Pet. 1:20*). How can we be sure we do not distort the meaning of Scripture to achieve our own ends? Why might this be easier to do than we realize? How can we safeguard ourselves against it?

Faithful Student in Italy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

In Italy, schoolchildren have the option of attending an hour of religion classes every week in public school. As a small girl, Sara decided to attend because she wanted to know more about the Bible.

Her classmates quickly realized that she knew the Bible well. So, when the teacher asked a question, they would say, “Sara knows the answer!”

After hearing the children say this for many months, the teacher asked Sara, “How is it that you know the Bible so well?”

“I go to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Sara said.

The teacher wanted to know more, so she went to church with Sara.

Sara got a new religion teacher in the sixth grade. Again she was able to answer the teacher’s questions. Impressed, the teacher invited her to give an hour-long class presentation about the Adventist Church. Sara prepared with help from her pastor and other church leaders. At the end of the presentation, classmates peppered her with questions about the seventh-day Sabbath.

Today, Sara is in high school, and her religion teacher is a nun. Once, she impressed the nun by writing a Bible verse on an exam. Other teens rarely cited the Bible. The nun asked for an explanation, and Sara told her about her faith. Afterward, the nun came to her church.

In another high school class, the teacher grew upset when Sara could not answer a question about religion in Italy. Sara explained that she did not know because she was not a member of Italy’s largest denomination. The teacher asked several questions and invited Sara to give the class a lesson about the Adventist Church. Sara’s presentation pleased the teacher, and she said, “It is wonderful to learn about another faith in our class.”

The next year, however, Sara had a Saturday class from the same teacher. The teacher pressured Sara to attend, and when she didn’t, teased her. “Please come to school,” she said. “We won’t tell anyone that you came.” Week after week, she mocked Sara. “I also could stay home on Saturdays,” she said. “It would be better than coming to school.”

To Sara’s surprise, her classmates began to defend her to the teacher.

Then one Sabbath, when Sara was in church, the teacher praised her to the class. “Even though Sara is only here half the time, she gets better marks than the rest of you,” she said.

Sara believes God has blessed her for being open about her faith.

“I never have hidden my faith from my classmates,” she told Adventist Mission. “My classmates respect me and know my faith is serious for me.”

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To help youth and young adults place God first.” For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *John 12:35*

Study Focus: *Rev. 12:7–9, John 8:44, Prov. 23:23, Prov. 4:18, John 12:35, Ps. 119:30, Acts 20:27–32, 2 Thess. 2:7–12, John 8:32.*

Introduction: This week we watch as the apostolic, and the post-apostolic, church enters the great controversy between God and Satan.

Born of Jesus, the church joined the great controversy on His side. However, the church soon would face the same temptation as Adam and Eve: to doubt Jesus' Word and to desire a compromise between His authoritative commands and Satan's delusive doctrines.

This week's lesson emphasizes that the great controversy is comprised of two unequal and irreconcilable sides. These sides are unequal because of who God is and who the devil is. While God is the Eternal One, the Creator, and the loving and righteous King of the universe, the devil and evil have a beginning and, thus, will have an end. The devil, sin, and evil are temporary aberrations that, though affecting God and the entire universe, will be extinguished by our all-powerful, all-loving, and all-just God. Consequently, the two parties engaged in the great controversy, God and Satan, simply cannot compromise.

The Bible depicts the great controversy in terms of a conflict between two radically opposite forces, such as light versus darkness or truth versus lies. True, the side of evil clamors for a compromise with the truth, for such compromise is evil's only chance of survival. The side of evil seeks to secure its survival at any cost in order that it might destroy that which is good or of God. That is why the devil has continually been at work to lure the church into compromise. Unfortunately, the church fell into compromise, as did humanity's first parents. The effects of these compromises are seen and felt to this day. God, however, who is the Source of truth and light, will never compromise. Trust in God and faithfulness to the truth, as revealed in Jesus through Scripture, will safeguard the church from compromise and prevent us from falling prey to the devil.

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson highlights four major themes:

1. In depicting the great controversy, the Bible uses diametrically opposed terms, such as light and darkness, to highlight the fact that God and His people cannot compromise the truth in any way with error and falsehood.
2. From the earliest days of Jesus' ministry and in the subsequent work of His apostles, the devil relentlessly pressured the church to slide into error or, at the very least, to compromise God's truth.

3. To compromise truth, however, is tantamount to the betrayal of God and the destruction of truth itself. Ultimately, such compromise constitutes siding with Satan.
4. The only way the church may emerge victorious in the great controversy is to remain faithful to the divine revelation in Jesus Christ and in God's Holy Word.

Part II: Commentary

Compromise

In various social contexts, such as family life and politics, compromise is considered acceptable and, in many situations, even desirable. Generally, the word “compromise” refers to reaching an agreement, to settling, by mutual concession, for the middle ground between the positions of two or more parties. The key to such an agreement lies in “concession”: each side must cede something so that both, or all, sides can continue to coexist or live together. In some cases, each side compromises because none has the strength to convince, or overcome, and control the other side by force. In other cases, the parties compromise simply because they want to live together peaceably as neighbors, or as family, in love or mutual respect.

In the context of the latter perspective, compromise certainly has a positive connotation, appearing as a solution to conflict and as an opportunity for peaceful coexistence. These types of compromises are common in our daily lives and involve negotiation or tolerance. However, in general, compromise is perceived as a negative phenomenon, implying the loss of an essential value, principle, truth, or quality. A compromised lot of medicine, immune system, national identity, education, morality, reputation, harvest, or military position are all undesirable and unacceptable compromises because they threaten our very way of life or existence.

How about God? Could not He compromise with the rebel angels or with fallen humans to avoid the war in heaven and to allow all to coexist peacefully? Could He not, at least, tolerate the opposing party? If the opposing side wanted independence or autonomy, could not God grant this request? Could He not simply give the rebels a region somewhere in a corner of the universe where they might live by themselves instead of being exterminated?

The answer is complex. Several points, however, may help elucidate it.

No Compromise by God

First, there is a qualitative difference between our daily negotiations and the compromise that Lucifer was desirous of achieving. God created

us with all the freedom necessary to express ourselves, to interact and negotiate with others, in love and in righteousness. However, there are some physical and moral limitations that cannot be compromised because these limits constitute the very foundation of our existence. This foundation is comprised of the truths that God is our Creator, our Provider, our Lawgiver (and as such, reveals how we should live our lives in order to be happy), and our King. God is the Source of our life. We simply cannot exist without Him. Lucifer wanted to change this very foundation. He challenged God's character, status, and authority and claimed that humans are gods (*Gen. 3:4*), having existence in themselves and having ability to create their own meanings of, and standards for, life and happiness.

Second, and closely related to the point above, is the nature of sin. Sin is not merely holding a dissenting opinion. Sin is the conscious and deliberate rebellion against, and rejection of, God's claim that He is the only Creator, Provider, Lawgiver, and King. Sin cannot tolerate the existence of such a God. The foundational impulse of sin is to topple this God from His throne and install self as the king. The devil, however, offers a compromise. He would be willing to renounce his call for a total rejection of God's existence as long as he, Lucifer, was also recognized as a god. God, on the other hand, allows no room for such a compromise or negotiation with sin. What can He concede on His part? To say that He is not the Creator? To say He is not the Provider? To say that He is not the Source of life and standard of happiness and morality? To say that angels and humans can have life without Him? Any of these would be a lie. While compromise would be a triumph for the devil, compromise would mean capitulation for God.

Third, and closely related to the first two points, the situation described above is not only about truth and honor but constitutes the ultimate life-and-death situation. Let us imagine for a moment that we are Adam and Eve. We are in a setting in which Satan and God explain their positions to us prior to the fall into sin. Satan claims that God lies to us, that we are autonomous, that we are gods, and that we are immortal. Furthermore, he asserts that we can reject God's claims and will not die (*Gen. 3:4*) because we contain life, original and underived, within ourselves. Further, Satan accuses God of using His claim of being the Source and standard of life to control us all; this divine claim, for Satan, is dictatorship, autocracy, abuse, deception, and injustice. According to Satan, the fact that God does not want to compromise corroborates his allegations. For this reason, Satan calls us to break free from God's "lies" and "abuse" and experience a new consciousness and autonomy, wherein we discover and enjoy our infinite and eternal divine potential. But aren't these just allegations and speculations? Do we not run the risk of dying or disappearing from existence if we disconnect from God?

Is it worth trying, just to prove a theory empirically? Lucifer certainly thought it was worth taking the risk.

God, on the other hand, tells us that He is the only Creator and Provider, and thus we cannot exist without Him. He tells us that if we do not believe Him, if we reject Him and His affirmations, we will disconnect from Him, the Source of life, and we will die, that is, disappear from existence. God explains to us that this outcome is not mere speculation but a fact because He is our Creator. We did not create ourselves, and we are not eternal. This fact alone, based on His Word, must be sufficient for us to believe Him. However, God points out that His claims are also evidenced by our past and present life: that is, as long as we have believed Him and lived with Him, everyone has been happy. The entire universe has been running smoothly, and no one has died. God further explains to us that He cannot compromise not only because He is right but also because if He renounces His throne, all of us and the entire universe will disappear from existence since He is the only Provider or Sustainer of existence and life. For this reason, God calls us to believe Him, to trust Him, to stay with Him, and to live happily with Him forever.

If you witnessed such a debate, whom would you have believed?

Fourth, unfortunately for humanity, our primeval parents accepted Lucifer's speculation. Was the risk worth taking? No. The choice of our first parents turned into a tragedy for them and for the entire human race. Moreover, this conclusion is not mere speculation but is based on historical and empirical evidence. Instead of feeling divine and living forever after disobeying God's law, humanity felt empty, naked, full of shame, their hearts and relationships broken (*Gen. 3:7, 8*). Moreover, the human race began to suffer and die. However, Lucifer did not stop his speculations against God's government; he proposed more compromise. We are immortal, he now claimed, because we have an immortal soul, which, after death, goes to a spiritual, ethereal sphere. Tragically, most people have fallen into the trap of believing that falsehood. Moreover, Lucifer now began calling on God and humanity to accept the reality of the existence of sin and death as the new normal. In the many nonbiblical religions that have prevailed throughout human history, Satan has proposed to redefine and reinterpret suffering and death in order to avoid their pervasive presence, which constantly undermines his lying claims.

Fifth, God remained true to Himself. He explained that Adam and Eve remained alive after rejecting Him, not because Satan was right in his claim that we are immortal, nor because God compromised. Rather, Adam and Eve did not die because God, in His eternal love for humanity, had a plan of salvation, which started operating as soon as humans fell into sin. According to this plan, God, far from compromising, gave us a new opportunity to choose to be saved, live, and stay with Him. But this new opportunity and salvation were not the products of compromise.

We must not confuse compromise with God's patience, love, and grace. Rather, salvation and the new opportunity for life spring from God's sacrifice. Precisely because God did not, and could not, compromise, He sacrificed. But He did not sacrifice us. Rather, He sacrificed His own life. If compromise were possible, He would not have needed to die in our place. But because He did not compromise, He chose rather to die in our place in order to uphold His truth, to manifest His love and righteousness, and to save us from the guilt and power of sin. Moreover, He did not compromise because He knew the consequences of compromise: suffering, misery, and death of the entire humanity and universe.

For the same reasons, God's true people do not compromise. True, traditional Christianity compromised the revelation of God's truth in Scripture. However, God worked to restore His truth in order that He might save as many as possible. For this reason, His faithful remnant church happily collaborates with Him to help spread His truth by reflecting His light.

Part III: Life Application

1. **What criterion or criteria does your culture appeal to in order to determine what is truth? What are the sources of truth in your society, religion, or culture? In what ways, if any, does your society or culture view the Bible as the source of truth about the origin, meaning, direction, and destiny of our world?**

2. **In what ways can you share our Adventist understanding of the Scriptures as the premier trustworthy source of truth? How does this understanding of Scripture help us develop the correct worldview and path to salvation?**

3. **Examine your life. Do you think there are areas in your life that are the result of compromising God's truth? If yes, what are they? What can you do to rectify this situation?**

Standing for the Truth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Dan. 7:23–25; Rev. 12:6, 14; Jude 3, 4; Rev. 2:10; Acts 5:28–32; Ps. 19:7–11; 1 John 5:11–13.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

The modern Turkish seacoast city of Izmir was once the biblical city of Smyrna, mentioned in the book of Revelation. This ancient city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants flourished in the late first and second centuries. It was a prosperous city, and it was fiercely loyal to Rome.

Once a year, all the citizens of Smyrna were commanded to burn incense to the Roman gods. Evidently, in the second century, Smyrna had a thriving Christian community, as well, and many were not going to comply. Polycarp, an early church leader, was martyred in Smyrna’s public square, burned at the stake for refusing to betray his Lord by burning incense to the Roman gods. When asked one last time to disavow Christ, the old man replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?”

Throughout the centuries, men and women have been willing to experience martyrdom rather than give up their faith in Christ. Their sacrifice rekindles our courage. The story of their commitment to Christ renews our own commitment. This week we will look at some biblical principles that motivated the Waldenses and later Reformers, such as Huss and Jerome, to stay faithful to the Lord no matter what—even at the threat of death from the same power that killed Polycarp: Rome, but now in the papal phase.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on *The Great Controversy, chapters 4–6, to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.*

Persecuted Yet Triumphant

Read Daniel 7:23–25 and Revelation 12:6, 14. What prophetic time periods are referred to in these passages?

Whenever God's people remain faithful to Him, Satan is enraged. Persecution often follows. The prophet Daniel described a time, still future to him, when the medieval church would "make war against" and "persecute" God's people (*Dan. 7:21, 25, NKJV*). The prophet John described this same period as a time when God's church would be forced to flee into the wilderness, where she would be "nourished for a time and times and half a time" (*Rev. 12:14, NKJV*). Revelation 12:6 adds, "The woman [the church] fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God" (*NKJV*). God's people were nourished in the wilderness. His Word strengthened and sustained them as the great controversy raged on during this long and dark period of papal domination.

God's people found a "place prepared" for them by God. In life's greatest challenges, God always prepares a place for His faithful followers. During the times of their greatest trial, His people have found refuge in His love and care. (*See Psalm 46.*)

The 1,260 days and the time, times, and half a time in Revelation 12:6, 14 are both referring to the same period (3½ times or years x 360 days per year = 1,260 days). Biblical prophecy is often written in symbols. In the prophetic portions of Daniel and Revelation, one prophetic day equals one literal year. We find this day-year principle in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

The day-year principle rests not on these two texts only, but on a broad scriptural foundation. William Shea, chronologist and Old Testament scholar, gives twenty-three lines of biblical evidence throughout the Old Testament for this principle. Bible interpreters have used it throughout the centuries.

The Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths were tribes that believed doctrines differently than Rome's official teaching. The 1,260 days began when the last of these barbarian tribes, the Ostrogoths, were driven out of Rome in A.D. 538. This period of spiritual darkness continued until A.D. 1798, when the Napoleon's general Berthier removed the pope from Rome. Countless Christians were martyred during this long period because they obeyed the Word of God. Even in death, they triumphed. In Christ they were free from the guilt and the dominion of sin, overcoming "through the blood of the Lamb." Christ's victory over Satan on the cross was their victory. Though they died, their death is only a rest until the return of Christ.

How has fulfilled Bible prophecy strengthened your faith?

Light Vanquishes the Darkness

Read Jude 3, 4. What’s the warning here and how did it apply to the later Christian church?

The book of Jude was written sometime before A.D. 65 to faithful Christians who were “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ” (*Jude 1:1, NKJV*). These faithful believers were urged to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, . . . who turn the grace of our God into lewdness” (*Jude 1:3, 4, NKJV*). This admonition meant even more to believers in the Middle Ages after pagan practices had flooded into the church and human traditions compromised the Word of God. For many centuries, people, such as the Waldenses, stood as champions for the truths of Scripture. They believed that Christ was their only mediator and the Bible their sole source of authority. “In every age there were witnesses for God—men who cherished faith in Christ as the only mediator between God and man, who held the Bible as the only rule of life, and hallowed the true Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 61.

Read Revelation 2:10. What promise does God give those who are faithful to Him in the face of death itself?

These words were written to the church at Smyrna. One of the city’s patron gods was Dionysius, the god of festivity and fertility. When the priests of Dionysius died, a crown was placed on their heads in their funeral procession. John contrasts this earthly crown placed on the head at death with the crown of life placed on the heads of those who are victorious over the forces of evil. The crown of life is presented to those who endured trials, difficulties, suffering, and death itself for Christ’s sake.

The crown of life inspires these faithful believers to endure death itself for Christ’s sake. The crown of life always motivates believers in challenging circumstances. It inspired the Waldenses through pain and persecution. They knew they would see Jesus one day and live with Him forever. The crown of life also speaks to us: we may go through trials now, but a crown of life awaits us as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

**What encourages you in challenging times? What frightens you?
What promises can you claim for those times?**

Courage to Stand

Compare Acts 5:28–32, Ephesians 6:10–12, and Revelation 3:11.
What basic principle is found in these texts?

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Waldenses, and each one of the Reformers, was their absolute allegiance to God, their obedience to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to the supremacy of Christ, not the papacy. Their minds were saturated with New Testament stories of faith and courage.

With Peter and the apostles they could say, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29, NKJV*). They grasped Paul’s admonition, “Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). They took seriously Jesus’ counsel, “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (*Rev. 3:11, NKJV*). Rather than submit to the traditions of the Roman church, these stalwart men and women of faith had the courage to stand for the truths of God’s Word.

The Waldenses were one of the first groups to obtain the Bible in their own language. A moving account of their hand copying of the Bible written by Jean Leger, a Waldensian Bible copyist, contains firsthand information of their work including drawings. The Waldenses secretly copied the Scriptures in their mountain communities of northern Italy and southern France. Youth at an early age were instructed by their parents to memorize large portions of Scripture. Teams of Bible copyists worked together to laboriously copy the Bible. Many of these Waldense young adults traveled throughout Europe as merchants quietly sharing the truths of Scripture. Some enrolled in universities and, as the opportunity arose, shared portions of the Scriptures with their fellow students. Guided by the Holy Spirit, at the right moment when they sensed a receptivity on the part of some honest seeker, select portions of their precious Scripture passages were given away. Many paid for their fidelity and devotion with their lives. Although the Waldenses did not understand every Bible teaching clearly, they preserved the truth of God’s Word for centuries by sharing it with others.

“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, / That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (*Prov. 4:18, NKJV*). Solomon compares the path by which God leads His children to a sun that rises higher and higher. If God simply threw a cosmic switch and the sun shone instantly in all its brightness, it would blind us. After darkness engulfed the world for centuries, God raised up men and women, committed to His Word, who continued to search for more.

How can we, reflecting the light of Christ, shine in our own community? Do we?

The Morning Star of the Reformation

Read Psalm 19:7–11, Psalm 119:140, Psalm 119:162, and Jeremiah 15:16. What similar attitudes did David and Jeremiah have toward the Word of God that were, really, the cornerstone of the Reformation?

Each of the Reformers “rejoiced” in God’s Word. They “delighted” in doing God’s will. They “loved” His law. One of the most significant foundational truths of the Reformation was the joy that studying the Scriptures brought. Bible study was not a laborious task. It was not a legalistic exercise. It was not a rigid requirement but a delight. As they studied the Scriptures, they were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“The character of Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scriptures. It was the Bible that made him what he was. The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul. An earnest, reverent study of the Scriptures, bringing the mind of the student in direct contact with the infinite mind, would give to the world men of stronger and more active intellect, as well as of nobler principle, than has ever resulted from the ablest training that human philosophy affords.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 94.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–3. What counsel did the apostle Paul give to Timothy regarding sharing the Word of God?

The truth of God’s Word and the joy of salvation in Christ so filled the hearts of the Reformers that they had to share it. John Wycliffe spent his life translating the Word of God into English for two reasons alone: the living Christ changed Him through the Word, and the love of Christ motivated him to share what he had learned with others.

Before Wycliffe, very little of the Bible existed in English. Though he died before Rome got to him, the papacy, undeterred, dug up his remains, burned them, and threw his ashes into a river. But just as those ashes were dispersed by the water, so God’s Word, the water of life, spread far and wide as a result of His work. Thus God used Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation.”

Cheered by Hope

Read Hebrews 2:14, 15. How did believers in the Middle Ages experience the reality of the great controversy?

What was it that cheered the faithful Waldenses during the horrible persecutions they faced? What gave Huss and Jerome, Tyndale, Latimer, and the martyrs of the Middle Ages courage to face the flames and the sword? Faith in the promises of God. They believed Christ's promise: "Because I live, you will live also" (*John 14:19*). They found His strength sufficient for life's greatest trials. They even found joy through fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. And their faithfulness was a powerful witness to the world.

They looked beyond what was to what will be. They knew that, through the resurrection of Christ, death was a defeated foe. For these courageous men and women, the stranglehold of death was broken. They clung to the promises of God's Word and came away victorious.

Read John 5:24, John 11:25, 26, and 1 John 5:11–13. What assurances do these promises give you personally? How do they help us in the trials of life?

John Huss would not falter in the face of imprisonment, injustice, and death itself. He languished in prison for months. The cold, damp conditions brought on a fever that nearly ended his life. Nevertheless, "the grace of God sustained him. During the weeks of suffering that passed before his final sentence, heaven's peace filled his soul. 'I write this letter,' he said to a friend, 'in my prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death tomorrow. . . . When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we shall again meet in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself toward me, how effectually He has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials.'—Bonnehose, vol. 2, p. 67. In the gloom of his dungeon he foresaw the triumph of the true faith."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 107, 108.

The apostle Paul's admonition speaks to us with increasing relevance today. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (*Heb. 10:23, NKJV*). As the promises of God sustained His people in ages past, so they sustain us today.

What might it mean to lose everything for Christ? What, in the end, do you really lose? (See Mark 8:36.) What lessons can we learn from the Waldenses and the Reformers that can sustain us in earth's final conflict?

Further Thought: “God permitted great light to shine upon the minds of these chosen men, revealing to them many of the errors of Rome; but they did not receive all the light that was to be given to the world. Through these, His servants, God was leading the people out of the darkness of Romanism; but there were many and great obstacles for them to meet, and He led them on, step by step, as they could bear it. They were not prepared to receive all the light at once. Like the full glory of the noontide sun to those who have long dwelt in darkness, it would, if presented, have caused them to turn away. Therefore, He revealed it to the leaders little by little, as it could be received by the people. From century to century, other faithful workers were to follow, to lead the people on still further in the path of reform.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 103.

“In another letter, to a priest who had become a disciple of the gospel, Huss spoke with deep humility of his own errors, accusing himself ‘of having felt pleasure in wearing rich apparel and of having wasted hours in frivolous occupations.’ He then added these touching admonitions: ‘May the glory of God and the salvation of souls occupy thy mind, and not the possession of benefices and estates. Beware of adorning thy house more than thy soul; and, above all, give thy care to the spiritual edifice. Be pious and humble with the poor, and consume not thy substance in feasting. Shouldst thou not amend thy life and refrain from superfluities, I fear that thou wilt be severely chastened, as I am myself.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 105, 106.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is “progressive light”? Why does God reveal truth gradually? How do these principles apply to God’s church today?
- 2 How do new discoveries of truth relate to previous truths that God’s people have understood? Why must new light never contradict old light?
- 3 No matter where you live, your culture is going to promote values, ideas, and moral codes that in some way conflict with what the Bible teaches. After identifying these areas of conflict, how do you see yourself and us, as a church, dealing with these challenges? How do we remain good citizens while at the same time not succumbing to whatever warped values our culture proclaims?
- 4 How does John Huss’s letter impact your thinking today? What impresses you about this letter?

Tale of Two Neighbors

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mussa's religion taught that it is wrong to raise pigs for sale. But Mussa worked as a pig farmer.

Nicolonaga's religion taught that it is wrong to divorce for any reason except sexual immorality. But Nicolonaga married three times and, on top of that, had three common-law wives at different times.

The two men, who were neighbors, lived lives that were far from their professed religious beliefs. But God had a plan for them in Mozambique.

One day, one of Mussa's pigs entered Nicolonaga's vegetable garden and caused considerable damage.

Nicolonaga was furious and demanded a fistfight. He won the brawl, and Mussa limped away bloodied and battered. But Mussa did not intend to give up. He vowed revenge through witchcraft. "You have thirty days to prepare for your death," he told Nicolonaga.

The next day, Nicolonaga woke up seriously ill. He spoke about Mussa's threat to his friends from the Seventh-day Adventist church, where he had once worshipped.

As Nicolonaga's condition steadily deteriorated, he grew worried. After 15 days, he asked church members to pray for him, and the pastor organized a prayer team to visit his house.

But Nicolonaga did not get better. Another week passed, and his options seemed few.

With the clock ticking down on Mussa's 30-day deadline, the pastor called for a night of fasting and prayer for Nicolonaga.

Early the next morning, Mussa knocked on the door of the pastor's house. He told a fantastic story about how his gods had fought with Nicolonaga's God, and Nicolonaga's God had won. He said he could no longer take Nicolonaga's life. He wanted to become a Christian.

"I want to worship Nicolonaga's God," he said.

Nicolonaga recovered from his illness, and both he and Mussa joined an Adventist baptismal class. Both gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism. Today, both are powerful forces for good in their region of Mozambique.

"God is powerful, and He answers the prayers of those who seek Him in faith," said Nelson A. Quenesse, the pastor.

After all, he said, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (*Heb. 11:6, NKJV*).

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *John 3:14, 15*

Study Focus: *John 14:6; Jude 3, 4; Rev. 2:10; 1 John 1:7; Heb. 11:6; Acts 4:12; Matt. 10:18–20; Rev. 1:9.*

Introduction: The early and medieval faithful Christians were characterized not only by their individual faithfulness to God and to His Word but also by the public stand they took in proclaiming the principles of God’s kingdom and of salvation. This week, we continue to witness the church’s stand on the side of God in the great controversy, throughout the periods of the Middle Ages and during the Reformation. During this time, the early Reformers and church leaders drew inspiration from the example of Christ and the apostles, as well as from martyrs, such as Polycarp.

This era of reform comprises no ordinary period of persecution, though; rather, it constitutes a prophetic period of 1,260 years, spanning from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. As in the case of the other prophetic periods of persecution, this era also points to the fact that the time of persecution is limited and that God is ultimately in control.

During this epoch, numerous Christians, such as the Waldensians, Wycliffe, and Huss, not only suffered persecution at the hands of God’s enemies but went on the offensive against the forces of spiritual darkness. The weapons of their offensive were not derived from their own strength, vision, or wisdom. Nor did these defenders of the faith mount an assault against the forces of evil with cunningly devised military strategies. Rather, the mission of the true Christians and the secret of their power consisted in their discovery of, love for, and proclamation of the Word of God, no matter the cost.

The work of the Reformers resulted in a double achievement for both humanity and God. Their first achievement was understanding that the love of God, as revealed in His Word, transforms the lives of His people and gives them hope in the kingdom of God. Their second achievement was the proclamation of Bible truth to the world in vindication of God’s identity and character, both of which were denigrated by the forces of evil in the great cosmic war. Then as now, spiritual darkness retreats in advance of the proclamation of the Word of God, which illuminates the world with hope and love.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson emphasizes three major themes:

1. The persecution that the medieval church waged against Bible-believing Christians transpired during a prophetic period, limited in time and under God’s ultimate supervision, as forecasted by Scripture.

2. The Waldensians, John Wycliffe, and John Huss illustrate what it means to stand on the side of God, witnessing to and proclaiming the Word of God in the darkest times of the cosmic conflict.
3. God's Word is our greatest source of hope and power, enabling us to live, and stand, on God's side.

Part II: Commentary

The Root of Persecution

Typically, the causes of early Christian persecution have been classified by church historians according to the following categories:

- *Economical* (e.g., a believer's profession of faith impacted, and often restricted, his or her transactions with local and regional businesses; see *Acts 19:23–27*)
- *Social* (e.g., Christians refused to participate in immoral activities)
- *Political* (e.g., Christians were made scapegoats to solve political problems)
- *Religious* (e.g., Christian beliefs, practices, and growth were perceived as an existential threat to dominant religions)

The root cause of all these persecutions was Satan. What was his motive in attacking Christians in his ongoing war against Christ? Wasn't it Satan, after all, who had originally accused God of control, oppression, and the restriction of liberty? Why would Satan now become the ultimate source of persecution and oppression?

We may postulate two possible reasons. First, Lucifer built his entire rebellion and his proposal for a new world order on lies, wild speculations, and baseless and pernicious accusations against God, His character, His status, and His sovereignty (*John 8:44*). As a liar, Satan distorted reality not only for others; he himself was affected by the lies he promulgated and by the act of lying itself. Deception distorts the very foundation of personhood. How quickly the lie becomes a controlling force in a person, attempting to assert itself as truth against the dictates of reason and conscience.

Although the lie exists only in the human mind, it controls one's actions and behavior. Thus, the lie causes catastrophic distortions to one's external reality. This distortion of reality happens because the lie cannot survive naturally; it does not correspond to reality, and, therefore, it wants to conform reality to its postulates. Otherwise, an encounter with the truth would simply dismiss the lie. Therefore, the lie needs to constantly force itself into existence. Any attempt to examine the truth is an existential threat to the lie, and thus, the one who accepts the lie will suppress any attempt at a search for the truth. For this reason, the

very evil nature of Lucifer, distorted by his own lies, now was acting to suppress any attempt of God's people to receive, discover, live, and proclaim the truth.

Second, there is no freedom without God. God Himself is free. He created us in His image: free, and, therefore, moral and loving. God not only created us free; as our Provider, He is the standard and the sustainer of our freedom. We cannot have real freedom without, or against, God. Any undertaking to establish complete autonomy apart from God, as Lucifer wanted, would mean depriving God of His status as Creator and Provider. Further, such an undertaking would be to dethrone Him. So, in order to achieve absolute autonomy, Lucifer originated his rebellion against God. However, Lucifer soon realized that to preserve his autonomy, he would constantly need to suppress the very existence of God, who by definition was the Creator and the Provider. Not only that, Lucifer also would need to suppress any desire, in himself and others, to return to God and to the principles of His kingdom. For this reason, Lucifer would need to exterminate any mention of God's existence. Thus, because God's people testify of God's existence and worship Him as their Creator and Provider, Satan could not allow the existence of God's people to continue unmolested. For to do so would mean acknowledging the collapse of his theories, namely, that there was freedom apart from God and His government.

Waldensians, Franciscans, and Scripture

By the beginning of the second millennium after Christ, the Roman Catholic Church had become a fearsome, centralized, and hierarchical behemoth in Europe. It also was a deeply corrupt institution. Church members could not overlook these developments. They felt the need to identify the causes of the church's corruption and to propose solutions. This process resulted in numerous religious and mendicant orders.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Francis of Assisi (1181–1226), the rather worldly son of a wealthy family, had a mystical conversion experience, after which he renounced whatever property he had and declared his intention to imitate Christ's poverty as much as possible. Francis founded the order of the Franciscans, which promoted poverty as a virtue. The Franciscans were known for their street preaching. In 1209, Francis sought the formal recognition of his order by Pope Innocent III, who was in power from 1198 to 1216. After an initial hesitancy, the pope granted Francis's request in 1210. Francis also founded a women's order, that of St. Clare, as well as the Third Order, comprised of laypeople.

Just several decades earlier, by the end of the twelfth century, Peter Waldo (d. 1205), a successful businessman in southeastern France, also experienced a conversion, renounced his riches, and preached voluntary

poverty. He also founded an order for the poor and appealed to the Papacy for approval. Although Pope Alexander III, who presided from 1159 to 1181, initially accepted Waldo's vow of poverty, his successor, Pope Lucius III, who presided over the papal see from 1181 to 1185, condemned Waldo and his movement, the Waldenses, as heretical, and banned them from preaching. Worse, over the next several hundred years, the Roman Catholic Church mounted horrific persecutions against the Waldenses that nearly led to their extinction.

So, let us consider the similarities before us between these two revivalist movements and religious orders, which emerged at about the same time in history. The founders of both movements, Francis of Assisi and Peter Waldo, had rather similar conversion experiences. Initially, both men founded their orders on similar spiritual rules: poverty and street preaching. Both men had similar desires to reform the church, and both appealed to the Papacy for approval of their orders. However, the two orders had radically different relations with the Papacy, and, consequently, they had different fates and endings. The Franciscans' request for papal approval was initially met with hesitancy but was later granted. In contrast, Waldo's vow of poverty, which was initially approved by the Papacy, was later rescinded. The Franciscans grew into one of the most influential Roman Catholic orders. (Today, we can see its influence most notably reflected in the fact that the current pope, although a Jesuit, honored Francis of Assisi by adopting his name.) On the other hand, the Waldensians endured one of the cruelest persecutions in history, persecution directed at their extermination.

The question of why is most pertinent here. What made the difference between these two movements or orders? The answer is in their ultimate allegiance. The Franciscans, very likely having learned from Waldo's experience, obtained papal approval by giving ultimate allegiance to the pope. That is, the Franciscans recognized the Papacy as the ultimate spiritual and temporal authority on earth and vowed to support unconditionally its authority in matters of doctrine and practice.

The Waldenses, on the other hand, believed that the ultimate authority for our lives and teachings sprang out of God's Holy Scripture. For this reason, they made Scripture the heart of their study, preaching, and living. Consequently, the Waldenses soon discovered and repudiated an increasing number of the Roman Catholic Church's falsehoods and compromises, such as:

- the veneration of the saints,
- most of the seven Catholic sacraments,
- the concept of transubstantiation,
- auricular confession of sins to human priests,
- the practice of infant baptism,

- the sale of indulgences,
- the doctrine of purgatory, and
- prayers for the dead.

Instead, the Waldenses proclaimed that God is the only Creator and Savior. They also proclaimed that Christ is the only Mediator, giver of grace, and forgiver of sins. They taught that worship was not restricted to the physical space of Roman Catholic churches but could be offered to God in any place.

The Waldenses did not, in their lifetimes, receive the reward for their faithfulness. But their ideas and their courage to stand for God's Word against compromise and the devil's falsehoods soon inspired the morning stars of the Reformation, Wycliffe and Huss, as well as the rest of the Reformation movement, from the sixteenth century onward. Not honored by humanity, these Reformers will be honored by Christ Himself at His glorious return. As part of their enduring legacy of faith, the Waldenses bequeathed to us their implicit trust in the authoritative power of Scripture. They understood that the success of Christianity resides not in the innate genius or stratagems of its members, but in their witnessing to others of what Christ has done and in pointing to God's Word as the source of divine revelation and salvation. For this reason, the Reformers simply followed the apostle Paul's exhortation to "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season" (*2 Tim. 4:2, ESV*). They spread, in their wake, Bibles, or fragments of the Holy Book, and left the results with the Holy Spirit. The Waldenses were motivated in this work by the foundational, and great, principle of *sola scriptura*; that is, that Scripture, by itself, is the Word of God, that the Bible has the power to communicate God's message to all humans, and that it is self-sufficient and makes sense to all its readers. It is precisely this ethos that later gave impetus to the identity, mission, unity, and life of the Advent movement in the 1800s.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. The Waldenses spread the Word of God in times of persecution. Maybe, like them, you are in a setting of persecution. Or perhaps you are currently in a situation of religious tolerance and peacefulness. Either way, what can you do to spread the Word of God in your circumstance in a meaningful way for the people around you?**
- 2. Develop a three-point plan to help you stand faithful on the side of God in times of persecution. Share your plan with your family or Sabbath School group.**

Faith Against *All* Odds



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Ps. 119:162; John 16:13–15; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 3:23, 24; Rom. 6:15–18.*

Memory Text: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (*Psalm 119:11, NKJV*).

The Protestant Reformers had something twenty-first century people desperately need—a purpose for their lives. In his book, *The Empty Self*, renowned American psychologist Philip Cushman discusses people who live purposeless lives. Their beliefs are shallow. Little of real significance matters to them, and they have nothing worth dying for, so they have little worth living for.

But the men, women, and children of the Protestant Reformation were dramatically different. They had an abiding purpose worth living for. What they believed mattered, and they were not willing to compromise their integrity. Their core beliefs were an inseparable part of them. To deny these beliefs was to deny their very identity. In the face of death itself, they had an inner peace.

In this week’s study, with examples from the Reformation, we will explore how the life-changing teachings of Scripture provide the basis for genuine purpose and true meaning in life. Understanding these eternal truths will prepare us for the final crisis in the great controversy between good and evil. The battle the Reformers fought is not yet over, and we have been called to pick up where they left off. We, too, can discover a God big enough for every challenge we face, a God who gives our lives meaning and purpose as nothing worldly ever could.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 7–11 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 4.

God's Word Alone

Read Psalm 119:103, 104; Psalm 119:147; and Psalm 119:162. What was David's attitude toward God's Word? How did this impact the Reformers, and how does it influence our lives today?

The Bible was the foundation of the Reformers' faith and the essence of their teaching. They understood that they were handling the inspired "word of God which lives and abides forever" (*1 Pet. 1:23, NKJV*). They treasured every word. As they read its pages and believed its promises, their faith was strengthened and their courage renewed. "So with all the promises of God's word. In them He is speaking to us individually, speaking as directly as if we could listen to His voice. It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power. They are leaves from that tree which is 'for the healing of the nations.' Revelation 22:2. Received, assimilated, they are to be the strength of the character, the inspiration and sustenance of the life. Nothing else can have such healing power. Nothing besides can impart the courage and faith which give vital energy to the whole being."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 122.

The Scriptures shine joy upon our sorrow, hope upon our discouragement, light upon our darkness. They give direction for our confusion, certainty in our perplexity, strength in our weakness, and wisdom in our ignorance. When we meditate upon the Word of God and by faith trust its promises, God's life-giving power energizes our entire being physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

The Reformers saturated their minds with Scripture. They lived by the Word, and many of them died because of the Word. They were not casual, complacent, careless Christians with a superficial devotional life. They knew that without the power of God's Word, they would not withstand the forces of evil arrayed against them.

John Wycliffe's passion was to translate the Bible into the English language so that the average person could read and understand it. Because that was illegal, he was tried for his faith, condemned as a heretic, and sentenced to death. At his trial, Wycliffe made an earnest appeal. "With whom, think you, are ye contending? With an old man on the brink of the grave? No! With Truth—Truth which is stronger than you, and will overcome you."—Wylie, book 2, chapter 13, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 90. Wycliffe's dying words were fulfilled as the light of God's truth dispelled the darkness of the Middle Ages.

In what ways have the Scriptures comforted you in times of trial?

Passing on God's Word

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and 2 Corinthians 2:14. What do these passages tell us about the confidence Paul had, despite the challenges he faced in proclaiming the truth of God's Word?

The apostle Paul faced overwhelming odds in his work of spreading the gospel; yet, he had the confidence that God's Word would eventually triumph, "for," as he said, "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (*2 Cor. 13:8*).

The Reformers faced similar trials; yet, by faith they remained faithful to God's Word. An example of courage in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds is William Tyndale. Tyndale's greatest desire was to give England an accurate, readable translation of the Bible. He determined to translate the Bible from the original languages and correct some of the errors in Wycliffe's translation about 140 years before. Eventually Tyndale, too, was arrested and tried. Many of his Bible translations, which were printed in Worms, Germany, were seized and publicly burned. His trial took place in Belgium in A.D. 1536. He was condemned on the charge of heresy and sentenced to be burned. His executioners strangled him while they tied him to the stake and then burned his body. His dying words were spoken with zeal in a loud voice and were reported as, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." God miraculously answered Tyndale's prayer.

Within four years of his death, four English translations of the Bible were published. In 1611 the King James Version of the Bible was printed, and it was largely based on Tyndale's work. The 54 scholars who produced the work drew heavily from Tyndale's earlier English translation. One estimate suggests that the Old Testament of the 1611 King James Bible is 76 percent Tyndale's translation, and the New Testament is 83 percent. In 2011 the King James Version of the Bible celebrated its 400th anniversary by passing the milestone of one billion Bibles in print. The King James Version has impacted tens of millions of people around the world. Tyndale's sacrifice was well worth it.

No matter how difficult it seemed or how challenging the circumstances were, Tyndale and his Bible-believing colleagues trusted that God was working out everything according to His will. Tyndale's life made a difference for eternity.

Read Daniel 12:3 and Revelation 14:13. How do these texts apply to Tyndale's life in a powerful way? Now think about your own life and your impact on others. What encouragement do these texts give regarding the opportunity you have to influence others for eternity?

Enlightened by the Spirit

One day while studying in the university library, Martin Luther came to a turning point in his own life. He discovered a Latin copy of the Bible. He never knew before that a book like this even existed. With sheer delight, he read chapter after chapter, verse after verse. He was amazed at the clarity and power of God’s Word. As he pored over its pages, the Holy Spirit illuminated His mind. He sensed the guidance of the Holy Spirit as truths obscured by tradition seemed to leap off the pages of Holy Writ. Describing his first experience with the Bible, he wrote, “O that God would give me such a book for myself!”

What principles can we take from the following texts regarding how we should interpret the Bible?

John 14:25, 26 _____

John 16:13–15 _____

2 Peter 1:20, 21 _____

What’s so powerful in these verses is the assurance that the same Holy Spirit that inspired Bible writers guides us as we read Scripture. He is the divine interpreter of divine truth. Unfortunately, many professed Christians today downplay the supernatural element in the Bible and exaggerate the human element. Since Satan can no longer keep the Bible from us, he does the next best thing: strip it of its supernatural character, make it merely good literature or, even worse, an oppressive tool of religion to control the masses.

The Reformers saw clearly that the Holy Spirit—not the priests, prelates, and popes—was the infallible interpreter of Scripture. There is an interesting exchange recorded between John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, and Mary, Queen of Scots.

“Said Mary: ‘Ye interpret the Scriptures in one manner, and they [the Roman Catholic teachers] interpret in another; whom shall I believe, and who shall be judge?’

“ ‘Ye shall believe God, that plainly speaketh in His word,’ answered the Reformer; ‘and farther than the word teaches you, ye neither shall believe the one nor the other. The word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, which is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places, so that there can remain no doubt but unto such as obstinately remain ignorant.’ ”—David Laing, *The Collected Works of John Knox*, vol. 2, pp. 281, 284, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 251.

Christ Alone . . . Grace Alone

Read Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 3:23, 24; Romans 6:23; and Romans 5:8–10. What do these verses teach about the plan of salvation?

God has provided salvation as a gift. His Holy Spirit leads us to accept by faith what Christ has so freely provided through His death on Calvary's cross. Jesus, the divine Son of God, offered His perfect life to atone for our sins.

Divine justice demands perfect obedience. Christ's perfect life stands in place of our imperfect lives. The divine law we have broken condemns us to eternal death. The Bible is clear. Through our sinful choices, we have "fallen short" of God's ideal for our lives. We have sinned. Left to ourselves, we cannot meet the just, righteous demands of a holy God. As a result, we deserve eternal death. But there is good news. The apostle Paul assures us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 6:23, NKJV*). It is a gift, undeserved; if it were by works, we would earn it, and if there is any one truth that shines out of the gospel, it is that we cannot earn salvation.

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformers discovered Christ and Christ alone as their source of salvation. It was then that Luther began to preach the message of Christ's saving grace. Crowds flocked to hear his heartfelt, life-changing messages. His words were like a drink of cold water in the barren desert of their lives. The people were shackled by the traditions of the medieval church and kept in bondage with centuries-old rituals that provided no spiritual life. Luther's biblical messages touched hearts, and lives were changed.

As Luther read the New Testament, he was overwhelmed with the goodness of God. He was amazed at God's desire to save all humanity. The popular view taught by church leaders at the time was salvation as partly a human work and partly God's work. Luther discovered that Christ's death on the cross was all-sufficient for all humanity.

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

What a powerful and wonderfully written summary of the gospel, that we could be justified by a righteousness "in which we had no share." What a promise!

If salvation is the work of God in Christ, what role do our good works play in the Christian life? How can we affirm the importance of good works in our experience without making them the foundation of our hope?

Obedience: The Fruit of Faith

Read Romans 3:27–31; Romans 6:15–18; and Romans 8:1, 2. What do these verses teach us about salvation through Christ’s righteousness alone?

A new wind was blowing through the Christian church in the days of Luther. Tens of thousands of people were taught to look away from their sinful selves and look to Jesus instead. No doubt these people, looking at themselves and what they were like, saw only things to discourage them. What believer today doesn’t have the same experience? That’s why we need to look, instead, to Jesus.

God’s grace changes us. One day, John Wesley attended a Moravian meeting in London. Wesley sat amazed as he heard Luther’s introduction to Romans read. For the first time in his life, he began to understand the gospel. Something stirred within, and he felt strangely drawn to this Christ who had given His life for him. He exclaimed, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”—John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (London: Stephen Couchman, 1793), p. 331.

Read 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18, Colossians 1:10, and Ephesians 4:18–24. What vital truths do these passages reveal about the Christian life?

The Reformers systematically studied the Word to discover more truth. Not content with the status quo, nor a rigid religious experience with little or no growth, they were constantly yearning to know Christ better. Many Bible-believing Christians in the Middle Ages paid an extremely high price for their commitment. They were tortured, imprisoned, exiled, and executed. Their properties were confiscated, their homes burned, their lands ravished, and their families persecuted. When they were driven from their homes, they looked for a city “whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb. 11:10*). When they were tortured, they blessed their tormentors, and when they languished in dark, damp dungeons, they claimed God’s promises of a brighter tomorrow. Although their bodies were imprisoned, they were free—free in Christ, free in the truths of His Word, free in the hope of His soon return.

When you look to yourself, what hope of salvation do you have?

Further Thought: “God’s faithful servants were not toiling alone.

While principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places were leagued against them, the Lord did not forsake His people. Could their eyes have been opened, they would have seen as marked evidence of divine presence and aid as was granted to a prophet of old. When Elisha’s servant pointed his master to the hostile army surrounding them and cutting off all opportunity for escape, the prophet prayed: ‘Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.’ 2 Kings 6:17. And, lo, the mountain was filled with chariots and horses of fire, the army of heaven stationed to protect the man of God. Thus did angels guard the workers in the cause of the Reformation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 208.

“When powerful foes were uniting to overthrow the reformed faith, and thousands of swords seemed about to be unsheathed against it, Luther wrote: ‘Satan is putting forth his fury; ungodly pontiffs are conspiring; and we are threatened with war. Exhort the people to contend valiantly before the throne of the Lord, by faith and prayer, so that our enemies, vanquished by the Spirit of God, may be constrained to peace. Our chief want, our chief labor, is prayer; let the people know that they are now exposed to the edge of the sword and to the rage of Satan, and let them pray.’ ”—D’Aubigné, book 10, chapter 14, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 209.

Justification by faith, the great truth that Luther discovered anew, is the foundation of the gospel, the truth upon which our hope of salvation rests. His hymn “A Mighty Fortress” powerfully articulates the gospel: “Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing, Were not the right man on our side, The man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He, Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), no. 506.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we explain the balance between grace and law, between faith and good works?
- 2 Why do you think it is so easy to let our minds slip into legalism? How would you define legalism? Why is it so detrimental to our Christian faith?
- 3 Are there dangers if the concept of “salvation by grace” is not rightly understood? Where might that misunderstanding lead?
- 4 What do some people mean when they use the term “cheap grace”? Is grace ever cheap?

Letters to the Rich and Famous

By REBECA RUIZ LAGUARDIA

A Spanish housewife read a startling passage that prompted her to embark on a 35-year letter-writing campaign to proclaim Jesus' coming to Spanish royalty, actors and singers, and the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

The missionary initiative was born when the housewife, my mother, Pilar Laguardia, read, "Men in business life, in high positions of trust, men with large inventive faculties and scientific insight, men of genius, teachers of the gospel whose minds have not been called to the special truths for this time—these should be the first to hear the call. To them the invitation must be given."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 230.

Reading the statement, my mother wondered, *How can I, a simple housewife, reach these people?* Moments later, she hatched a plan. She would listen to interviews with prominent people on television and the radio and read them in newspapers and magazines. She would seek any hint that they were interested in spiritual matters and introduce them to God. My mother found many opportunities. As soon as she heard someone say "I wish I had faith" or "I'm agnostic" or "I have an emptiness inside," she wrote a letter.

My mother has lost count of the number of letters that she has mailed to Spanish presidents and government ministers, bishops, priests, actors, singers, authors, journalists, and inmates. In addition to Fidel Castro, recipients include Spanish King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, Italian tenor Al Bano Carrisi, and authors Paulo Coelho and José Saramago. She never had trouble finding mailing addresses, even before the internet. Sometimes, newspaper articles offered clues. Other times, she called television stations and prisons.

Many people have responded. Madrid's mayor wrote, "I'm reading the Conflict of the Ages series, and I'm in the chapter 'The Awakening in Spain' in *The Great Controversy*. It's very interesting, and I will continue reading."

A bishop expressed gratitude for *Steps to Christ* and the Conflict of the Ages and wrote, "May divine mercy do what's needed to bring us light."

Another bishop said, "I want to study the Bible better and to serve God better. Maybe I need to correct some of my interpretations of the Bible."

Isabel, a physician who gave up her career to enter a cloistered convent as a nun, kept contact with my mother by phone and mail for months. In her first letter, she said, "You can send me all the Bible materials you want." So, my mother did, and a seed was planted. The results are in God's hands.

"The important thing is to plant seeds," my mother says. "The Lord says, 'Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days' " (*Eccles. 11:1, NKJV*).

Join the Seventh-day Adventist world church in the mass promotion and distribution of The Great Controversy in 2023 and 2024. Visit greatcontroversyproject.com for more information or ask your pastor.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Psalm 119:11*

Study Focus: *Ps. 119:162; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; John 16:13, 14; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 3:23-31; Rom. 5:8-10; Rom. 6:22, 23.*

Introduction: The study this week highlights three central principles that characterize the great controversy:

1. God's character is love and justice.
2. The only way to salvation is grounded in His love and righteousness.
3. The first two principles spring out of only one source: God's revelation as manifested in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures.

During medieval times, these three principles appeared to be forever engulfed in the devil's own darkness, never to be upheld, or proclaimed, again. But God called several great warriors, the Reformers, to stand up in the midst of the battlefield and raise the standard of God's truth once more. These warriors were few. But the paucity in the ranks of the Reformers was meant to show that the movement was not human but divine, both in its origins and in its operations; that is, we who are on God's side in the great controversy are not winning the battle by our wisdom or strength. On the contrary, we gain the victory in the great controversy only as we give witness to what the Word of God proclaims and to what the power of God's grace can do, and does, for us and in us. For these reasons, the Reformers understood that their mission was to proclaim the five great *solas*:

- *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone),
- *sola gratia* (grace alone),
- *sola fide* (faith alone),
- *solus* or *solo Christus* (Christ alone), and
- *solus Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone).

Lesson Themes: This week's lesson explores two major themes:

1. To be on God's side in the great controversy means to manifest an unshakable faith in Scripture as the most authoritative revelation of God's character and love for us.
2. To be on God's side in the great controversy also means to manifest an unshakable faith in God's grace as the sole source and way of salvation.

Part II: Commentary

Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide

Why is the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* so important to the

great controversy? How is it connected to salvation and to the other Protestant *solas*, especially *sola gratia* and *sola fide*? (Note: in accordance with Ephesians 2:8, this commentary treats *sola gratia* and *sola fide* as one.)

As we have seen, the great controversy started in heaven with Lucifer's false accusation that God is evil and that His reign is dictatorial. Afterward, the great controversy moved to earth, when Lucifer deceived our first parents into believing that they were, or could become, gods. In each stage of human history, the devil has worked with unsleeping malice to distort God's character, plans, sovereignty, and law. God responded by revealing Himself to humanity. God reveals Himself to us is through nature, history, human nature, and our consciousness. This divine disclosure is commonly called general revelation. However, general revelation is not specific because it is nonpropositional; that is, it is not transmitted directly into words. In addition, sin produced significant changes to nature, to history, to human nature, to morality, to human thinking, and to our perception of reality that poses challenges to our appreciation, and apprehension, of general revelation.

For these reasons, God reveals Himself principally through *special revelation*. Special revelation means that God reveals Himself personally and propositionally. In it, we can know and understand God's character, His personality, His plans, His dominion over human history, and His principles of action and rule. Before humanity's fall into sin, God's special revelation was manifested through His personal relationship and conversations with Adam and Eve. After the Fall, God did not abandon humanity, though sin gravely altered His relationship with the human race. He continued His personal revelation to Adam and Eve and to the rest of humanity through various means, such as theophanies (divine appearances in various forms) or prophetic experiences (dreams and visions).

For millennia, God worked through patriarchs and prophets to counter the devil's misinformation, but more important, to call humanity to understand Him correctly, to trust Him and to accept His plan of salvation. But God did not stop at this form of mediated revelation. God the Son, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, became a human being so that God could be with us in person (*John 1:1-3, 14*) and personally manifest His love to us. To save us, God took upon Himself the guilt of our sin, becoming sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Jesus Christ, the God incarnate, was the culmination of God's special and personal revelation to humanity, and even to the entire universe (*Heb. 1:1-3*). Through Jesus—in His incarnation, life, ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection—God revealed fully His character of love and righteousness, and His creative and salvific power. After Christ's ascension, God continued His prophetic revelation through

the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.

But God's special revelation does not stop at these historical, divine manifestations. Through the process of inspiration, God worked directly with, and through, prophets and apostles (*Eph. 2:20*) to record His special divine revelation so that it could be published and proclaimed to the entire world (*2 Tim. 3:16, Matt. 28:20*). This record of divine revelation is the Holy Scriptures, comprised of the Old and New Testaments and focused on God's revelation in Christ (*John 5:39, 40; Luke 24:27*).

Scripture is thus an integral part of God's special revelation, carrying the full imprimatur of divine authority as the Word of God. Through Scripture, God yearns for all people to know who He truly is and what He has done, and is doing, for their salvation.

Attacks

Satan employed several strategies to undermine God's special revelation. One such strategy was to cause humanity to doubt what God revealed in His Word. But after God's Word was proved true, time and again, the devil redirected his focus to his main strategy: making Scripture dependent on human interpretation and tradition. This shift occurred among God's people during Old Testament times. Thus, in New Testament times, some of them had a hard time accepting Jesus, not because Scripture was unclear but because they wanted to filter God's Word through their own tradition (*Mark 7:1-13*). Thus, the devil achieved his three-pronged goal: to "let go of the commands of God," (*Mark 7:8, NIV*), to set "aside the commands of God," (*Mark 7:9, NIV*), and to "nullify the word of God" (*Mark 7:13, NIV*).

Initially, as with the Jews, tradition may be well intended. But if not carefully regulated by biblical principles, tradition eventually gives rise to the very essence of sin: the removal of God's authority; an attempt to control Him; and the establishment of human authority over God, His kingdom, and His revelation. The establishment of tradition over the Word of God demolishes the very purpose and meaning of God's special revelation, which is to reveal His true character, purposes, and plans and to reveal the way of redemption. Instead of God's love and salvation by grace, people are taught to follow the instructions of the religious experts and to follow a burdensome way of salvation (*Matt. 23:4*).

Just as Christ did, the first Christians repudiated tradition and reinterpreted Scripture according to its intended sense (*John 5:39, 40; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 2:14-32*). Later, however, Christians followed the example of Judaism and developed their own interpretation of Scripture informed by various cultural, political, or philosophical presuppositions. By the time of Luther, Scripture and its interpretation was firmly in the hands of the church magisterium. According to their authority, the Bible was too divine and holy to be interpreted by "ordinary" people. Just as the scribes

did in the days of Jesus, the Roman Catholic prelates, priests, and scholars, under the guise of preserving the identity and unity of the church, claimed that not everyone could read and understand the Bible. Their withholding of the Scriptures from the people resulted in a lack of true knowledge of God and a dearth of spirituality, with dire results. Consequently, the absence of Bible truth led to the rampant activation of sin; soon the church claimed authority and control over God, His kingdom, and His way of salvation. Because of this trajectory, the church, like the Jewish leaders of old, imposed a “new” way of salvation: one by works. According to this teaching, people are saved by, and through, the church, by doing what the church tells them to do. Thus, the doctrine of the church was changed into an observance of hierarchical and sacramental rites, while the doctrine of salvation was changed to an acceptance of penance and indulgences. God was deprived of the very means He had created to reach out directly to all people, which is Scripture.

By establishing the *sola scriptura* principle, the Protestant Reformers rose against this demonic strategy operating within the church. The Reformers established that Scripture was the only form of special revelation that God gave to the church at that time and that people needed to be allowed to listen to God directly by reading the Bible themselves. *Sola scriptura* does not mean that the Protestant Reformers excluded any other form of knowledge, such as reason, arts, or experience. What the Reformers meant by *sola scriptura* is that Scripture is God’s authoritative revelation that shapes our worldview, telling us who He is, what He has done, who we are, and what happened to us at the Fall. Further, Scripture reveals how God saves us and what He expects of us. Thus, the authority of Scripture is above the authority of the church and above that of any other human authority or form of knowledge. The Word of God created the church, not the other way around.

The *sola scriptura* principle is directly and inseparably related to the establishment of another principle, *sola gratia/sola fide*. When Martin Luther read the Bible without the filter of tradition, he discovered in it the true character of God and His true way of salvation. In Scripture, the Protestants discovered the central message that God wanted to communicate to humanity in the midst of the great controversy: our God is a God of love and righteousness, not a tyrant. Even when we rebelled against Him, He died in our place. He offered us the gift of His righteousness, so that we might be restored to His kingdom when we accept this gift by faith.

The Liberal Assault

Unfortunately, in several centuries, Protestantism itself would be deluged by another of the devil’s strategies to sever God’s relationship with humanity. Liberal Protestants did not prohibit people from reading Scripture for themselves. Rather, these liberal thinkers reinterpreted the very definition and nature of Scripture. For them, the Bible was no longer the divine special revelation but merely a product of an evolving human

mind, culture, and morality. Thus, Scripture was not God's Word to humanity but mere human words, imaginations, or speculations about God, which sprang from people's natural or historical environment. For this reason, according to liberal Protestantism, a direct, natural, literal, and pious reading of Scripture, as the Word of God, is simply wrong. Rather, we must read Scripture in the same way, and with the same methodologies, required when reading literature, history, culture, or philosophy.

Consequently, instead of the traditional Protestant historical-grammatical method of reading Scripture, the adherents of liberal Protestant theology imposed upon Scripture the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. The Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* collapsed because, in this line of thinking, Scripture was now no longer the only authoritative source of God's special revelation. Instead, the Bible became just one of the many historic, or monumental, documents produced by humanity. Moreover, the *sola gratia-sola fide* principle also collapsed because both Scripture and the way of salvation became products of human genius and moral and religious effort. In addition, contrary to Scripture (*Acts 4:12*), Christ is merely one of the many ways of salvation. Tragically, this view of Scripture and this method of biblical interpretation have become dominant throughout Christian denominations.

As God's end-time remnant church, Seventh-day Adventists have been divinely entrusted with the mission to, once again, proclaim the foundational biblical principles of *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia/sola fide*.

Part III: Life Application

1. **Think of the five *solas* of the Protestant Reformers. How are they relevant to your life? How are they relevant to the religions and culture around you as well? What contributions could the five *solas* make to the community in which you live?**
2. **How does your community and/or culture view the Holy Scriptures? In what ways would you say that upholding Scripture in your particular religio-spiritual context is part of the great controversy?**
3. **What is your personal contribution to upholding Scripture in your local community as part of the great controversy? How can you be a Wycliffe, Tyndale, or Luther in your religio-spiritual context?**

A STORY TO TELL



Two options for sharing the mission story about Khachik in Sabbath School:

Option No. 1: Open the *Children's Mission* quarterly and show a photo of Khachik as you tell the story of how God saved his life in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Give the children a drawing of Georgia's flag, printed in the quarterly, to color as they listen.

Option No. 2: Make Khachik's story come alive with photos of him, Georgia, and a mission map with the Thirteenth Sabbath projects. At the end of the story, show a short video of Khachik acknowledging that his life is in God's hands.

How will you share the mission story next Sabbath?

Learn more in the *Children's Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/childrensmisson) and the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly (bit.ly/adultmission).



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THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

STUDY GUIDES

Kurt Johnson, DMin

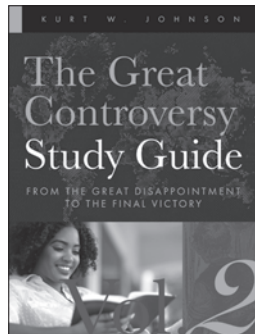
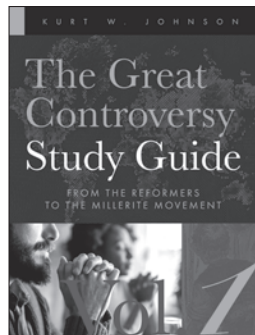
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The Two Witnesses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 11:3–6; Zech. 4:14; Rev. 12:5, 6, 14, 15; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 54:17; Ps. 119:89; Rev. 11:15–18.*

Memory Text: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (*Isaiah 40:8, NKJV*).

Through the centuries, God's Word has been dissected, doubted, and discarded. It has been chained in monasteries, burned in public squares, and torn to shreds. Its believers have been ridiculed, mocked, imprisoned, and even martyred. Through it all, God's Word has prevailed.

The medieval church persecuted faithful, Bible-believing Christians. Yet, God's Word illuminated the darkness. Oppression and persecution did not stop the proclamation of the Word of God. As English Bible translator William Tyndale was tried for his faith, he was asked who aided him most in spreading God's Word. He pondered the question and then answered, “the Bishop of Durham.” The magistrates were shocked.

Tyndale explained that on one occasion, the bishop purchased a supply of his English Bible translation and publicly burned them. What the bishop did not know at the time was that he was greatly aiding the cause of truth. He had purchased the Bibles at a much higher price than usual. With such a large purchase, Tyndale was able to print many more Bibles than were burned. Truth crushed in the dust has risen again and again to shine in all its brilliance.

This week, we explore one of the most vicious attacks on the Scriptures and the Christian faith. During the French Revolution, blood flowed in the streets of France. The guillotine was set up in Paris's public square, and thousands were slaughtered. Atheism became the state religion. Nevertheless, the witness of God's Word could not be silenced.

* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 12–17 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 11.

Two Witnesses

Read Revelation 11:3–6. List five identifying features of the two witnesses you discover in this passage.

In Zechariah 4, the prophet saw two olive trees on either side of a golden lampstand—the same imagery that we find here in Revelation 11. Zechariah is told that this represents “ ‘the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth’ ” (*Zech. 4:14, NKJV*). The olive trees feed oil into the lampstand so that it continues to give light. We are reminded of what the psalmist wrote: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Ps. 119:105, NKJV*). Oil represents the Holy Spirit (*Zech. 4:2, 6*). John’s vision in Revelation 11 is describing God’s Word being proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit to lighten the world.

These two witnesses can prophesy and keep rain from falling for as long as they predict. They can turn water to blood and smite the earth with plagues. By the word of God, Elijah said no rain would fall on Israel, and in answer to his prayer, there was no rain for three and a half years (*see James 5:17*). Then he prayed to God, and rain returned after the false prophets of Baal failed to end the drought (*1 Kings 17, 18*). Moses, through the Word of God, brought plagues of all kinds on the Egyptians, including turning water to blood, because Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go free (*Exodus 7*).

Those who seek to harm the Scriptures will be consumed by the fire that comes from their mouth. God says, “ ‘Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them’ ” (*Jer. 5:14, NKJV*). God’s Word pronounces judgment upon all those who reject it. His word is like fire in the mouth.

In John 5:39, Jesus declares that the Old Testament scriptures testify (bear witness) of Him. He also says that the gospel will be proclaimed “as a witness” to the whole world (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*), and the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, is the basis of that witness. A word from the same root (*martyrs*) as the words for witness used in these two verses appears in Revelation 11:3.

Who are these two witnesses? In view of these biblical points and the characteristics given in Revelation 11, we can conclude (not dogmatically, however) that the two witnesses are the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, communicating God’s light and truth to the world.

Many Christians today tend to downplay the Old Testament, to label it irrelevant and not needed, because we have the New Testament. What is so terribly wrong with that attitude?

Prophetic Time Periods

Compare Revelation 11:3 and Revelation 12:5, 6, 14, 15 with Daniel 7:25. What similarities do you see in these prophetic periods?

The two witnesses “ ‘will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth’ ” (*Rev. 11:3, NKJV*). This is the same time period as the 42 months during which the “Gentiles” (those who oppose God’s truth) will tread the Holy City underfoot (*Rev. 11:2*). The enemies of God tread underfoot God’s truth for 1,260 days ($42 \times 30 = 1,260$, each day symbolizing a year in apocalyptic prophecy), and God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, prophesy against them during this same time.

As we already have seen (see lesson 4), Daniel 7:25 says the little-horn power that would arise out of the breakup of the Roman Empire would persecute God’s people “ ‘for a time and times [literally, “two times”] and half a time’ ” (*NKJV*). A “time” is one year (360 days). So, three and a half times equals 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:6, 13 talks about 1,260 days of persecution for the people of God. Revelation 12:14 talks of a time, times, and half a time. Revelation 13:5 talks about 42 months. We find both 42 months and 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation 11:2, 3. All these prophecies describe different aspects of the same historical time period.

When the authority of Scripture is neglected, other (human) authorities arise instead. This often leads to persecution of those who uphold the Word of God, which happened during the time of papal domination from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798, when the medieval church descended into deep spiritual darkness. The decrees of men substituted for the commandments of God. Human traditions overshadowed the simplicity of the gospel. The Roman Church united with the secular power to extend its authority over all of Europe.

During these 1,260 years, the Word of God—His two witnesses—were clothed in sackcloth. Their truths were hidden under a vast pile of tradition and ritual. These two witnesses still prophesied; the Bible still spoke. Even amid this spiritual darkness, God’s Word was preserved. There were those who cherished it and lived by its precepts. But in comparison to the masses in Europe, they were few. The Waldenses, John Huss, Jerome, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, and a host of other Reformers were faithful to God’s Word as they understood it.

What are some of the teachings today, held by many Christians, that are based on tradition and not on the Word of God?

The Two Witnesses Are Killed

Read Revelation 11:7–9. Remembering that the language is symbolic, what do these verses predict would happen to God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments?

By A.D. 538, the pagan Roman Empire had collapsed. Justinian, the Roman emperor, surrendered civil, political, and religious authority to Pope Vigillius. The long period of the medieval church’s domination began. It continued until A.D. 1798. The French general Berthier, on orders from Napoleon, marched unopposed into Rome on February 10, 1798. Pope Pius VI was taken captive and brought back to France, where he died. This date marks the prophetically predicted end of the Roman Church’s secular authority, the 1,260 days or years as depicted in Daniel and Revelation (see yesterday’s study).

What a powerful manifestation of the truth of biblical prophecy! Daniel, writing more than 500 years before Christ, so accurately predicted events more than 2,300 years later. We can, indeed, trust the prophecies given in the Bible.

Meanwhile, during all this, the truth of the gospel was kept alive by the witness of the Word. But even greater challenges threatened biblical truth. The beast that ascended from the bottomless pit (Satan) made war against the Scriptures. He initiated new assaults on the Bible’s authority through the French Revolution that began in 1789.

In the French Revolution, the government officially established the Cult of Reason as a state-sponsored atheistic religion, intended to replace Christianity. A Festival of Reason was held nationwide on November 10, 1793. Churches across France were turned into Temples of Reason, and a living woman was enthroned as the Goddess of Reason. Bibles were burned in the streets. God was declared nonexistent, and death was pronounced to be an endless sleep. Satan worked through godless men to kill God’s two witnesses. Their dead bodies would “lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (*Rev. 11:8, NKJV*).

Egypt was a culture of many gods that denied the true God (*see Exod. 5:2*). Sodom represents gross immorality. In the French Revolution, God’s two witnesses—the Old and New Testaments—lay dead as a result of the atheism and immorality that ran rampant as normal restraints were loosed in revolution and bloodshed.

Revelation 11:9 says that the bodies of God’s two witnesses would lie unburied for “three-and-a-half days” (*NKJV*), i.e., prophetic “days” representing three and a half literal years. Atheism was at its height in the French Revolution, at least for about three and a half years. This period extended from November 26, 1793, when a decree issued in Paris abolished religion, to June 17, 1797, when the French government removed its restrictive religious laws.

The Two Witnesses Resurrected

Read Revelation 11:11. What prediction does this text make about the Word of God?

At the end of the French Revolution, God's Word would, figuratively, come to life again. There would be a mighty revival. Great fear would fall on those who saw God's Word once more become the living power of God unto salvation. At the end of the eighteenth century, God raised up men and women who were committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. People spread the message of the Bible rapidly. One such person was William Carey, who traveled to India and translated the Bible into dozens of local dialects. Propelled by the power of the Bible, missionaries were sent around the world.

It is not by accident that these worldwide mission endeavors arose after the French Revolution. God's Word is a living Word, and although to many it seemed "dead," it was still living in the hearts of believers and would rise again to full life, as Revelation's prophecies predicted. "The infidel Voltaire once boastfully said: 'I am weary of hearing people repeat that twelve men established the Christian religion. I will prove that one man may suffice to overthrow it.' Generations have passed since his death. Millions have joined in the war upon the Bible. But it is so far from being destroyed, that where there were a hundred in Voltaire's time, there are now ten thousand, yes, a hundred thousand copies of the book of God. In the words of an early Reformer concerning the Christian church, 'The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

Read Psalm 119:89 and Psalm 111:7, 8. What do these passages tell us about the Bible, and why we can trust it?

God's Word may be attacked, or suppressed, but it will never be eradicated. Even many professed Christians undermine its authority in various ways, questioning parts of the Bible or so emphasizing the human elements that it all but loses its divine stamp, and God's truth is undermined.

We must never, in any way, allow ourselves to be seduced by these attacks on the Word of God. It is still alive today, speaking to human hearts, breathing new life into those who are willing to listen to the Word and follow its teachings.

What prophecies in particular speak to you, personally, and why?

Truth Triumphant

Despite the attacks of the enemy, God’s work on earth will come to a glorious climax. The gospel will be preached to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). The great controversy between Christ and Satan will end with Christ completely defeating the powers of hell. God’s kingdom will triumph over evil, and sin will be eradicated forever from the universe. Revelation 11 begins with Satan’s attempt through the French Revolution to destroy the Christian faith and eradicate belief in God, but the chapter ends with the triumph of God’s kingdom over the principalities and powers of evil. It provides encouragement to all who go through fiery trials for the cause of Christ and His truth.

Read Revelation 11:15–18. According to these verses, what events take place at the close of time when the seventh trumpet sounds?

The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord. Christ is victorious. Evil is defeated. Jesus wins and Satan loses. Righteousness triumphs. Truth reigns. We would do well to heed the following instruction: “Whatever is built upon the authority of man will be overthrown; but that which is founded upon the rock of God’s immutable word shall stand forever.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

Read Revelation 11:19. What did John see opened in heaven? And what did he see as he looked up into heaven?

The temple of God in heaven was opened to John’s view. As he gazed into the Most Holy Place, he saw the ark of the covenant. In the Old Testament sanctuary, which was a type patterned after the great original in heaven, the glorious presence of God was revealed between the two angelic figures fashioned on the cover of the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was the law of God. Although we are saved by grace alone through faith, obedience to God’s law reveals whether our faith is genuine. The law of God is the basis or the standard of judgment (*James 2:12*). This fact becomes especially important and relevant at the end of time (*see Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*).

How does the striking contrast between the godlessness of the French Revolution and the glorious climax pictured in Revelation 11 speak to us today?

Further Thought: “When the Bible was proscribed by religious and secular authority; when its testimony was perverted, and every effort made that men and demons could invent to turn the minds of the people from it; when those who dared proclaim its sacred truths were hunted, betrayed, tortured, buried in dungeon cells, martyred for their faith, or compelled to flee to mountain fastnesses, and to dens and caves of the earth—then the faithful witnesses prophesied in sackcloth. Yet they continued their testimony throughout the entire period of 1260 years. In the darkest times there were faithful men who loved God’s word and were jealous for His honor. To these loyal servants were given wisdom, power, and authority to declare His truth during the whole of this time.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 267, 268.

“When France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible, wicked men and spirits of darkness exulted in their attainment of the object so long desired—a kingdom free from the restraints of the law of God. . . . The restraining Spirit of God, which imposes a check upon the cruel power of Satan, was in a great measure removed, and he whose only delight is the wretchedness of men was permitted to work his will. Those who had chosen the service of rebellion were left to reap its fruits until the land was filled with crimes too horrible for pen to trace. From devastated provinces and ruined cities a terrible cry was heard—a cry of bitterest anguish. France was shaken as if by an earthquake. Religion, law, social order, the family, the state, and the church—all were smitten down by the impious hand that had been lifted against the law of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 286.

“Unless the church will follow on in His [God’s] opening providence, accepting every ray of light, performing every duty which may be revealed, religion will inevitably degenerate into the observance of forms, and the spirit of vital godliness will disappear.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 316.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How are the principles of the great controversy revealed in the French Revolution?
- 2 When arguing that there is no God, one person wrote that “we are free to establish our own goals and to venture across any intellectual boundaries without looking for no-trespassing signs.” Why is that phrase “without looking for no-trespassing signs” so instructive to the motives many have for rejecting God? How might such ideas help explain some of what happened in the French Revolution?
- 3 What is the significance of John’s vision of the sanctuary as it relates to final events?

One Angel, Four Encounters

By NELSON CINCO REIS CHITAONGA
and CALAVETE SABONETE OSSIFO

Few people can say that they have seen an angel. Oyele says he has seen an angel—not just once, but four times.

Oyele slipped away from his childhood faith as he labored for three years away from home, helping construct a 250-mile (400-kilometer) road between the cities of Mocuba and Nampula in Mozambique. It was tough work, and he sought relief in ways that he knew violated God’s law.

One day, several strangers approached Oyele, who was drunk after work, and asked if he was aware that the Bible taught that the Sabbath was on the seventh day of the week. Oyele was convinced that the strangers were wrong. “Prove it to me from the Bible,” he said.

The strangers, who introduced themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, opened the Bible to the fourth commandment and read, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8, NKJV*). Then they turned to Ezekiel 20:20 and read, “Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God” (*NKJV*).

Oyele read and reread the verses over the next few days. He wondered if he was reading truth from God. Even though he had gone to church since he was a boy, he had never noticed the verses before.

As he thought and prayed, a shining angel appeared at night over the house where he was staying. “Strength!” the angel said. “You are on the right path.” The next night, he saw the angel again in the same place. “Strength!” the angel said. “You are on the right path.” The same thing happened the third night. Oyele went to an Adventist church the next Sabbath. After that, he worshiped regularly with the Adventists.

When his three-year contract ended, Oyele returned home and was surprised to find that his wife and children had joined the Adventist Church. He had had no contact with them during his extended absence.

“What a coincidence!” his wife said when she learned that Oyele had been going to an Adventist church. “Is this by chance?”

Back home, Oyele went to the Adventist church on Saturdays and his childhood church on Sundays. He wasn’t sure what to do. Then the angel appeared for a fourth time. “What you are studying is true,” the angel said. Oyele decided on the spot to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

There are few Adventists where Oyele lives, but God has blessed his efforts to share the good news that Jesus is coming soon. Oyele has helped start three house churches. “Evangelize anyone, even if they’re drunk,” he said. “God is the one who converts, and there are many people who God has prepared to accept the gospel. They only need to be touched by you.”

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Isaiah 40:8*

Study Focus: *Rev. 11:2–11; Rev. 12:6, 14, 15; Zech. 4:14; Ps. 119:105; John 5:39; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 40:8; Ps. 119:89; Isa. 54:17.*

Introduction: Continuing the theme of the previous weeks, this study centers on the foundational role, authority, and power of the Word of God in the great controversy. Specifically, we will focus our attention on the Word of God as represented by the two witnesses who preached in sackcloth for the prophetic period of 1,260 years.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the devil directed his efforts and energy against God’s Word, the Scriptures, and against God’s people. The mission of the church was to testify of Jesus Christ and His Word, which is the revelation of God’s character and will. In Revelation 11, the Word of God is represented by the Old Testament expression the two witnesses (*Zech. 4:14*). This metaphor speaks to the fact that the Word of God has a perpetual presence and power, being of divine origin, having been transmitted through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The parallel between Jesus and the Word is obvious: in the same way that Jesus ministered three and a half years under the pressure and persecution of His own people, who were supposed to receive Him, Scripture ministered to the world for three and a half prophetic years, or 1,260 historical years, under the pressure of the very people that claimed to be the guardians of the Word of God. Just as Jesus, the Word of God, died and was resurrected, Scripture, the Word of God, “died and was resurrected.” As Jesus was triumphant, so His Word will be triumphant, and His people also will be triumphant in Him and in His Word.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson explores two major themes:

1. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 symbolize the Holy Scriptures. The two witnesses ministered in a time of persecution, during the prophetic period of 1,260 years, between A.D. 538 and A.D. 1798.
2. At the end of this prophetic period, the two witnesses died and were resurrected, just as Jesus died and was resurrected, pointing to the fact that God will have, through Jesus and in His Word, the final victory in the great controversy.

Part II: Commentary

Prophesying in Sackcloth

Why do Adventists maintain that the two witnesses, or the Holy Scriptures,

were suppressed during the Middle Ages? Did not the people of that time know about the Bible? Were not the cathedrals and churches decorated with biblical themes? Were not the scholastics teaching their students from the Bible in their university classes? The answer to all of these questions is yes. So, why insist that the 1,260-year period, between A.D. 538 and A.D. 1798, was a time of persecution, a time when the two witnesses wore sackcloth, a symbol of crisis and humiliation?

Before answering the question, let us complicate the issue a bit further. Some may be quick to point out that persecution against Scripture existed *before* A.D. 538. Indeed, the Romans attempted to mock or suppress Scripture during the early persecutions against Christians. The pagan emperor Diocletian (emperor A.D. 284–305) specifically targeted the Bible to be annihilated, ruling that Christians must renounce, and denounce, their holy book. While most Christians did not have Bibles, some who had biblical manuscripts surrendered them to be publicly burned and desecrated; others died for their faith instead. Eventually, the Word of God emerged honored and victorious from this onslaught. At the end of the 1,260-year prophetic period, French revolutionaries, as well as other later dictatorial atheistic and Communist regimes, also targeted Christian Scripture for annihilation, just as Diocletian had.

Unlike Diocletian, however, the French Revolutionaries succeeded in annihilating Scripture in their territory for a short period of time (*Rev. 11:7–9*). True, both Diocletian and the insurrectionists of the French Revolution sought to denigrate the Word of God; but the French revolutionaries did so by attempting to utterly annihilate it instead of permitting it to prophesy in sackcloth. In addition, the period of 1,260 years, during which the two witnesses suffered humiliation, far exceeds the first two or three centuries of persecutions, the ten years of persecution under Diocletian, or the few years of the French Revolution. For these reasons, we must look elsewhere in history to discover the meaning of the Word of God ministering in sackcloth.

Thus, to understand when, and how, the two witnesses or the Scriptures ministered in sackcloth, we need to emphasize two facts. One, the two witnesses ministered during a period of 1,260 years. As our lesson details, Seventh-day Adventists understand that this period spanned from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798 and encompassed the rise, the establishment, and the rule of the Roman Catholic Church. Two, the two witnesses were not killed during this period but were clothed in sackcloth.

The allusions to Zechariah (*Rev. 11:4, Zech. 4:14*), Elijah (*Rev. 11:5, 6*), and Moses (*Rev. 11:6*) in Revelation 11 seem to suggest that the prophetic ministry of the two witnesses, wearing sackcloth, took place within the context of the persecution of God's people. Revelation 11 does not say that the two witnesses were killed during the 1,260 years; rather, they were empowered by God to prophesy wearing sackcloth during

this time (*Rev. 11:3*). Elijah wore sackcloth during a time of profound spiritual crises in Northern Israel, when that nation had consciously and deliberately changed God's law, placing themselves above, and against, God's revelation. Likewise, the major question is not whether the Roman Catholic Church had any knowledge of Scripture, or used Scripture at all to do theology, during the 1,260 years of church supremacy and persecution. The question is: What was the church's attitude toward Scripture throughout this persecuting period? The Roman Catholic leaders' attitude closely resembled the attitude of Northern Israel: they knew God's special revelation, but they deliberately placed themselves above it.

The Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* emphasizes that Scripture is the complete, self-sufficient, and clear revelation of God. Whenever the divine revelation is an inconvenience, or hindrance, to a human project, the devil and his false teachers introduce traditions to justify reinterpreting the inconvenient biblical passages; or they simply introduce new teachings or practices that are crassly against Scripture. Church tradition and the magisterium are portrayed as the exclusive interpreters of the Bible and as the only authority with the power to create and establish dogmas. God's Word is diminished, denigrated, and placed under the control of the church, though Scripture clearly stipulates that it must be the other way around. In this regard, several quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* are simply astonishing.

According to the *CCC*, God's revelation "through his Word in the Holy Spirit" is "present and active in the Church," and thus church tradition is an inseparable part of God's special revelation, just as the prophets and the apostles (*CCC*, p. 79). For this reason, "the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation are entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence' " (*CCC*, p. 82).

True, the *CCC* does stipulate that the magisterium, being the only interpreter of Scripture (*CCC*, pp. 86, 100), "is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant" (*CCC*, p. 86). However, the magisterium does not draw only from Scripture but from both Scripture and tradition (*CCC*, p. 82). Because tradition is of equal authority with Scripture, and because the magisterium ("the Pope and the bishops in communion with him") has the sole authority to "authentically" interpret the Word of God (*CCC*, p. 100), the magisterium will draw materials from both tradition and Scripture, whenever convenient.

The experiences of both Northern Israel and Judah show that, when tradition is placed on the same level with Scripture, Scripture is not only relegated to a lower level, from the divine to the human, but eventually

is nullified altogether (*Matt. 15:3–6*), having been misconstrued to suit a human worldview. Thus, its authority is annihilated. This annihilation of biblical authority is exactly what happened in the Roman Catholic Church. As the church increasingly emphasized tradition and accepted philosophical presuppositions, its teachings and practices changed so radically that the church was no longer compatible with the model of the apostolic church.

Thus, in misinterpreting and teaching directly against Scripture, the Roman Catholic Church claimed the following errors:

- That it has power to change God's Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week, thus deliberately transgressing the fourth commandment and diminishing God's status as Creator and King.
- That Christ left the church in the charge of the bishop of Rome and of the sacramental ecclesiastical hierarchy.
- That the church is a necessary element of God's salvation.
- That the church and the saints can mediate for people and offer them merit for salvation.
- That Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born with a sinless nature (immaculate conception).
- That Mary has a special role in salvation being called Mediator (Mediatrice), Advocate, Helper, titles reserved in Scripture only for Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- That salvation is by works, such as penance and indulgences.
- That the soul is immortal, hell is eternal, and purgatory exists.
- That there are seven sacraments that impart salvation.
- That infants must be baptized.
- That the very substance of the bread and wine are literally changed into the body and blood of Christ during the Mass (transubstantiation).
- That the so-called laity cannot share in the cup during the Communion.
- That the priests themselves are a sacrament and impart salvation.
- That the priests of the church must not marry, having to remain celibate.
- That Christians can and, in fact, must venerate and worship images and statues, thus flagrantly transgressing the second commandment.

With such a stunning misinterpretation, or flagrant rejection, of Scripture and its teachings for more than a millennium in and by the self-professed people of God, it comes as no surprise that God describes the Scripture, or His two witnesses, as dressed and prophesying in sackcloth.

Yes, eventually, the two witnesses were killed in a secular, as opposed to a religious, context (during the French Revolution). However, the atheistic French Revolution itself was a reaction to the long-standing lawlessness of the Catholic Church against God Himself, against His special revelation, and against humanity, who is so desperately in need of salvation. The great

controversy is complex. The devil aims to destroy God's revelation in His Written Word. But he especially aims to suppress the Word of God in His church. This satanic objective has not succeeded, nor ever will it. The Protestant *sola scriptura*, the biblical and missionary societies, the Adventist three angels' messages, and the loud cry will prevail. God's Word will be ever clearer in its communication of God's love.

Part III: Life Application

1. **Imagine you lived around year 700, some 160 years after A.D. 538, at the beginning of the 1,260-year prophetic period. Imagine also that, as a student of the Bible and as a devout Christian, you understood that the 1,260 years of persecution against the two witnesses had barely begun, and, therefore, many centuries more would pass until the persecution expired. How would you keep your hope, especially as you and your descendants faced the long prospect of at least a thousand years more of waiting? How would you keep your devotion to God burning and commitment to preaching the Word of God, knowing that victory was more than 1,000 years away? How would you prepare your family after you for such a prospective wait? How can your answers inspire your faith today as we await the return of Jesus?**

2. **Although the French Revolution impacted the entire world with its worldview, spirit, and actions, this impact was felt more directly within the Western world. If you live in the West, how might you continue to celebrate the resurrection and the ministry of the two witnesses? If you live in other parts of the world, which were not impacted directly by the secular or atheist revolution in France, how has your local society or community tried to kill the two witnesses or make them minister in sackcloth? How could you and your church partake in the resurrection and ministry of the two witnesses?**

Motivated by Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:27, 30, 31; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; Dan. 8:14; Dan. 9:20–27; Ezra 7:7–13.*

Memory Text: “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’ ” (*Isaiah 25:9, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus is one of the central themes of Scripture. It is a golden thread that runs through the Bible’s sacred pages. One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ’s second coming in the Old Testament. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the return of Christ. One in every 25 verses mentions it. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event.

After the Reformation in Europe foundered and was hampered by divisions and strife, Protestantism took root in the New World, including the United States, where many sought to pick up the mantle of truth, including the truth about the Second Coming.

Among them was a Baptist farmer named William Miller. From his study of the Bible, he believed that Jesus was coming soon, even in his lifetime, and then began preaching that message. Miller started a movement that, though facing a great disappointment, opened up to many people Bible truths that remain relevant to this day.

In this week’s lesson, we will examine why the second coming of Christ has filled the hearts of believers with joy through the centuries and how we can be ready for that great event.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 18–21 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.

The Promise of His Return

The Protestant Reformers and the pilgrims who left from Holland for the New World longed for the coming of Jesus. For them the second coming of Christ was a joyous event that they eagerly anticipated. John Wycliffe looked forward to the coming of Christ as the hope of the church. Calvin spoke for all the Reformers when he talked of the glorious return of Christ as “of all events most auspicious.” For faithful men and women of God, the second coming of Christ was something to be embraced, not something to be feared.

Read John 14:1–3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, and Titus 2:11–14. Why did these Bible passages give such hope to Christians through the centuries?

It is easy to understand why a belief in the second coming of Christ has brought such hope and joy to Bible-believing Christians. It points forward to the end of sickness, suffering, and death. It ushers in the end of poverty, injustice, and oppression. It anticipates the end of strife, conflict, and war. It forecasts a future world of peace, happiness, and enduring fellowship with Christ and the redeemed of all ages forever.

“The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour’s parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the ‘appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ was the ‘blessed hope.’ When the Thessalonian Christians were filled with grief as they buried their loved ones, who had hoped to live to witness the coming of the Lord, Paul, their teacher, pointed them to the resurrection, to take place at the Saviour’s advent. Then the dead in Christ should rise, and together with the living be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. ‘And so,’ he said, ‘shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.’ 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 302.

Why is the Second Coming so important to our faith? Especially because we know that the dead sleep (see lesson 10), why does this teaching take on such importance? Without it, why would we be, as Paul said, in an utterly hopeless situation (see 1 Cor. 15:15–18)?

Anticipating the Time

Although the Protestant Reformers believed in the literal, visible, audible, and glorious return of Christ, gradually the understanding of this biblical truth changed. Popular nineteenth-century preachers taught that Christ would come to establish His kingdom on earth and usher in 1,000 years of peace. This led to spiritual lethargy and an apathetic commitment to spiritual values.

Similarly, Christ's disciples misunderstood the nature of the Messiah's coming. They thought that He would come as a conquering general who would break the yoke of Roman bondage, not One who would deliver them from the condemnation and shackles of sin. Thus, they failed to understand the manner of His coming.

Read Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 1:7; and Matthew 24:27, 30, 31. What do these verses teach us about the manner of our Lord's return?

When Christ came the first time as a babe in Bethlehem's manger, very few people discerned His coming. But when He comes the second time, "every eye" will see Him come. Every ear will hear the trumpet blast of His return. Every human being on earth will behold His glory. We need not be deceived. The Scriptures have made the events surrounding His return abundantly clear.

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again His banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

An early Adventist leader, Luther Warren, used to tell young people, "The only way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to get ready and stay ready." The message of Christ's soon return is an urgent appeal to each one of us to examine our hearts and evaluate our spiritual lives. It is a call to godly living. There can be no neutrality in the blazing light of the glory of Christ's return.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:2–5 and Hebrews 9:28. What encouragement do these verses give us regarding the manner of Christ's coming?

William Miller and the Bible

Just as God used the Protestant Reformers to rediscover the truth about justification by faith in Christ alone, He used William Miller to rediscover the truth about the manner of Christ's second coming. As Miller studied Scripture, he discovered a Christ who loved him more than he could possibly imagine. With his Bible, a pen, and a notebook, he began reading starting with Genesis and read no faster than he could understand the passage at hand. By comparing scripture with scripture, he allowed the Bible to explain itself.

Read Isaiah 28:9, 10; Proverbs 8:8, 9; John 16:13; and 2 Peter 1:19–21. What principles of Bible interpretation do you discover in these passages?

As William Miller compared scripture with scripture, the mysteries of the Bible were opened to him. He searched as one searching for a hidden treasure and was richly rewarded. The Holy Spirit opened the Word of God to his understanding. He approached prophecy with the same diligence in Bible study as the other biblical passages he was studying.

Read Daniel 1:17; Daniel 2:45; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; and Revelation 1:1–3. What do these passages teach us about understanding the prophecies of the Bible?

The symbols in the prophetic books are not locked in mystery. A loving God has given us His prophetic Word to prepare us for the climactic events soon to unfold in this world. William Miller clearly understood that prophecy was its own best interpreter. The symbols of prophecy are made clear by the Bible itself. Beasts represent kings or kingdoms (*Dan. 7:17, 23*). Wind represents destruction (*Jer. 49:36*). Water represents peoples or nations (*Rev. 17:15*). A woman represents the church (*Jer. 6:2, Eph. 5:22–32*). The time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation also are given in symbolic language, with one prophetic day representing one literal year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). As William Miller applied these principles of biblical interpretation, he was startled at what he discovered regarding what he believed to be the timing of Christ's return.

Why is a correct understanding of prophetic symbolism so important for our faith?

The 2,300 Days of Daniel 8:14

William Miller observed that events predicted by the prophets were precisely fulfilled: the 400 years of the sojourn of Abraham’s descendants, Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the 70 years of Israel’s captivity, and Daniel’s 70 weeks allotted to Israel (*Gen. 15:13, Num. 14:34, Jer. 25:11, and Dan. 9:24*).

Read Mark 1:15, Galatians 4:4, and Romans 5:6. What do these verses tell us about God’s timetable for the First Advent?

As Miller studied the prophecies, comparing scripture with scripture, he concluded that if God had a divine timetable throughout the Bible, God must have a divine timetable when it comes to our Lord’s second coming.

Read Daniel 8:14. What event was to occur at the end of the 2,300 days?

William Miller accepted the popular view that the “cleansing of the sanctuary” was the purification of the earth by fire. He diligently studied the Scriptures to understand an event of such stupendous importance. He discovered the linkage between Daniel 8 and Daniel 9. In Daniel 8, the angel was instructed to “make this man understand the vision” (*Dan. 8:16*). By the end of the chapter, the only portion of the entire vision of Daniel 8 left unexplained (*see Dan. 8:27*) was the part about the 2,300 days. Later the angel returned to Daniel and declared, “ ‘I have now come forth to give you skill to understand’ ” (*Dan. 9:22, NKJV; see also Dan. 9:23, 25–27*). This was to help him understand about the 2,300 days.

We know this because, after bidding Daniel to “ ‘consider the matter, and understand the vision’ ” (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*), the first words of the angel were: “ ‘Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city’ ” (*Dan. 9:24, NKJV*). The word translated “determined” literally means “cut off.” Seventy weeks, 490 years, are to be cut off. But from what? The vision of the 2,300 days, obviously—the only part of Daniel 8 that Daniel did not understand, and that the angel now came to explain.

And since the starting point of the 70 weeks was “ ‘from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem’ ” (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*), Miller knew that if he had that date, he could know the beginning of the 70 weeks and the 2,300-day prophecy.

The Longest Prophetic Time Line

Read Ezra 7:7–13. When was the decree issued to allow Israel’s captives in Persia to go free to rebuild their temple?

The decree was issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 457 B.C. This decree was the last of three decrees to allow the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and restore temple worship services. This third decree was the most complete and marks the beginning of the 2,300-day prophecy.

Read Daniel 9:25, 26. When would this entire prophetic period begin? What major events do these verses predict?

In this remarkable prophecy, Daniel predicted that from the “going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” to the Messiah would be 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 prophetic days, or literal years. Since the decree went forth in the fall of 457 B.C., 483 years extend to the fall of A.D. 27. The word “Messiah” signifies “the Anointed One.” In the autumn of A.D. 27, Christ was baptized and received the anointing of the Spirit (*Acts 10:38*). After His baptism, Jesus went into Galilee, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled’ ” (*Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV*).

In the spring of A.D. 31, in the middle of this last prophetic week, three and a half years after His baptism, Jesus was crucified. The system of offerings that pointed forward to the Lamb of God ended with Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Type had met antitype, and eventually all the sacrifices and offerings of the ceremonial system ceased.

Read Daniel 9:27. How would the 70-week prophecy end?

The 70 weeks, or 490 years, especially allotted to the Jews, ended in A.D. 34 with the rejection by the Sanhedrin of the gospel message (*Acts 6:8–7:60*).

Subtracting 490 years from the 2,300-year prophecy leaves 1,810 years for the completion of the prophecy. This leads us to A.D. 1844. William Miller and the early Adventists believed that the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was the earth, and they assumed that Christ would come to purify the earth by fire in 1844. (See the chart on Friday.)

Further Thought: Look at the following chart for the prophecies of the 70 weeks and the 2,300 days. The prophecies start in 457 B.C. and foretell the events surrounding “Messiah the Prince,” upon whom the 70-week prophecy is grounded. With that solid foundation, the 2,300-day prophecy ends in the year 1844.

| 2,300 days (2,300 years) | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------|
| <u>70 weeks (490 years)</u> | <u>1,810 years</u> | |
| 457 B.C. | A.D. 34 | 1844 |
| | | |

“Like the first disciples, William Miller and his associates did not, themselves, fully comprehend the import of the message which they bore. Errors that had been long established in the church prevented them from arriving at a correct interpretation of an important point in the prophecy. Therefore, though they proclaimed the message which God had committed to them to be given to the world, yet through a misapprehension of its meaning they suffered disappointment.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 351, 352.

“Yet God accomplished His own beneficent purpose in permitting the warning of the judgment to be given just as it was. The great day was at hand, and in His providence the people were brought to the test of a definite time, in order to reveal to them what was in their hearts. The message was designed for the testing and purification of the church. They were to be led to see whether their affections were set upon this world or upon Christ and heaven. They professed to love the Saviour; now they were to prove their love. Were they ready to renounce their worldly hopes and ambitions, and welcome with joy the advent of their Lord? The message was designed to enable them to discern their true spiritual state; it was sent in mercy to arouse them to seek the Lord with repentance and humiliation.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 353.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What lessons can we learn from William Miller’s experience? Does God at times overrule our mistaken understanding?
- ❷ Why is an understanding of Daniel 9:24–27 so significant in establishing the integrity of the Bible and the divinity of Christ?
- ❸ What role does understanding prophecy play in the plan of salvation? Why is prophecy so significant in the plan of God?

Unlocking Hearts

By F. EDGAR NUNES

On a recent Sabbath, two Syrian refugees attended the worship services at the Kingston Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Canadian province of Ontario. As the church's pastor, I rejoice at the sight of any visitor, but to be able to welcome a mother and daughter who belong to another world religion was an unexpected privilege. How did they hear about us? Who invited them to our worship service?

It turned out that long before they set foot in our church, the Syrian refugees had been befriended by one of the church members, Shirley.

Shirley has a big heart for strangers, especially refugees, and she greets people with a warm smile that melts barriers away. She loves to help in any way she can, and people are moved by her kindness and compassion. They readily accept her invitations to family dinners and summer picnics. The Syrian mother and daughter, Eman and Heba, accepted Shirley's invitation to come to church on Sabbath.

After the worship service, we visited outside the sanctuary. Eman and Heba seemed happy to talk and readily accepted my offer to pray for them. Afterward, I asked if they would be interested in a copy of the Gospel of John in Arabic, printed by the Canadian Bible Society.

"I won't be offended if you say, 'No,'" I said.

The mother accepted the book.

"We believe Jesus is a prophet, so we will read the book," she said.

A few days later, Shirley called to ask if I spoke "Sudanese."

"I have another family from Africa that I would like you to visit," she said.

Shirley's genuine love and warmth for strangers keeps unlocking hearts. Her example inspires us to follow Christ's method. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Shirley mingles with people, listening, serving, and showing disinterested love and acceptance, thereby breaking down the most formidable barriers. We also can go from heart to heart as Shirley does every day.

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (*John 13:35, NKJV*). The love that reveals we are His disciples is the same power that opens the hearts of strangers and moves them to consider becoming His disciples.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Isaiah 25:9*

Study Focus: *Matt. 13:30, 38–41; 2 Tim. 3:13; Matt. 24:27, 30, 31; 1 Cor. 15:51–53; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Dan. 8:14; Dan. 7:9–14; Dan. 9:20–27; Rom. 13:11.*

Introduction: A crucial point in the great controversy was the coming of the Messiah. During the 70-week prophetic period, the devil fought to destroy Israel’s faith in the first coming of the Messiah as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, prophecies, and types. In the same way, by the end of the 2,300-year prophetic time period, the forces of evil tried to obscure its fulfillment in the pre-Advent judgment, occurring in the heavenly sanctuary, and to suppress the proclamation of the second coming of the Messiah.

By the end of the 70-week prophetic period, there were faithful people of God, such as Simeon, who waited for “the consolation of Israel” (*Luke 2:25, NASB*), or Anna and others “who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (*Luke 2:38, NASB*). These faithful few saw in Jesus the fulfillment of the promise of the first coming of the Messiah. In the same way, there were, by the end of the 2,300 years, believing people, such as William Miller, whose “present truth” message focused on the hope in the soon appearing of the Messiah. Miller did not discover this message through a philosophical methodology but through a literal reading of Scripture. This illustrates, once again, the essentiality of Scripture to the great controversy.

Lesson Themes: This study focuses on two major themes:

1. Although the exact date and year of Christ’s second coming is not given in the biblical prophecies, the 70-week and 2,300-days prophecies, which are related to both the first and the second coming of Jesus, have been fulfilled with precision. Their precise fulfillment assures us that Christ’s second coming is certain and imminent.
2. The Adventist people were called by God to proclaim to the world the fulfillment of the longest time prophecy in the Bible. God also appointed them to call the world to embrace the hope in the second coming of Jesus to end the great controversy forever.

Part II: Commentary

Finding Hope in Premillennialism

Hope and optimism filled the atmosphere of the nineteenth-century United States, the new nation born out of the unique American Revolution. The

century brought social, economic, political, as well as technological changes and inventions, promising the dawn of a new world. The spirit of the age influenced the country's Protestant evangelical Christians, until it permeated their religion and churches. The result was a postmillennial Christianity with a hopeful and optimistic eschatological fervor.

But what is postmillennialism? Millennialism comes from the word "millennium," which refers to the 1,000 years of Christ's reign with the saints as described in Revelation 20:1–6. While most Christians accept this biblical teaching about the millennium, not all agree on how to relate the millennium to the Second Coming and to the last judgment.

The first post-apostolic theologians—the apostolic fathers—adopted premillennialism, the belief that Christ would return to earth *before* the millennium and execute the last judgment. (Adventists, of course, understand that the millennium will be in heaven.) However, soon, subsequent church fathers, such as Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 185–253/254) and Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430), integrated Greek philosophy with Christian theology and applied the allegorical method to the reading and interpretation of the Bible. Consequently, they rejected premillennialism as a naive and superficial reading of the book of Revelation, and proposed instead a new theory of the millennium, which was later called amillennialism.

According to this theory, the millennium must be understood allegorically or spiritually. As in Greek philosophy, which posited that time has no particular relevance to spirituality or to the ethereal sphere of existence, these church fathers concluded that the millennium refers to the church period that runs between the first and the second comings of Jesus. For this reason, the millennium is not past or future but represents the entire Christian era. During this period, Christ reigns spiritually with the souls of the dead saints in heaven, as well as with the church on earth. The church is God's kingdom on this planet. Christ works to establish His church to the ends of the earth, thus diminishing the power of the devil. However, before the Second Coming, Satan will corrupt the church, leading to the installment of the antichrist. At this moment, Jesus will return, saving the church from the antichrist, and executing the last judgment, thereby reestablishing a new order of things. This position was embraced by the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, and some Protestant denominations, such as the Lutheran, Anglican, and the Presbyterian churches.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism was an adaptation of amillennialism by the nineteenth-century Protestant churches, who applied it to their contemporary situation. Like the amillennialists, the postmillennialists thought that Christ would come at the end of the millennium. However, unlike the amillennialists, most postmillennialists thought that the millennium represented 1,000 literal years. This period does not represent the entire Christian

era, but only the last 1,000 years before Christ's return. During this 1,000 years, Christ will work through the Holy Spirit and through the church to spread the gospel throughout the entire world to establish His millennial kingdom. As most of the earth's population accepted the gospel, the power and control of the devil would diminish, and the world would gradually enter its golden age, a period of peace, righteousness, justice, love, and prosperity that would serve as a foretaste of the coming of God's eternal kingdom. Highly optimistic about the nature of the human individual and society, postmillennialists did not envision a time when the church would become corrupt or when the antichrist would control and oppress the church and the world. The millennium would be followed by the second coming of Christ, by the general resurrection, the last judgment, and the eternal divine kingdom.

Judging by the success of the gospel in the world during the eighteenth century, the nineteenth-century postmillennialists concluded that the millennium was still in the future, albeit a very near future, one that even was at hand. Moreover, since the millennial kingdom would be inaugurated through the church by Christ, the Protestants rolled up their sleeves and began working hard to bring about the millennium and to do so in their lifetime. Change and progress filled the air of America. An increasing number of biblical societies published Bibles and Christian literature. Missionaries were sent overseas to prepare the world to accept the gospel and to enter the millennial kingdom. Parallel to this development, an increasing number of technological inventions contributed to the rise of the quality of life in America and around the world. Temperance societies focused on improving the quality of people's health through abstinence from alcohol. Noting the absence of major wars, political parties and all types of social movements called for profound social changes compatible with the establishment of God's millennial kingdom.

Not all, however, followed the postmillennial excitement of the majority. The original premillennial ideas of the apostles and of the apostolic fathers were revived by the Anabaptist Reformers in the sixteenth century; and then continued by some English Evangelicals through the eighteenth century; and, finally, began spreading in North America during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the greatest proponents of biblical premillennialism were William Miller and, after the Great Disappointment, the Seventh-day Adventists. Like the postmillennialists, the Adventist premillennialists believed that the millennium represented 1,000 literal years, that the millennium was still in the future, and that it would begin soon.

Seventh-day Adventists

Unlike the postmillennialists, however, the Seventh-day Adventist premillennialists understood from their Bibles that things would worsen for

God's people before the day of the Lord (*2 Pet. 3:3–13*), that Jesus would come before the millennium (*Rev. 19:11–16*) to save His persecuted church, resurrect His people, and take them all with Him to heaven (*1 Thess. 4:13–18*). In heaven, God's people would not only reign with Christ (*Rev. 20:4, 6*) but also participate with God in the judgment of the wicked (*Rev. 20:4, 1 Cor. 6:2*). During that time, the devil is described as “bound . . . for a thousand years” (*Rev. 20:2*) on earth because he “could not deceive the nations” (*Rev. 20:3, CJB*). These nations constitute the wicked who will not be resurrected until the end of the 1,000 years (*Rev. 20:2, 3, 5*). Once the millennial judgment ends, Jesus returns to planet Earth with all His saints. He resurrects the wicked (*Rev. 20:5, 7, 13*) and executes the last judgment (*Rev. 20:11, 12*). The devil tries to deceive the wicked one last time in order to incite them to fight against God and take His kingdom by force (*Rev. 20:7–9*). This event culminates the great controversy; Christ executes His judgments, and the wicked, the devil, and evil, as well as death itself, are all cast into the “lake of fire” (*Rev. 20:9, 10, 14, 15*) and are forever annihilated.

Miller and the Seventh-day Adventists did not share the optimism of their postmillennial contemporaries about human nature and about the bright, utopic near future of humanity. But this stance was not because Miller and the Adventists were antisocial, pessimistic, or negativistic by nature and thus incapable of rejoicing over the progress and hope of humanity. Rather, Miller and the Seventh-day Adventists arrived at their premillennialist understanding from their solid, literal, historical-grammatical study of the Bible. For this reason, they rejected both amillennialism and postmillennialism because these doctrines were rooted, not in the Bible, but in the presuppositions of ancient Greek philosophy or of contemporary socio-economic-political studies. The postulations of the amillennialists or postmillennialists are not only absent from the Bible, but they also go contrary to biblical teachings, thus distorting the gospel and generating false hope. Miller and the Seventh-day Adventists longed for hope, but they wanted a hope built on the solid foundation of the Word of God.

In just a few decades, the twentieth century's two world wars and one cold war pulverized the postmillennial optimism about human nature and about humanity's gradual ushering in of God's millennial kingdom of peace and prosperity. Most Evangelicals returned to premillennialism. True, this premillennialism was repackaged and distorted, falling into the unbiblical teaching of dispensationalism. Nevertheless, the mere fact that Evangelicals returned to premillennialism indicates that amillennialism and postmillennialism are not only unbiblical but an inadequate and disappointing exegesis of end-time events. Biblical premillennialism is the only foundation for hope. It teaches that while humanity cannot save itself or the world, Jesus will come again in the most difficult time of history. Before the millennium, He will save us from the final attacks of the devil and his armies and will lead the great controversy toward its end.

Part III: Life Application

1. **How does the second coming of Jesus Christ bring hope to your religious and/or cultural context? How can you explain to your neighbors that the return of Jesus is humanity's only hope?**

2. **How relevant is the fulfillment of the biblical time prophecies (such as 2,300 years) in your religious or cultural context? Think and propose ways in which you could make it relevant to the people of your community.**

3. **William Miller developed a specific way of reading and understanding the Bible. What is your model of reading and interpreting the Scriptures? Develop and share with your Sabbath School class your own meaningful way of understanding God's Word. Share how Bible truth has transformed not only your own life but also the life of your family and of your community.**

Light From *the* Sanctuary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Exod. 25:8, 9, 40; Heb. 8:1–6; Lev. 16:21, 29–34; Lev. 23:26–32; Heb. 9:23–28; Dan. 7:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (*Hebrews 8:1, 2, NKJV*).

Shortly after the disappointment of October 22, 1844, some of the Millerites came to understand that the 2,300-day prophecy didn’t deal with the second coming of Jesus but with Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary.

The cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven was the fulfillment of the earthly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary. To understand this important truth better, look at the parallel between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8:

| Daniel 7 | Daniel 8 |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Babylon | ----- |
| Media-Persia | Media-Persia |
| Greece | Greece |
| Rome | Rome |
| Judgment in heaven | Cleansing of the sanctuary |

These parallels show the nature of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the pre-Advent judgment. This week we explore Christ’s ministry in heaven.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 22–24 and 28 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 25.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

Read Exodus 25:8, 9, 40 and Hebrews 8:1–6. What two sanctuaries are outlined in these verses?

As the early Adventist believers pored over the Scriptures in the months following 1844, they understood that there are two sanctuaries mentioned in the Bible—the one Moses built and the great original in heaven. The term “sanctuary,” as used in the Bible, refers, first, to the tabernacle built by Moses, as a pattern or “type” of heavenly things; and, second, to the “true tabernacle” in heaven, to which the earthly sanctuary pointed. At the death of Christ, the typical service lost its importance. The “true tabernacle” in heaven is the sanctuary of the new covenant. And as the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 is fulfilled in this era, the sanctuary to which it refers must be the sanctuary of the new covenant.

“At the termination of the 2300 days, in 1844, there had been no sanctuary on earth for many centuries. Thus the prophecy, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,’ unquestionably points to the sanctuary in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 417.

The sanctuary in the wilderness was a scale model or pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. The services in the earthly sanctuary foreshadowed God’s divine plan of salvation. Every sacrifice offered represented Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross of Calvary (see *John 1:29*). Through the sacrifice of Christ, we are free from the condemnation of sin. Forgiveness is ours. Our guilt is gone as we accept Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf and confess our sins (*1 John 1:9*). Jesus is not only the Lamb who died for us but also the Priest who lives for us.

Hebrews 7:25 explains: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (*NKJV*). He removes the guilt of sin and saves us from the power of sin (*Rom. 8:1–4, 2 Cor. 5:21*). Jesus’ ministry in heaven’s sanctuary is for us. As a result of His intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. We are no longer under bondage or enslaved to our sinful natures. In Christ we are free—free from sin’s condemnation and free from sin’s control. As we hold on to Christ by faith, we have the assurance of salvation.

What does it mean for you to know that Jesus is in heaven ministering in your behalf, meaning that He is there mediating for you? Why do you need a Mediator in your behalf? Why is this truth good news?

In the Holy of Holies

Read Leviticus 16:21, 29–34; Leviticus 23:26–32; and Hebrews 9:23–28. Why was the Day of Atonement so important in ancient Israel?

The priests ministered every day of the year, but on the Day of Atonement, called Yom Kippur in Hebrew, the eyes of all Israel turned toward the sanctuary. Leviticus 16 and 23 give explicit instructions for the Day of Atonement. All regular activity ceased. Everyone fasted. While the high priest entered the presence of God for them in the Most Holy Place, the people examined their hearts. They sought God in humility and heartfelt confession.

Anyone who was not “afflicted” on the Day of Atonement would be “cut off,” no longer part of the chosen people (*Lev. 23:27, 29*). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest took the blood of the Lord’s goat into the sanctuary and, after sprinkling it on the mercy seat, applied the blood to the horns of the golden altar and of the brazen altar, completely cleansing the entire sanctuary. When he had made “an end of reconciling,” the high priest placed his hands on the live goat and confessed Israel’s sins. Then it was led into the wilderness to be separated from the camp forever (*Lev. 16:20–22*).

The blood was transferred into the sanctuary during the daily services, showing the recording of sin (*Jer. 17:1*) and God’s taking responsibility for its ultimate disposition. Now, on the Day of Atonement, it was transferred out of the sanctuary and placed on the head of the scapegoat Azazel, representing Satan and revealing his ultimate responsibility for the sin problem.

This goat was led far into the wilderness so that, at the close of the Day of Atonement, God had a clean sanctuary and a clean people. In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ ministers for us first in the Holy Place, and now, in the Most Holy Place since 1844, at the end of the 2,300 days.

We will get through this great judgment because of Jesus, our Substitute. As Ellen G. White said, we are “justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. As a result of this righteousness—credited (imputed) to us—we afflict our souls, which is a turning away from sin. That means we have not come to a comfortable acceptance of evil nor are we excusing or clinging to cherished sins. Instead we are growing in grace and living a life of holiness.

What is the significance of the Day of Atonement in our lives today? Why should it make a difference in how we live?

The Judgment Has Come

Compare Daniel 7:9, 10 with Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the similarity between these two passages?

The judgment is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (*Eccles. 12:14, NKJV*). Jesus pointed His hearers to a future time of judgment, when “ ‘every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment’ ” (*Matt. 12:36, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds, God will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (*1 Cor. 4:5*). The angelic messenger said to John, “The hour of His [God’s] judgment has come” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 22:10–12. When Jesus returns, what is the fate of all humanity? What clear declaration is made to John?

Since Christ comes to give out His final rewards, there must be a judgment before that, to show who will receive what reward when He comes. When Christ returns, there is no second chance. Every human being has had sufficient information to make their final, irrevocable decision for or against Christ.

Read Matthew 25:1–13. Why does Jesus relate so differently to these two different groups of believers?

“When the work of investigation shall be ended, when the cases of those who in all ages have professed to be followers of Christ have been examined and decided, then, and not till then, probation will close, and the door of mercy will be shut. Thus in the one short sentence, ‘They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut,’ we are carried down through the Saviour’s final ministration, to the time when the great work for man’s salvation shall be completed.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 428.

We need not fear the judgment. Through Christ, forgiveness is ours, freedom from guilt is ours, power to live godly lives is ours, and final victory is ours.

The Good News of the Most Holy Place

Read Hebrews 4:14–16 and Hebrews 10:19–22. What assurance and divine invitation do these verses give to each one of us?

Paul’s point here in Hebrews is “hold fast,” “come boldly,” “never give up,” focus your faith on Jesus, our great High Priest. In Jesus, we have all we need. By faith we may enter the heavenly sanctuary through the “new and living way” that Jesus has opened for us.

Looking into the court, we see *blood* on the horns of the brazen altar. In the Holy Place, we see *blood* on the golden horns of the altar of incense. We behold the sprinkled *blood* on the curtain before the mercy seat.

Jesus’ blood prepares the way at every step. This gives us hope since we can have reunion with God only if Jesus pardons us and blots out our sins. The mercy of God is infinite, but so is His justice. And justice cannot accept Christ’s sacrifice as atonement for our transgressions unless Jesus guarantees first to forgive our sins and second to blot them out.

Read Revelation 11:19. In the context of the great controversy, why is this vision significant? How does it show the inseparable link between the law and the gospel?

Here in the dazzling brightness and blazing glory of the presence of God, in the throne room of the universe, at the very base of God’s throne, we discover the law of God in the ark of the covenant. Here in the Most Holy Place, God’s justice and mercy are revealed. No earthly power can change God’s law because, among other reasons, it is enshrined in the ark of the covenant in heaven. Hebrews 8:10 says: “ ‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’ ” (*NKJV*). Entering by faith into heaven’s sanctuary, we find pardon for our past sins and power to live an obedient life through Christ, who died for us and writes the law in our hearts. Jesus saves us to the “uttermost” (*Heb. 7:25*). Jesus saves us totally and completely—from the penalty of sin and from its power.

Why is Jesus’ intercession such incredibly good news? As we stand before the law as the standard of righteousness, what hope would we have without the gospel?

Jesus, Our Advocate in the Judgment

Read Hebrews 10:9–14. What difference does this passage reveal between the priest’s ministry in the earthly sanctuary and Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary?

Once and for all, Christ died upon the cross as a perfect sacrifice for sin. His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary sanctifies us. Now, having entered the Most Holy Place, He stands as our Advocate in the judgment (see 1 John 2:1). “Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28, *NLT*). Through His sacrifice and mediation, sin has been dealt with. Now He comes again for those who “love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Read Hebrews 6:19, 20. Why does He invite us to follow Him, and what do we discover as we follow?

“The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, ‘whither the forerunner is for us entered.’ Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven; the sacrifice made is equal to the broadest demands of the broken law of God. Jesus has opened the way to the Father’s throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

The plan of salvation is a complete plan to resolve the great controversy and rescue this planet from Satan’s grip. Jesus’ life revealed God’s love to a needy world and a watching universe. His death revealed the hideousness of sin and provided salvation for all humanity. His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary provides the benefits of the atonement to each one who reaches out in faith to receive them.

How does Christ’s death on the cross relate to His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, and why is the judgment so necessary to the plan of salvation?

Further Thought: Notice how Jesus' work for us in the judgment and our role are described: "Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' Psalm 51:17. And to the accuser of His people He declares: 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

"The fact that the acknowledged people of God are represented as standing before the Lord in filthy garments should lead to humility and deep searching of heart on the part of all who profess His name. Those who are indeed purifying their souls by obeying the truth will have a most humble opinion of themselves. The more closely they view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to His image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in themselves. But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.

"We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of their probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 489, 490.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What emotions are stirred at the thought that Jesus is lifting His wounded hands for us before the Father? Why is this our only hope in the judgment?
- 2 We are living in the Day of Atonement. Atonement is the work of God in saving lost sinners. Why, then, should any day dedicated to the work of God in saving sinners be good news?
- 3 Notice what Ellen G. White wrote: "Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 2, 1908. How can you make this hope your own?

Running From Church: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go. Raised in a family that followed a non-Christian world religion, she had visited her own house of worship on holidays and to observe animal sacrifices for more than 40 years. So, it came as a shock when her husband and 20-year-old son, Rosen, were offered a Bible by a stranger on the street.

“Take this and come to our meeting this evening,” the stranger said.

He said refreshments also would be available.

At home, Aneliya balked at the invitation. “What are we going to do there?” she asked. “I don’t want to go. I belong to another religion.”

But Rosen wanted to go to the church.

“Come,” he said. “We’ll eat and listen to a few things.”

All five members of the refugee family went to the meeting in the European city. They exchanged greetings with church members, and they sipped tea and ate cake with them. During the church program, Aneliya heard people talking about Jesus, but she couldn’t understand the words.

What are they talking about? she wondered. It was a normal reaction for someone from her faith background when first exposed to the Bible.

Rosen, however, was fascinated by the meeting. Afterward, he started Bible studies with Paul, the stranger who had offered the Bible on the street.

Before long, Rosen asked his mother to come to church for his baptism.

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go.

“I don’t understand what a baptism is,” she said. “I won’t go.”

Rosen was baptized without her.

Then Aneliya and her family were evicted from their rented apartment. They had money for rent, but they couldn’t find a place to live. Church members joined the search but to no avail. Church members invited the family to stay temporarily in the children’s Sabbath School classroom.

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go. But she had no choice. She and the family lived in the church for seven months.

During that time, Paul visited the family and read from the Bible. Aneliya wondered why he was reading the Bible. She was convinced that only her religion’s sacred writings contained the truth. She wondered, *How will this Bible help me get an apartment? Why can’t we find an apartment?*

On Sabbaths, Paul invited the family to attend church services. Aneliya fled. When she saw the worship service starting, she ran out the door. But her 22-year-old son, Sergei, was moved by what he heard. He was baptized.

After the family found a new home, both of Aneliya’s sons began to plead with her to consider Jesus.

Thank you for your support of Adventist Mission, whose Global Mission Centers help train people to share the good news of salvation with precious people from other world religions. For information, visit globalmissioncenters.org. The story concludes next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 8:1, 2*

Study Focus: *Exod. 25:8, 9, 40; Heb. 8:1–6; Matt. 25:1–10; Dan. 7:9, 10; Heb. 8:1–5; Heb. 9:23–28; Rev. 11:19; Heb. 10:16; Lev. 16:21, 29–34; Lev. 23:26–32.*

Introduction: So prominent is the theme of the sanctuary in both the Old and New Testaments that it is simply astonishing to consider that many Christians lost sight of the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary for almost two millennia. Seventh-day Adventists realized that the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary was not only an important biblical teaching but was the central tenet of a biblical theology that connected other doctrines. These teachings include:

- the doctrine of God, His character, creation, work, and government;
- the doctrine of the origin of evil and of the great controversy;
- the doctrine of Christ, His first coming to earth, His incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension;
- the doctrine of salvation in Christ;
- the doctrine of the last things, the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the restoration of all things; and
- the doctrine of the church, especially the teaching of the remnant church in the end time, before the second coming of Jesus.

The longest biblical prophecy—the 2,300 years of Daniel 8:14—concerns the heavenly sanctuary and the great controversy. This prophecy acquaints us with both the attack on the heavenly sanctuary and its cleansing in the day of God’s judgment and in the restoration of all things. However, Adventists do not think of this prophecy as a mere abstraction with no basis or fulfillment in reality. Rather, they understand that this prophecy was fulfilled in history, commencing in the mid-nineteenth century, in 1844. The fulfillment of this prophecy calls for all people living in these probationary times to accept Jesus’ atonement for their sins before the close of His intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

The fulfillment of the 2,300-day prophecy is especially important to Adventists because they understand that God has called them as His remnant church to announce to the world the fulfillment of this prophecy, the return of Jesus, and the imminent consummation of the great controversy. Thus, the message of the 2,300-day prophecy is the very essence of “the eternal gospel” (*Rev. 14:6, NASB*). The good news in the context of the three angels’ messages is God’s final call of love to humanity. God bids sinners on earth to turn to Him so that they may be saved by the blood of Jesus and by His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary.

Lesson Themes: The study for this week highlights two major themes:

1. The earthly sanctuary in the Old Testament was not just a part of the culture of Israel; it principally pointed to the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of Jesus on behalf of humanity.
2. As such, the heavenly sanctuary is central to the universal and eternal gospel, to the salvation of humanity, and to the mission of the church.

Part II: Commentary

The Sealing of the 2,300-Year Prophecy

The first and the second coming of Jesus are closely associated with the sanctuary, both the earthly and heavenly. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon and Anna were there (*Luke 2:25–38*). They knew the Messiah would come to the temple. For this reason, Luke reports that, while waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise of the first coming of the Messiah, Simeon “came by the Spirit into the temple” to meet Jesus (*Luke 2:27*), and the prophetess Anna “did not leave the temple grounds” (*Luke 2:37, NASB*).

The longest biblical prophecy, that of the 2,300 years (*Dan. 8:14*), was focused on the heavenly sanctuary (*Dan. 8:10–12*). This prophecy was “sealed,” or confirmed (*Dan. 9:24*), by the first coming of Jesus to the earthly sanctuary. After receiving the 2,300-year prophecy, Daniel “was astounded . . . and there was no one who could explain it” (*Dan. 8:27, AMP*). Left without an explanation for this vision for several years, Daniel focused on the data he had at hand: Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the 70 years of “the desolations of Jerusalem” (*Dan. 9:2, NASB; compare with Jer. 25:11, 12*).

Daniel prayed for God’s intervention to fulfill Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy, pleading with the Most High to redeem His people (*Dan. 9:3–19*), and to “let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary” (*Dan. 9:17, NASB*). To Daniel’s joy, God sent “the man Gabriel” to instruct him (*Dan. 9:21, 22*). However, Gabriel did not immediately focus on answering Daniel’s prayer about Jeremiah’s 70-year prophecy. Instead, Gabriel began to exhort Daniel to “pay attention to the message and gain understanding of the vision” (*Dan. 9:23, NASB*). Obviously, the vision in question is the one described in Daniel 8:14 because Gabriel does not speak of 70 literal weeks but of 70 prophetic weeks (*Dan. 9:24*), or 490 years. The 490 years could be “determined” or deducted only from the 2,300 years in Daniel’s vision (*Dan. 8:14*)—not from the 70 years in Jeremiah’s prophecy. By this calculation, Gabriel also revealed the event that marked the beginning of the 70 prophetic weeks and, therefore, of the 2,300 years. This

event was “the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (*Dan. 9:25, NASB*), which took place in 457 B.C. Thus, the prophecy of the 70 prophetic weeks is a subset, or the first part, of the 2,300-years prophecy; the two periods constitute one great prophecy.

Here Gabriel finally answers Daniel’s question and prayer about the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Dan. 9:25*), God’s “holy mountain” (*Dan. 9:20*). However, Gabriel immediately explains that this fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of 70 years is only the beginning of a much longer prophecy. That is, it is the beginning of the 70 prophetic weeks, and then the beginning of an even longer prophecy—the 2,300 years. For this reason, keeping the focus on this bigger prophecy, Gabriel further explained to Daniel that these 70 prophetic weeks, or 490 literal years, would be “decreed” or “determined” for “your people and your holy city” (*Dan. 9:24, NASB*) for a special purpose: “until Messiah the Prince” (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*).

The end, or the aim, of these 490 years was the first advent of the Messiah. Gabriel explained that the purpose of the Messiah would be “‘to make an end of sin, to make atonement for guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness . . . and to anoint the Most Holy Place’ ” (*Dan. 9:24, NASB*). In the seventieth prophetic week, the Messiah would “‘confirm a covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering’ ” (*Dan. 9:27, NASB*). The only plausible fulfillment for all these events was in the sacrifice of Jesus, the “‘Messiah the Prince’ ” (*Dan. 9:25, NASB*) and “‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*), who “‘will be cut off and have nothing’ ” (*Dan. 9:26, NASB*).

Thus, the prophecy of the 70 weeks starts the prophecy of the 2,300 years. We can be sure that the 2,300-year prophecy about the cleansing of the sanctuary was fulfilled in 1844 because the prophecy of the 70 weeks (*Dan. 9:24–27*) was fulfilled with exactitude in the sacrificial death of the Messiah in the middle of the seventieth week, in A.D. 31. In addition, in the same way that the prophecy of the 70 weeks was fulfilled in the Messiah’s sacrificial death in relation to the earthly sanctuary, the prophecy of the 2,300 years would be fulfilled in the Messiah’s cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. Similarly, the two parts of the prophecy are related to the two comings of the Messiah: the end of the 70-week period relates to Christ’s first coming, while the end of the 2,300 years pertains to His second coming.

The Loss of the Doctrine of the Sanctuary

The sanctuary is one of the most prominent themes and teachings in Scripture. The Bible describes two sanctuaries, an earthly and a heavenly.

Both sanctuaries reveal foundational aspects of God's character, of the great controversy, and of salvation. Thus, the two sanctuaries serve as the place of God's revelation to His people, His dwelling among them, and His reigning over them. At the sanctuary, God met with Israel, and they responded to Him in worship. In the same way, the heavenly sanctuary serves God's kingdom on a cosmic level. In that central place, God established His throne. He revealed Himself to the inhabitants of the universe, exercising His sovereignty over them and providing for their needs.

When, however, sin entered the universe, the heavenly sanctuary adopted a salvific function, with its sacrificial and mediatorial ministries. Thus, the two sanctuaries are not separate in the sense that they are closely connected in a typological relationship: that is, the earthly sanctuary was built expressly to reveal, point to, and explain the meaning and the role of the heavenly one.

Keeping in mind this understanding of the foundational role of the sanctuary to God's kingdom, we cannot help noting that its presence is impossible to miss in Scripture. How Christians, of all people, ignored the study and significance of the heavenly sanctuary for thousands of years is simply mystifying. How was such an oversight even possible?

Adventists point to two major factors that led to the exclusion of the doctrine of the sanctuary from Christian theology. First, given the significance of the heavenly sanctuary to salvation, it is obvious that the devil would do whatever possible to obscure, or even annihilate, the biblical teaching of the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, people would not know the truth about God, about Christ's sacrifice, and about His continuous mediation in the heavenly sanctuary for our salvation.

Cosmic Dualism

How was this doctrine obscured in Christianity? The answer to this question neatly segues our discussion into the second major factor: the concept of dualism. During the first centuries of its history, Christianity assimilated Greek philosophy with its foundational concept of dualism. According to this concept, our entire reality is divided into two spheres: the earthly and the heavenly. However, these two spheres are radically and essentially different. While the earthly sphere is material, temporal, and spatial, the heavenly realm is immaterial, timeless, and aspatial. In other words, in the heavenly sphere, there is no physical existence or personal relationship. Because there is no communication or relationship between the two spheres, the only way humans could get into the heavenly sphere was by escaping any connection to their earthly existence, which amounts to ceasing to exist as integrated human beings and somehow surviving as disembodied souls or minds that do not experience time and space. Obviously, this worldview is possible only if one accepts the concept that humans have a physical body as well as an immortal, completely autonomous soul. When the early

Christians adopted this worldview, it was impossible for them to think of a literal sanctuary in heaven. It was even difficult for them to imagine heaven as a literal space, let alone Jesus ascending in a human body into this space. For this reason, when the early Christians read in Scripture about the heavenly sanctuary, they simply allegorized or spiritualized it away and concluded that the Israelite sanctuary applied to the church. To talk about a literal sanctuary in a literal heaven did not seem “worthy” of an “elevated” theology.

True, the early and medieval Christians did make a connection between the sanctuary’s sacrificial system and the death of Christ. But because of the influence of Greek philosophy, these early Christians could not properly envision Christ’s mediatorial work for humanity in a literal heavenly sanctuary. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church applied Christ’s mediatorial ministry to the church and its priesthood. Tragically, this usurpation of Christ’s mediatorial ministry in the heavenly sanctuary led the church to undermine even the sacrifice of Christ. However, God worked through the movements of the Protestant Reformation to return His people to a literal reading of the Bible and, through the Adventist movement, to rediscover the biblical teaching of the heavenly sanctuary in the prophecies and in the book of Hebrews.

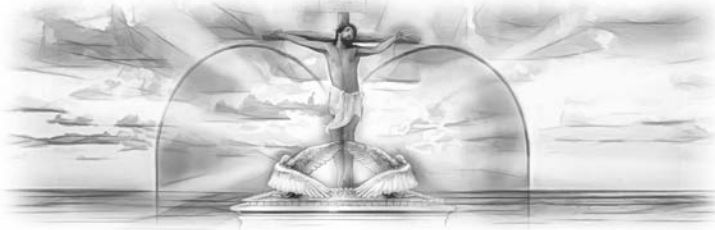
Thus, our mission, as Seventh-day Adventists, is to guard against compromising the Word of God, and to call both Christians and the world to focus their attention on the sacrifice of Christ on earth and His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. (For further discussion, see Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Heavenly Sanctuary,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, pp. 381, 382, 403–406.)

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Think of the concept of priesthood in your culture. How does this concept compare to the biblical concept? How could you use the local concept of priesthood to communicate to other people the priesthood of Jesus?**

- 2. Think of the concept of judgment in your culture or country. How does this concept of judgment compare or contrast with the biblical concept of judgment? How could you explain the biblical understanding of judgment to people from your own culture?**

The Foundation of God's Government



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:6–12; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Prov. 28:9; Dan. 7:25.*

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*).

Through intensive Bible study, Adventists came to understand the significance of the law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Looking into the heart of God's law, they also discovered the significance of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment. In fact, this commandment more than any other clearly identifies God as our Creator, the foundation of all true worship—a theme that will be especially relevant in the final days of earth's history (*see Rev. 14:6–12*).

Satan's aim from the beginning has been to thwart the worship of God through undermining the law of God. He knows that to offend “in one point” means to be “guilty of all” (*James 2:10*); so, he encourages people to transgress God's law. Satan hates the Sabbath because it reminds people of the Creator and how He is to be worshiped. But it also is enshrined in God's law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Because the law is what defines sin, as long as people seek to be faithful to God, then His law must continue to be valid, including the Sabbath commandment.

The aim of this lesson is to show the link between the sanctuary, God's law, the Sabbath, and the coming crisis over the mark of the beast. We also will explore the relevance of the Sabbath to an end-time generation.

* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 25–27 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.

The Sanctuary and the Law

Read Revelation 11:19, Exodus 25:16, Exodus 31:18, and Revelation 12:17. What do these verses indicate was in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary?

The Day of Atonement was a day of judgment. All of Israel was commanded to take part in this event by repentance, soul searching, and refraining from all work (*see Lev. 23:29–31*). On this day alone the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place to make atonement for sin. There, in the innermost apartment of the sanctuary, was the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was God’s Ten Commandment law, written on tables of stone. The golden cover of the ark was called the mercy seat, where blood was sprinkled to cleanse the sanctuary from sin. God’s presence was manifest in Shekinah glory above the mercy seat. Every sacrifice offered revealed God’s mercy toward sinful human beings, but the Day of Atonement shows that sin is remembered until the day of judgment (*Heb. 10:3*) and that it could really be removed only through faith in the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19*). There, in the presence of God, mercy and justice beautifully combine.

Looking into the heavenly sanctuary, the apostle John saw “the temple of God . . . opened” and the “ark of His covenant” revealed (*Rev. 11:19, NKJV*). *The Great Controversy* adds this comment: “Within the holy of holies, in the sanctuary in heaven, the divine law is sacredly enshrined—the law that was spoken by God Himself amid the thunders of Sinai and written with His own finger on the tables of stone. The law of God in the sanctuary in heaven is the great original, of which the precepts inscribed upon the tables of stone and recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch were an unerring transcript. Those who arrived at an understanding of this important point were thus led to see the sacred, unchanging character of the divine law.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 434.

As the early Adventist believers studied the Bible’s teaching on the sanctuary, they realized the significance of the law of God and the Sabbath in the heart of God’s law. They reasoned that if the law of God was pictured in the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary, it certainly could not have been done away with at the cross.

Think about the Sabbath, which, at 1,000 miles an hour, comes to us every week without exception. What should that tell us about the importance of the doctrine of Creation? What other doctrine has such a powerful, and reoccurring, reminder?

The Immutability of God's Law

Read Matthew 5:17, 18; Psalm 111:7, 8; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; 1 John 5:3; and Proverbs 28:9. What do these Bible passages teach regarding the Christian's relationship to the law?

Seventh-day Adventists follow in the footsteps of the Protestant Reformers who upheld the sanctity of God's law. Note this powerful affirmation of John Wesley: "The ritual or ceremonial law delivered by Moses to the children of Israel, containing all the injunctions and ordinances which related to the old sacrifices and service of the temple, our Lord indeed did come to destroy, to dissolve and utterly abolish. . . . But the moral law, contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, he did not take away. It was not the design of his coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken, which 'stands fast as the faithful witness in heaven.' . . . Every part of this law must remain in force, upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other."—"Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," Discourse V, John Wesley's *Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1991), pp. 208, 209.

Compare Exodus 34:5–7 with Romans 7:11, 12; Psalm 19:7–11; Psalm 89:14; and Psalm 119:142, 172. What do these verses tell us about the relationship between God's law and God's character?

Since the law of God is a transcript of His character, the foundation of His throne, and the moral basis for humanity, Satan hates it. "None could fail to see that if the earthly sanctuary was a figure or pattern of the heavenly, the law deposited in the ark on earth was an exact transcript of the law in the ark in heaven; and that an acceptance of the truth concerning the heavenly sanctuary involved an acknowledgment of the claims of God's law and the obligation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Here was the secret of the bitter and determined opposition to the harmonious exposition of the Scriptures that revealed the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 435.

What are the reasons people often give to argue that we no longer are obligated to keep the Ten Commandments? What do you think is really behind it?

The Sabbath and the Law

Read Revelation 14:6, 7; Revelation 4:11; Genesis 2:1–3; and Exodus 20:8–11. What is the relationship between Creation, the Sabbath, and the law of God?

Creation speaks of our value in God's sight. We are not alone in the universe—some speck of cosmic dust—nor are we a genetic accident. In other words, the common scientific scenario of life's origins, which has been picked up by the news media and popular culture, presents a view of our origins that is in every way incompatible with the biblical account.

We are here because Jesus created us. And He is worthy of our worship not only because He created us but also because He redeemed us. Creation and Redemption are at the heart of all true worship. Therefore, the Sabbath is vital to understanding the plan of salvation. The Sabbath speaks of a Creator's care and a Redeemer's love.

At the conclusion of Creation week, God rested in the beauty and majesty of the world He had made. He also rested as an example to us. The Sabbath is a weekly pause to praise the One who made us. As we worship on the Sabbath, we open our hearts to receive the special blessing He placed in that day only, and in no other day.

The Sabbath points us to a Creator who loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from His purpose for us. The Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in Him. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (*Ezek. 20:12, 20*). It is a symbol of rest, not of works; of grace, not of legalism; of assurance, not of condemnation; of depending upon God for salvation, not on ourselves. True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us.

The message of Revelation 14, God's end-time message for the world, calls people to rest in His love and care each Sabbath. It calls us to remember the One who created us and give Him glory. Keeping the Sabbath also is a connecting link between the perfection of Eden and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth to come. It reminds us that one day the splendors of Eden will be restored.

Most Seventh-day Adventists have faced the charge of being legalistic, and that charge is usually connected with our keeping the Sabbath. Discuss the Sabbath as a symbol of Redemption and righteousness by faith. Why would obeying God's command to rest lead people to think we are trying to work our way to heaven?

The Mark of the Beast

Read Revelation 12:12, 17 and Revelation 13:7. How do these texts reveal Satan's wrath? Why is the devil so angry with God's end-time people?

Revelation 12 outlines the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan down through the ages. It climaxes with Satan's final attack on the people of God. Revelation 13 introduces the dragon's two allies, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. These two powers join him in making war on God's people.

Read Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15 and Revelation 14:7, 9–11. (See also Rev. 15:4, Rev. 16:2, Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:4, Rev. 22:9.) What one key theme appears in all of these verses?

Note the contrast. Either people worship the Creator or they worship something else. The Creator is worthy of worship (Rev. 5:9). The controversy between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14, NKJV). Satan wanted the worship belonging only to the Creator. According to Revelation 13, he succeeds through the activity of the land beast (Rev. 13:4).

A comparison with Daniel 7 shows that this land beast is the same as the little horn that "seeks to change times and laws" and exercises authority for 1,260 prophetic "days," that is, for 1,260 years (Dan. 7:25; compare Rev. 13:5; see lesson 6). The only part of God's law, the Ten Commandments, dealing with time is the fourth commandment. This church has attempted to change the day of worship from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day of the week.

For an earthly power to seek to change the day of worship, the seventh-day Sabbath, which God Himself gave as a sign of His authority (Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20), is an attempt to usurp divine authority at the most basic level possible. On this point, then, is the focus of the final conflict over true and false worship.

For this reason, Revelation identifies the people who are faithful to God as those "who keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12). This includes the seventh-day Sabbath, not Sunday. Those who refuse the final call of the three angels to worship God on His holy day (Isa. 58:13) and who worship the beast on his counterfeit sabbath, Sunday, will receive the mark of the beast (see lesson 11).

The Three Angels' Messages

In Revelation 14:7, the first angel cries with a loud voice, “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*NKJV*). Heaven’s appeal is for us to give our supreme allegiance and heartfelt worship to the Creator in light of impending judgment.

The second angel declares, “ ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’ ” (*Rev. 14:8, NKJV*). Babylon represents a fallen apostate religious system that has rejected the message of the first angel in favor of a false system of worship. That’s why Revelation 14:9–11 warns against worshipping “the beast and his image.” Two opposing choices are presented here—worship of the Creator or worship of the beast. Every person on planet Earth will make their final, irrevocable decision over who has their total allegiance—Jesus or Satan.

Read Revelation 14:12. What are the two identifying characteristics of those who refuse to worship the beast? Why are both vitally important?

God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in the history of the world. Through the gift of Christ’s righteousness, they will live grace-filled, obedient lives. Worshiping the Creator stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast and is expressed in keeping the commandments of God. This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or allegiance to the beast power centers in worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is the Sabbath.

These committed followers of the Savior will not only have faith “in” Jesus but will also have the faith “of” Jesus. The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the demons in hell and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot reason why, and hopes when it cannot understand. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith. It will carry us through the crisis ahead. When the final crisis breaks and we face an economic boycott, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself, the faith of Jesus will carry us through earth’s final hours until Jesus returns.

How is God preparing your faith today for what is coming in the future?

Further Thought: “In the absence of Bible testimony in their favor, many with unwearied persistence urged—forgetting how the same reasoning had been employed against Christ and His apostles: ‘Why do not our great men understand this Sabbath question? But few believe as you do. It cannot be that you are right and that all the men of learning in the world are wrong.’

“To refute such arguments it was needful only to cite the teachings of the Scriptures and the history of the Lord’s dealings with His people in all ages.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 455

“Christians of past generations observed the Sunday, supposing that in so doing they were keeping the Bible Sabbath; and there are now true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who honestly believe that Sunday is the Sabbath of divine appointment. God accepts their sincerity of purpose and their integrity before Him. But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshiping the beast and his image. As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—‘the mark of the beast.’ And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive ‘the mark of the beast.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 449.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The world is changing so quickly, so dramatically. Why must we always be vigilant so that last-day events don’t catch us unprepared?
- 2 How does an understanding of the judgment and the law of God harmonize with the fact that we are saved by grace alone?
- 3 What are ways you can witness to those who don’t grasp the significance of the true Sabbath and sincerely keep Sunday, the first day of the week?
- 4 What dangers lie in the union of church and state powers? How as Christians are we to relate to the government?

Running From Church: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After two young refugees gave their hearts to Jesus in a European city, they began to plead with their mother to consider Jesus.

“Mother, don’t you want to be saved?” asked 20-year-old Rosen.

His mother, Aneliya, erupted like a volcano. “I will never leave my religion!” she yelled, pounding on a table. “I’ll keep my religion until I die!”

Her 22-year-old son, Sergei, spoke about how Jesus was crucified for people’s sins and resurrected on the third day.

“It’s impossible that He was resurrected,” Aneliya said.

“If you believe in Jesus, and die, you also will be resurrected,” Sergei said.

One day, he read John 3:36 to his mother: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (*NKJV*). “We die,” he said to his mother, “but when Jesus returns, we will be raised from the graves.”

“My son, how will we be raised from the graves?” she asked.

“We will live again,” he said.

It was a big question for Aneliya. It was the biggest question on her mind. How was it possible to be resurrected and live forever?

As she listened to her sons, Bible verses that had once confused her began to make sense. She began to understand what Paul, the man who had first invited the family to church, had read to them from the Bible and what she had heard about Jesus during her first church visit. Joy filled her heart. Aneliya later understood that the Holy Spirit had entered her heart. Soon Aneliya acknowledged Jesus as her Savior. When she did that, a desire filled her to spend time with Him and to attend worship services at church.

Then her 15-year-old daughter was baptized. Aneliya had skipped the baptisms of her two sons, but she went to her daughter’s baptism. She congratulated her afterward. “Mother, your turn is next,” her daughter said.

Sergei gave Bible studies to his mother, and she also studied the Bible on her own. A thirst grew in her heart to live for Christ. Then the day came, when she was 47, that she gave her heart to Jesus in baptism. “It was with great joy,” she said in an interview. “I cannot describe my joy. It was the first time in forty-seven years that I had such joy. I believed and accepted Jesus Christ.”

Today, Aneliya is 48 and a missionary to her people. Her husband has accepted the Bible, and even his parents back in their native country are keeping the Sabbath. Aneliya also gives Bible studies to her community.

“Once I had wanted to run away from church, but now a desire has filled me to run to church,” she said. “The Holy Spirit brought me to God.”

Thank you for your support of Adventist Mission, whose Global Mission Centers help train people to share the good news of salvation with precious people from other world religions. For more information, visit globalmissioncenters.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Revelation 12:17*

Study Focus: *Eccles. 12:13, 14; Prov. 28:9; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 51:7, 8; Rev. 13:15–17; Rev. 12:17; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Introduction: The biblical themes of the great controversy and of the heavenly sanctuary are inseparably interwoven with the theme of God’s law and of His Sabbath, which is included in His law. In fact, the great controversy started with Lucifer’s erroneous accusations against God’s character, His law, and the principles of His government. The rebel angel proposed that we are autonomous beings, fully capable of defining the meaning of life on our own terms and shaping our relationships and society in the way we want. Ultimately, this blasphemous proposition constitutes the clear desire to exclude God from our lives, from our relationships, and even from the universe. For this reason, our insistence upon the validity of the law of God is not a matter of legalism or salvation by works but inasmuch as God’s law is the expression of His character, the law stands at the core of the great controversy itself.

Defending God’s law is defending God’s character and His status as Creator and rightful King of the universe, enthroned in His heavenly sanctuary. Upholding God’s law means that we understand that God is the only source of moral standards and of the meaning of life. Abandoning God and His principles of life will lead to chaos and to eternal death. For this reason, Seventh-day Adventists proclaim the following Bible truths:

- the immutability of God’s law,
- the Sabbath as the sign of God’s Creatorship and Kingship,
- the heavenly sanctuary as the seat of God’s government and of salvation in the universe, and
- the Adventist movement as the remnant church, called to proclaim God’s last invitation to humanity to return to His kingdom.

The centerpiece of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. These messages indicate that the great controversy is a choice between two diametrically opposed principles: the devil’s, which leads to perdition; and God’s, which leads to life.

Lesson Themes: This week’s study emphasizes four major themes:

1. The law of God, which includes the Sabbath, is eternal and immutable because it represents God’s being, character, status as Creator and King of the universe, and His principles for life and relationships.
2. The heavenly sanctuary is the seat of God’s government and of His salvation.

3. The great controversy started because of Lucifer's impulses to usurp God's status and authority.
4. Toward the end of the great controversy on earth, God called forth, and established, His remnant church. God commissioned this remnant church to proclaim His final call of mercy to members of humanity, inviting them to embrace Him as their Creator, Savior, and Lord, who is the only Source and way of life.

Part II: Commentary

Christianity and the Law of God

Many Christians have mixed feelings regarding God's law. On the one hand, they all agree, to various degrees, that God's law is good and necessary. Even Martin Luther, who many Protestants think had a negative view of the law, dedicated a significant portion of his *Large Catechism* to comment on the importance of God's law for the life of the Christian. In the preface to the *Large Catechism*, Luther confessed that, whenever possible, he recited the Ten Commandments, along with the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Psalm.

On the other hand, throughout history, Christians have found reasons and ways not only to diminish the importance of the law of God but also to change it. During the early and medieval times, theologians found it relatively easy to change the Sabbath. Why? As with the case of the sanctuary, the integration of the dualism and worldview of Greek philosophy made possible the dismissal of the Sabbath. If, according to Greek philosophy, the heavenly sphere is spaceless, the existence of a literal sanctuary that occupied space in heaven was meaningless. Jesus' ascension into heaven in a literal, space-filling, material human body was also unacceptable to Greek philosophy.

Likewise, if the heavenly sphere is timeless, a literal Sabbath, as holy time, was irrelevant to God and to religion. However, the Sabbath is too obvious a theme in the Bible to be simply brushed aside. For this reason, many early and medieval Christians applied to the Bible the allegorical-interpretative method, the only method that allowed them to reconcile the Greek and the biblical worldviews. According to this method, the most important meaning of a biblical teaching was not the literal but a spiritual, transcendent, timeless meaning. They concluded, therefore, that Christians did not need to celebrate a literal Sabbath. Instead, they could replace it with a spiritual meaning, such as an abstract, eternal rest in God. Little wonder, then, that Christians did not give special attention to the law of God in medieval times.

The Protestant Reformers would change this trend by returning to a grammatical, or literal, reading of the Bible. For this reason, the Reformers gave the Ten Commandments a prominent role in the Christian life and even a place in the catechisms. However, even in these documents, the law of God was perceived as partially authoritative. For instance, just several paragraphs after highlighting the importance of the Ten Commandments for the life of the Christian, Luther makes a comment regarding the Sabbath commandment. Luther's *Large Catechism* concludes that the Sabbath is an Old Testament ordinance and does not concern the Christians, who were freed from it by Christ. Despite the reformation in theology he was proposing, Luther could not break entirely free from the gravitational pull of Greek philosophical presuppositions and the traditional Christian way of thinking.

In contemporary times, dispensationalism has found yet another excuse for, or way of, diminishing the importance of God's law for Christians. The foundational teaching of dispensationalism is that the history of salvation is divided into several dispensations or periods of time. However, this segmentation is not a simple periodization or division of the history of salvation. Rather, in each of these dispensations, God establishes a distinct covenant with a particular group of people, giving them a unique revelation and a different responsibility from the ones who covenanted with God before. One of the dispensations, the law, covering the period from Sinai to the death of Jesus, is characterized by the covenant and the law revealed at Sinai. Dispensationalists think that the law was revealed or "added" only to Israel and not to other people before Sinai or after Christ. For this reason, the law of God and the Sabbath are not relevant to Christians.

All these ways of diminishing or dismissing the law of God will eventually lead to the establishment of the mark of the beast, a replacement of God's law with human or demonic laws, even within the framework of Christianity. Thus, the Sabbath will be replaced with a counterfeit Sabbath. The mark of the beast precisely represents the initial intention and objective of Satan in the great controversy: to reject God's authority and His law, and to replace them with the devil's own authority and law. Seventh-day Adventists believe that they are tasked by God to proclaim the three angels' messages, which call people to return to God's kingdom; to accept and uphold His law; to reject the mark of Satan and the authority of his beast powers; and to join God's end-time remnant people, who await Christ's soon return (*Rev. 14:6-12*). For this reason, Seventh-day Adventists have included an entire fundamental belief on the law of God:

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They

express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.—Fundamental Belief 19, “The Law of God,” <https://www.adventist.org/the-law-of-god>.

This fundamental belief highlights at least two essential aspects of God's law. First, the law of God is the reflection of God's character and of the principles of His kingdom (*see Ps. 89:14*). As such, the law is located at the very heart of the heavenly sanctuary, in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place (*Rev. 11:19*). For this reason, the law of God is eternal and applicable to all people at all times. Because God, His nature, and His character do not change, His law has never changed; Jesus Christ Himself declared that He did not come to change the law but to fulfill it (*Matt. 5:17–19*); and He never gave any authority to anyone among His people, in any period of history, to diminish or change His law, in whole or in part!

Second, the law of God is the reflection of God's nature of love and righteousness, which are reflected in the principles of His kingdom. According to Paul, “love is the fulfillment of the law” (*Rom. 13:10, NKJV*). For this reason, the law cannot be placed in opposition to the gospel or to salvation. The law is not, was not, nor ever will be the enemy. Our enemies are sin and the devil. The law of God is “holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (*Rom. 7:12, NASB*). Salvation is by God's grace and is accepted by, and appropriated through, faith. However, salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who aims to restore us to our original status as the children of God, who perfectly reflect His love and righteousness.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. If you are in a non-Christian country, how does your local religion understand the concept of law, in general, and of divine law, in particular? How could you explain the law of God to your friends in the context of your local culture? If you live in a Christian country,**

how do the Christians in your country relate to God's law? How can you share with them the Adventist message of God's law?

2. In most Christian countries today, we could debate about Sunday versus Saturday as God's current holy day. But what if you live in a non-Christian country? How could you explain to your friends the truth about the Sabbath and the great controversy? How also might you explain about the mark of the beast in your non-Christian context?

3. Compare the ceremonial with the moral law. What is similar, and what is different about them? What does each of these laws reveal about God? How do each of these laws relate to Jesus Christ?

Spiritualism Exposed



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 9:5; Isa. 8:19, 20; John 11:11–14, 21–25; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 16:13, 14; Matt. 24:23–27; 2 Thess. 2:9–12.*

Memory Text: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (*1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, NKJV*).

Decades ago, stories surfaced about near death experiences (NDEs), in which people who died and were then revived gave incredible accounts of what they had seen and heard while “dead.” Millions now believe that these accounts are evidence that the dead are not really dead. This foundational belief of spiritualism is one of Satan’s most widespread and effective deceptions.

In fact, spiritualism began back in Eden with the serpent’s lie to Eve, “You will not surely die” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). This idea also lay at the root of one of the greatest spurious religious movements of the nineteenth century with the Fox sisters’ claim, later admitted to be fraudulent, that they could receive answers to their questions from spirits of the dead.

The aim of this lesson is to show that our only safeguard against Satan’s last-day delusions is a personal relationship with Christ and a solid grounding in the teachings of the Bible. This includes its teaching about death, regardless of what our eyes and ears and hearts might try to tell us.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 31–34 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.

The Deadly Consequences of Spiritualism

The fable that death is really just entrance to a new stage of life is based on the concept of the soul's natural immortality. This pagan idea infiltrated the church early on as it moved away from its biblical foundations in an attempt to make its faith understandable to the wider Roman world. "The theory of the immortality of the soul was one of those false doctrines that Rome, borrowing from paganism, incorporated into the religion of Christendom."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 549.

“ ‘And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ ” (Matt. 10:28, NKJV).

What should this verse alone tell us about the supposed immortality of the soul?

The Lord forbade His people from involvement in occultism of any kind. They were not to tolerate among them “a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (*Deut. 18:11, NKJV*). Such people were to be stoned to death (*Lev. 20:27*). The punishment seems incredibly harsh, but it was designed to protect Israel from worshiping false gods.

Witchcraft is demonic. It seduces people into false worship and counterfeits a genuine relationship with God, but it can never satisfy the deepest needs of the heart. Spiritualism is at the heart of Satan's plan to take the world captive. But Jesus, by His grace and power, sets captives free from the chains of evil that bind them.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 7:7–9; and Isaiah 8:19, 20. What do these Bible passages teach us about death and communication with the dead?

Though unbliblical, the belief that the dead go right to heaven at death has been around for so long and is so firmly entrenched that it's very difficult for people to let go of it. People use a few texts that are taken out of context to try to justify the belief. But this false teaching leaves them with no protection against the deceptions Satan can foist on them, especially in the final crisis.

What has been your experience with trying to explain the state of the dead to other Christians? What, if anything, have you found effective?

Death in the Old Testament

Read Psalm 6:5, Psalm 115:17, 1 Kings 2:10, 1 Kings 11:43, and 1 Kings 14:20. What do these verses teach about the state of the dead?

The Old Testament does not teach the immortality of the soul. Nor does it teach that after death the faithful soar off to the bliss of heaven for eternity and the unfaithful descend to hell, where they burn for eternity. It teaches that death is a sleep. The book of Kings uses the expression “they rested [slept] with their fathers” to describe the death of the patriarchs. The Psalms call it the “sleep of death” (*Ps. 13:3; compare Ps. 90:5*). Referring to death, Job speaks of not awaking from sleep (*Job 14:12*). The psalmist adds, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (*Ps. 17:15, NKJV*).

When the Assyrian army was defeated and destroyed, the death of the soldiers is called their “final sleep” (*Ps. 76:6, CJB*). The idea of the dead as disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living is not a biblical concept at all but pure paganism.

A failure to understand the truth about death leaves us open to the deceptions of Satan. “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

Read Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:25, 26. What elements about the state of the dead are added by these verses?

Death is a rest in sleep until the resurrection. There are no disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living. Although the pagans believed in a spirit world, the Israelites understood death as a sleep until resurrection morning.

Though we mourn for the dead, think this way about those who die in Christ: they close their eyes in death, and then, regardless of how long it takes until Jesus returns, the next thing they know is the Second Coming. The first thought they might have at the resurrection is *Wow! Jesus really did come back soon after all!*

Death in the New Testament

Read John 11:11–14, 21–25; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54; and 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17. How do the New Testament writers’ descriptions of death compare with those in the Old Testament?

Both the Old and New Testaments use the symbolism of death as a sleep. At least 53 times in the Bible, the word “sleep” is equated with death. The Bible writers concur that there is no conscious existence in an immortal soul that leaves the body immediately after death.

The New Testament adds another dimension, one already hinted at in the Old: the glorious resurrection at Christ’s return.

The Gospels emphasize that eternal life is in Christ alone. All the demons in hell cannot rob believers of their assurance of eternal life. Christ conquered death on the cross. The grave can no longer hold its victims. Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee that all believers will one day be resurrected from the grave at His return.

Look at these words of Paul: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, NKJV*). How does one make any sense of these verses if the dead, at death, already are in the bliss of heaven? What does Paul mean that they “have perished” if, in fact, they already are in heaven?

Instead, Paul’s whole point is that Christ’s resurrection is the foundation of our resurrection and that without the Resurrection, “your faith is futile; you are still in your sins,” and the dead remain in the ground, perished.

These verses fit in perfectly with other Bible texts about the hope we have in the resurrection at Jesus’ return when we will receive the “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*). If, however, the dead already are in heaven, why does Peter speak of an inheritance “reserved in heaven” for us? Clearly, New Testament believers eagerly looked forward to the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, and this hope inspired them to faithfulness in the trials of life.

Why is the resurrection such a powerful hope for the Christian faith? What if we had the cross but no resurrection? What hope would we have? Why, then, is the resurrection such an important part of our faith?

Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 1

Read Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:7–9; Revelation 13:13, 14; and Revelation 16:13, 14. What kind of deceptions will people face in the last days?

The devil will use “signs and wonders” and spectacular miracles to deceive multitudes just before the coming of Jesus. Commenting on the deceptive power of demonic spirits, Ángel Rodríguez makes this telling statement: “Their power of persuasion is to be found not in the content of their message but in the power of supernatural manifestations called ‘signs’ or ‘miracles.’ They perform/do (*poieō*) signs, thus appealing to the affective side of human beings rather than to their discretionary and rational abilities. The fact that these signs are performed by demons shows that the unifying force of the message of the three demons [dragon, beast, and false prophet] is spiritualistic in nature—God is not their source or origin. As the cosmic conflict approaches its closure, demonic power will enter the arena of human history in an unprecedented way. Spiritualism, whose very foundation is the non-biblical teaching of the immortality of the soul, will nearly take the world captive.”—“The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

Why is it dangerous to trust our emotions? What roles do they play, good and bad, in our faith experience? How might Satan bypass our thinking processes and appeal to our feelings?

“Satan has long been preparing for his final effort to deceive the world. . . . Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. . . . Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion. The people are fast being lulled to a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 561, 562.

Our sole security is in Jesus and His Word. It’s not hard to see how millions, even billions, who do not understand the state of the dead could be swept away by delusions involving the idea that the dead live on after death.

Even now, what are some common deceptions that those who understand that the dead sleep are protected from?

Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 2

Our hope of salvation is rooted in Christ. His bloodstained hands beckon us to accept the sacrifice so freely provided at infinite cost. Soon Christ will return to claim His own. Titus 2:13 calls the second coming of Christ “the blessed hope.”

Satan’s goal is to destroy this hope. He will perform miracles, signs, and wonders, anything and everything that could lead people away from Bible truth and salvation in Christ.

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). In the final struggle, Satan is going to do all that he can to prevent people from either keeping the “commandments of God” or having “the faith of Jesus,” or both. Hence, the need to be careful of any teaching that, even if accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles, would turn us away from either of these two characteristics of the remnant.

Read Matthew 24:23–27; 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12. What do these passages tell us about Satan’s deceptive power and manner of working?

In the last moments of time, Satan will enact his final deception: “Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the government of heaven. By these agencies, rulers and subjects will be alike deceived. Persons will arise pretending to be Christ Himself, and claiming the title and worship which belong to the world’s Redeemer. They will perform wonderful miracles of healing and will profess to have revelations from heaven *contradicting the testimony of the Scriptures*.”

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13–15.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624 (emphasis supplied).

Why is understanding the truth about how Christ returns, as well as the state of the dead, so important in order not to be deceived?

Further Thought: A recent book by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven*, is premised on the idea that, at death, the dead remain alive in some kind of conscious existence, with “near death experiences” (NDEs) being used as part of the “proof.” One example: “Another girl, who had an NDE during heart surgery, said she met her brother in the afterlife—which surprised her because she didn’t have a brother. When she later recovered and told her father, he revealed to her for the first time that she did, indeed, have a brother, but he had died before she was born.”—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2021), p. 69. Strobel struggles, however, to harmonize the idea of an immediate afterlife with the clear biblical teaching that only when Christ returns do Christians receive their final reward.

We have been warned: “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.

“Just before us is ‘the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.’ Revelation 3:10. All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. Satan ‘works with all deceivableness of unrighteousness’ to gain control of the children of men, and his deceptions will continually increase. But he can gain his object only as men voluntarily yield to his temptations. Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defense. ‘Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee’ (verse 10), is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What subtle spiritualistic influences might Satan be using to influence the mind? What role does mass media play?
- 2 How would you share your faith with a friend who just lost a loved one and believed that this person was in heaven? What is appropriate to say, and what is not appropriate?

Unreached Town in Nigeria

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The Nigerian town of Umuacha is located at a strategic crossroads. The town boasts a big market that attracts daily crowds from neighboring towns. But it lacked a Seventh-day Adventist church.

The absence of an Adventist church was astonishing because Adventist churches had been established more than 70 years earlier in all of the surrounding towns. Even the headquarters of the Adventist Church's Aba North Conference was located nearby. But Umuacha had no church.

Why?

The first church opened in Umuacha more than 80 years earlier, and it resolved to be the only church in town. As the years passed, however, townspeople sold their land to outsiders who, in turn, constructed their own churches. The oldest church accepted the newcomers, but all declared that Adventists, who worshiped on a different day, would never be welcome.

Adventist churches in the neighboring towns struggled to reach Umuacha. When they sought to organize evangelistic meetings, no one would give them a meeting place. Hopes were raised when the church in nearby Mba conducted a two-week evangelistic meeting outside the town and afterward opened a branch Sabbath School. But the Sabbath School closed after only three months. Later, Mba young people held Bible studies that brought several Umuacha families to the Mba church on Sabbaths. But the families stopped attending when their neighbors threw stones at them.

In 2021, the Aba North Conference laid new plans for evangelistic meetings in Umuacha but again struggled to find a site. One landowner agreed to host tent meetings but then abruptly changed his mind. Additional attempts provided unsuccessful that year and in 2022. It seemed hopeless.

Then a church member, Christian, made a new attempt to find a site. While searching, he met Chilaka, the owner of a school.

"You who are running around, what are you looking for?" the school owner asked.

"It seems that I am looking for you," Christian replied.

After a discussion, the school owner offered the property for the meetings. Christian gratefully accepted.

For a month, Adventist preachers proclaimed the Word of God in Umuacha. They were joined by a medical team that cared for the sick. In the end, 29 precious souls were baptized. Then someone donated land, and an Adventist church opened in Umuacha.

"Today, the church is progressing to the glory of God," said Caleb Uchenna Onyendi, evangelism director for the Aba North Conference.

God's timing is perfect, he added, pointing to Exodus 9:5, which says, "Then the LORD appointed a set time, saying, 'Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land' " (NKJV). The Lord did just that in the town of Umuacha.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17*

Study Focus: *Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 9:5; Isa. 8:19, 20; John 11:21–25; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Matt. 24:23–27; Rev. 16:13, 14; 2 Thess. 2:9–12.*

Introduction: Spiritualism is part of the devil’s scheme to promote the diabolical theory that we are gods and can live without God. Thus, spiritualism is the devil’s device to keep humanity on his side of the great controversy. To maintain any form of spiritualism is to be stuck on the side of the devil. To promote spiritualism, the devil changed the biblical definition of death and the Bible teaching about the nature of humanity. These false doctrines lay the groundwork for the spurious teaching that we are eternal and indestructible and that we continue to exist even beyond death. As a consequence, this deception opens the door to the dangerous belief that after we die we can continue to communicate with other people and even angelic beings.

The movement of the European Enlightenment embarked on a long, hard battle to eradicate all medieval forms of spiritualism, including communication with the dead. However, the Enlightenment failed in this endeavor. According to biblical prophecy, spiritualism will strike humanity with full force in the end times, preparing humanity for the last great deception in the great controversy. That is why God’s people are called to proclaim to humanity the true nature, and intentions, of spiritualism, as well as the biblical teachings on human nature, the nature of death, and the true hope of humanity. Our hope is not based on the erroneous notion of an immortal soul but on the assurance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and on an eternal relationship with Him.

Lesson Themes: This study focused on three major themes:

1. The true essence, and intentions, of spiritualism in the context of the great controversy is to deceive humanity into entering a direct relationship with demonic forces.
2. The Bible teaches that humans are unitary, integrated beings; that the first death is a temporary sleep; and that the second death is total annihilation, which is also the biblical depiction of hell.
3. The true hope that the Word of God gives us is the resurrection of the entire human being and an eternal relationship with God.

Part II: Commentary

Designations and Historical Background

Modern spiritualism refers to the religious and/or philosophical belief that

death is not the end of human existence. Rather, spiritualism contends that the spirit survives as an ethereal, immaterial, eternal, immortal soul. After death, these souls or spirits continue to develop and evolve, rapidly advancing to other dimensions and levels of existence and knowledge. Humans who are still in their bodies can contact these departed spirits, asking for help and guidance. These contacts could be done through specialists, such as mediums. Or one could personally contact these spirits through study and practice.

Generally, modern spiritualism is believed to have originated in Hydesville, New York, on March 31, 1848, with the Fox sisters, who claimed that a spirit communicated with them through a rapping code. In 1888, one of the sisters disclosed that all the rapping had been a hoax, but in 1889, she retracted her confession. Despite huge scandals of fraud, spiritualism spread in North America. By the end of the nineteenth century, several million middle- and upper-class Americans considered themselves spiritualists.

In the meantime, in the 1850s, Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, a French teacher known by the pseudonym Allan Kardec, developed spiritism. Spiritism teaches that humans are incarnations and reincarnations of immortal spirits that populate a transcendent sphere. Thus, while spiritism believes in the reincarnation of the eternal soul, spiritualism believes in the eternity of the soul without accepting the concept of reincarnation. While all spiritists are spiritualists, not all spiritualists are spiritists. Although there is some disagreement between these spiritualistic movements, they are all united by one belief: *the immortality of the soul and the possibility of communicating with spirits after their death*. In the second half of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of the educated elites of Europe embraced either spiritualism or spiritism, developing modern Western occultism. They organized themselves in numerous societies and associations, publishing an enormous quantity of books and articles on esoteric knowledge and magic.

The Immortality of the Soul

Modern Western spiritualists do not claim their belief in the immortality of the soul is new. Rather, they readily concede that this “knowledge” comes from the “ancients.” Indeed, the concept of the immortality of the soul can be traced back to the serpent’s temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Afterward, this false theology spread throughout the world, permeating entire cultures and creating entire religions, such as shamanism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, voodoo, and other local and regional pagan religions.

The immortality of the soul was the foundation of Greek philosophy, especially Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Middle Platonism, and Neoplatonism. Manichaeism and Gnosticism also built on

the same concept. Tragically, through a syncretism with Greek philosophy, Christianity was also infused with the concept of the immortality of the soul. For this reason, even if many Christian denominations today have condemned spiritism, any Christian church that continues to hold fast to the concept of the immortality of the soul is especially vulnerable to spiritualism and occultism. As a result, some churches, such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, have developed an entire cult of saints, who allegedly can hear prayers and respond by protecting and guiding the ones who appeal to them. The Protestant Reformers rejected the cult of the saints; however, the concept of the immortality of the soul is entrenched in most Protestant denominations, potentially opening them to spiritualist influences.

Two additional observations are important here. First, it is noteworthy that modern spiritualism emerged exactly during the same period, and in the same area, in which Millerite Adventism originated: in the northeastern United States during the 1840s. This emergence was the devil's attempt to anticipate, and discredit, God's work of proclaiming the second coming of Jesus and the three angels' messages. God proclaimed these messages through the remnant church, which was confirmed through the gift of the Spirit of prophecy. One of the foundational teachings of the Adventist Church was to call people to reject the pagan belief of the immortality of the soul. The Adventist Church also called the world to return to the biblical teaching of the unitary human being. Adventists also urged humanity to hang its hope for the afterlife, not on surviving death as an immortal soul but on the resurrection that Jesus would bring at His second coming.

Second, the European Enlightenment or modernism, with its emphasis on science and scientific education and technology, promised humanity the extermination of superstitions, magic, witchcraft, and any contact with the supernatural. Perhaps the only success of modernism in this regard was to undermine the belief in the Christian God among Westerners. Otherwise, modernism never succeeded in uprooting the supernatural from Western society. As a result, Western society became secular and atheistic, without being free of spiritualism. On the contrary, the second half of the nineteenth century is known as one of the greatest revivals in the history of spiritualism, spiritism, occultism, witchcraft, and magic. By the end of the twentieth century, modernism itself struggled for survival, as postmodernist children were inundated with occultic stories—in the form of books, cartoons, and movies—replete with supernatural powers, magic, witchcraft, and communications with the dead.

Today, too, what are known as near-death experiences are now another manifestation of this same principle. And, unfortunately, even many Christians see them as proof that the dead immediately live on in another realm of existence.

Spiritualism and the Great Controversy

What is the role of spiritualism in the devil's strategy amid the great controversy? By promoting spiritualism, the devil wants to explain, and confirm, his foundational deception that started the great controversy, namely:

- that God is not the only God, but that we are all gods;
- that we have life in and of ourselves;
- that we have a component (the soul) of our beings that is spiritual (immaterial, ethereal), indestructible, immortal, and eternal; and
- that we are morally autonomous.

Humanity's fall into sin brought incommensurable suffering, destruction, and death, empirically proving the devil wrong. In this situation, humans would rightly doubt Satan's thesis in which he stated that rebelling against God would not lead to death but to another divine level of existence and consciousness. Spiritualism in various forms, then, is the devil's attempt to redefine death and affirm that only the body dies and that the soul transitions to a superior form of life.

The devil also uses spiritualism to lure or drive people to a direct, personal encounter with himself and his demons. The Bible clearly teaches that behind spiritualistic phenomena, as in the case of idolatry, stand demons themselves (*1 Cor. 10:20*). These encounters are dangerous, not only because they are deceptive (*John 8:44*) and generate impurity (*Mark 5:2*) but also because, many times, they lead toward demon possession, a situation in which demons control, and enslave, humans. For various reasons and as part of their strategy, demons cannot possess or control everyone in the same way. However, demonic forces are in the constant business of devising a large variety of snares to capture as many people as possible to side with them in the great controversy. The apostle Peter warns us that our "enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (*1 Pet. 5:8, NIV*).

Christ's Power

Despite the devil's efforts, Christ's healing of people possessed with demons (*e.g., Luke 8:26–33, Matt. 12:45*) demonstrated His power to deliver us from Satan's control. Seventh-day Adventists proclaim Christ's victory, not only at the end of the great controversy but here and now, in the midst of it. For this reason, at the 2005 General Conference Session, in St. Louis, Missouri, the Seventh-day Adventist Church voted an additional fundamental belief, number 11, that precisely highlights this point:

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually

committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. We are also called to follow Christ's example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience."—Fundamental Belief Number 11, "Growing in Christ," <https://www.adventist.org/growing-in-christ>.

Initially, this fundamental belief was necessitated by the situation in some parts of the world, such as Asia and Africa, in which Christians, in general, and even some Adventists, were not clear that Scripture rejects all occult practices. In addition, even if Adventists in those areas did understand that the Bible opposes all spiritualistic practices, they were hesitant to break free of those practices and teachings because they were afraid of the retaliation of the spirits. Moreover, spiritualism, spiritism, and occultism are all pervasive realities, not only in Africa and Asia but throughout the world. Thus, fundamental belief 11 is for all people. Regardless of our cultural and social backgrounds, all people need the same message of the gospel: " 'My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand' " (*John 10:27–29, NASB*).

Part III: Life Application

1. **What do people in your particular culture think about human nature and death? How can you share with them the truth about death, as taught in the Word of God?**
2. **What do people in your culture think about hell? What can you and your church do in your society to promote the biblical understanding of hell?**

The Impending Conflict



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:7, 9, 12; Rev. 4:11; Rev. 13:1, 2; Rev. 12:3–5, 17; Rev. 13:11–18.*

Memory Text: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”
(*John 17:17, NKJV*).

There is a relatively new medical device called a biochip or VeriChip, about the size of a grain of rice, that can be implanted in a patient. The biochip contains information about the patient's medical history, which can then be obtained by passing an external scanner across the area where the biochip or VeriChip has been inserted. Some Christians see this as part of a conspiracy to enforce the mark of the beast. For others, the mark of the beast has to do with the bar codes on cans of food, or it is a mysterious number on dollar bills that supposedly adds up to 666. For some it has to do with the Masonic order, the Illuminati, black U.N. helicopters, or the United Nations.

The aim of this week's lesson is to reveal the coming conflict over worship. Satan will challenge God's authority by attempting to undermine God's law. Specifically, the Sabbath will become the center of a global conflict over worship. Satan hates the Sabbath because he hates the Creator. He will use coercion, pressure, and force to break our commitment to Christ. There will be a collision of beliefs over the true and false day of worship. God's final appeal is an appeal to faithfulness to Christ despite persecution, an economic boycott, imprisonment, and a death decree. This week's study emphasizes Jesus' strength to take us through earth's final conflict.

** Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 35 and 36 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 15.*

Revelation's Final Conflict

The message of Revelation is much more than cryptic symbols, strange beasts, and odd images. It speaks of eternal truths given by a loving God to an end-time generation. The conflict between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship. It will come to its final climax over worship.

Compare Revelation 14:7, 9 with Revelation 4:11. What is the overarching theme of Revelation in this conflict between good and evil?

Throughout Revelation, worship and creation are indissolubly linked. Revelation 14:7 calls us to worship the Lord of all creation. Against the backdrop of evolution, which has taken the world by storm during the past two centuries, the Sabbath is an eternal reminder of our identity. It constantly reinforces that we are created beings and our Creator is worthy of our allegiance and worship. This is one reason the devil hates the Sabbath so much.

Read Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12. How does worshiping the Creator find its final expression?

Worshiping the Creator through keeping the commandments of God stands in direct opposition to worshiping the beast. God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him despite the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in history.

“While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

Revelation 14:12 states that these committed followers of the Savior will have “the faith of Jesus.” The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep that it trusts when it cannot see. It perseveres when it cannot understand. It is a gift from Jesus that we receive by faith and will carry us through the impending conflict.

The seventh-day Sabbath is so foundational a symbol of God as Creator that it goes back to Eden itself. Thus, to seek to usurp it, as Rome did (see Dan. 7:25), is to seek to usurp the authority of God at the most foundational level possible, God as Creator. How does this truth help us see why it will be such a controverted point in the last days?

The Coming Crisis

The mark of the beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the fiercest and very worst stage of Satan's war against God. Ever since Jesus died on the cross, the enemy has known he was defeated, but he is determined to take as many as possible down with him. His first strategy in this campaign is deception. When deception does not work, he resorts to force. He is ultimately behind the decree that anyone who refuses to worship the beast or receive his mark will be put to death.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for obeying God's command. Jesus said it would happen even among believers.

Read John 16:2, Matthew 10:22, 2 Timothy 3:12, and 1 Peter 4:12. What did the New Testament church experience, and how does that apply to Christ's end-time church?

Throughout Christian history, persecution was common. It happened in pagan Rome but was especially evident in the vicious persecution of Bible-believing Christians by the medieval church. The mark of the beast is the final link in this hellish chain. Like past persecutions, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship.

The prophecy indicates that persecution will start with economic sanctions: no one can buy or sell unless they have the mark. Anyone who refuses to receive the mark will eventually be placed under a death decree (*Rev. 13:15, 17*).

The devil already is preparing professed Christians to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes by encouraging them to make compromises in their lives. When it appears that the whole world is following the beast in wondering admiration (*Rev. 13:3*), suddenly the scene changes, and the prophetic camera focuses on God's people. Revelation 14:12 gives us this picture. "Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*NKJV*). God's people live lives of godly obedience. By His grace, they stand firm when everything is shaking all around them. While the world is following the beast, they "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (*Rev. 14:4, NKJV*). By the power of Christ, they triumph over the powers of hell arrayed against them.

As we saw in lesson 9, the central conflict between good and evil is over worship. The beast uses deception and, when that fails, force and coercion.

How quickly now do you allow, if at all, economic considerations to compromise your Sabbath keeping?

Identifying the Beast: Part 1

Read Revelation 13:1, 2. Where does this beast rise from, and who gives it authority?

The book of Revelation identifies the dragon primarily as Satan. Revelation 12:3–5 says the dragon attempted to destroy, “as soon as it was born,” the “male Child,” who was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*). It was the devil, working through pagan Rome, who tried to destroy Christ (*see Matt. 2:16–18*). The archenemy of God and humanity works through political and religious institutions to accomplish his purposes.

About this beast power we’re told, “The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (*Rev. 13:2, NKJV*). This prophecy was precisely fulfilled hundreds of years later when the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople, in modern-day Turkey. This left a power vacuum at the former throne or seat of the caesars, the imperial city of Rome. Thus, pagan Rome gave the beast its seat, or capital city.

Isaac Backus stated, “By removing the seat of the empire to Constantinople, . . . Constantine made way for the bishop of Rome to exalt himself above all men upon earth, and above the God of Heaven.”—*The Infinite Importance of the Obedience of Faith, and of Separation from the World*, p. 16, quoted in Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 3, p. 213. According to Thomas Hobbes, “the Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof.”—*Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 386. A careful analysis reveals that the sea beast of Revelation 13 is an apostate religious power that rises out of Rome and becomes a worldwide system of worship (*Rev. 13:3, 4*). This beast is not a person; it is a religious organization that has substituted the truth of God’s Word for human decrees.

Read Revelation 13:1, 6. What key word is used to identify the beast power?

The Bible defines *blasphemy* in John 10:33 and Luke 5:21 with two examples: (1) a man pretending to be or claiming to be God, and (2) a man claiming the power to forgive sins. These accusations against Jesus were unjust because He is truly God and, therefore, has the right to forgive sins. The Roman Papacy has two distinctive doctrines that the Bible calls blasphemy: its claims that its priests have the power to forgive sins and that the pope has the prerogatives of God on earth.

Identifying the Beast: Part 2

Rather than worshiping the beast, God's people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshiping Him. Their obedience springs from their heart of love. They are committed to Him because they know how committed He is to them.

Read Revelation 13:5. Write this identifying characteristic in the space below.

Recall from lesson 4 that God gives us a key for understanding prophetic time—one prophetic day equals one literal year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). Calculating the time period of 42 months mentioned in Revelation 13:5 using the 30-day Hebrew month equals 1,260 prophetic days or literal years.

The Papacy exercised great influence from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. But when Berthier, Napoleon's general, took the pope captive in A.D. 1798, the prophetic period of papal supremacy ended, and Revelation's prophecy was fulfilled: "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity" (*Rev. 13:10, NKJV*). The blow to the Papacy was extremely serious but not fatal. According to Revelation 13:12, the deadly wound would be healed. The Papacy's influence once again would be felt worldwide.

Today, world leaders welcome the pontiff as an ambassador of the church of Rome and visit him regularly at the Vatican. In a world of unprecedented instability, the scene is being set for the Roman pontiff to become the acclaimed moral leader of the world who can bring people together. During his speech on June 6, 2012, to more than 15,000 people gathered in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI declared, "Sunday is the day of the Lord and of men and women, a day in which everyone must be able to be free, free for the family and free for God. In defending Sunday we defend human freedom."—https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120606.html (accessed October 10, 2022). *The Great Controversy* clearly reveals where this movement will one day ultimately lead: "Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. . . . They will be accused of disaffection toward the government. Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. In legislative halls and courts of justice, commandment keepers will be misrepresented and condemned."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 592.

However hard it is now to see something like this happening, look at how quickly our world can change. What should these changes tell us about how quickly end-time events can come upon us?

The Beast From the Earth

Read Revelation 13:11–18. How does this second beast differ from the first beast of Revelation 13?

The first beast rose out of the sea; the second beast comes “up out of the earth” (*Rev. 13:11, NKJV*). The sea represents “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (*Rev. 17:15, NKJV*). The earth, then, represents a sparsely populated area of the world. This second beast arises near the close of the prophetic period during which the first beast exercises authority (*Rev. 13:5*). That is, it rises to prominence around A.D. 1798.

The United States precisely fits this description. It declared its independence in A.D. 1776, adopted its constitution in A.D. 1789, and was recognized as a world power by the late nineteenth century.

John continues, “He had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11, NKJV*). Horns in Bible prophecy symbolize power. Unlike the first beast, this beast has no crowns on its horns, suggesting it is not a monarchy. The two horns represent the two primary governing principles that are the source of the United States’ power and success—political and religious liberty.

Read Revelation 13:11, 12. What change do you see in this beast, and how does it speak?

This gentle, lamblike nation ultimately speaks like a dragon. It exercises “all the authority of the first beast” (*Rev. 13:12, NKJV*) and abandons its principles of religious liberty, causing “the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast” (*Rev. 13:12, NKJV*). The United States will lead out in requiring everyone on earth to worship the first beast by recognizing the Papacy’s spiritual and secular authority. According to this prophecy, the United States forms an image to the beast—a union of church and state—and it will require everyone to worship this image.

What’s fascinating is that at the time when first identified as this beast power, the United States was nowhere near the military and economic behemoth it was to become and remains now.

Think about the political instability in America today. How might that one day lead to the fulfillment of this prophecy?

Further Thought: Worshiping the beast and its image alludes to Daniel 3, in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded by the king of Babylon to bow down to a golden image or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Ancient Babylon, modern Babylon—the issue is worship. True worship springs from a mind taught by God’s Word, a soul transformed by His love, and a heart filled with His Spirit. Then we will not be “conformed to this world” but live according to God’s will, which is found in His Word. That is our only safety!

“God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan’s constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 591.

“In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 593.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we live in the expectation of the coming of Christ and share that hope without becoming alarmists?
- 2 Dwell more on the question of worship. What does our daily life, our daily routine, tell us about who or what we worship?
- 3 How can we help ourselves and others face the future with confidence and not with fear?
- 4 What practical difference does understanding last-day events make in our lives today?

No to Pork, Yes to Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sara thought about the Seventh-day Adventist Church as she helped her mother sell pork and beer in Mozambique in southeast Africa.

Why do Adventists go to church on Saturday? she wondered.

As a small girl, Sara had gone to the Adventist Church several times with her big brother, who was an Adventist. But then he had moved to another town, and she had gone back to the church of her mother.

As she worked with her mother, memories about the Adventist Church returned. She thought about Adventist neighbors who had moved next door. Sara decided to ask them why they went to church on Saturday.

The neighbors welcomed Sara's question, and they opened the Bible to the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8–10. Sara read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work" (NKJV). She also read other verses about the holiness of the seventh-day Sabbath. She saw that Jesus worshiped on the seventh day when He lived on earth. She decided to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

Mother was furious when Sara told her that she would no longer sell pork and beer on Saturdays. She forbade Sara from going to the Adventist Church. Sara went anyway. She wanted to honor her mother as God commands in the fifth commandment (*Exod. 20:12*). But she also realized that it was more important "to obey God rather than men" (*Acts 5:29*).

Tensions escalated further when Sara stopped selling pork and beer altogether. She explained to Mother that God does not condone the eating of unclean meat, such as pork (*Lev. 11:7*), or the drinking of alcohol (*Prov. 20:1*). Furthermore, she said, the Bible teaches that "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (*1 Cor. 10:31*), and selling products unapproved by God would not glorify Him.

Mother threw Sara out of the house. With nowhere to go, Sara left town and moved in with her Adventist brother and his wife and their sons. Her heart was heavy. *Is this the cost of following Jesus?* she wondered.

Sara's brother presented her case to leaders at his church. Through their efforts, an Adventist pastor met with Mother. She listened carefully to what he said. She didn't agree with him on everything. But her face softened as they spoke. She said Sara could return home.

Today, Mother still does not share Sara's convictions. Sara is praying for the Holy Spirit to touch her heart. She knows that the God who gave her a fuller understanding of His love can do the same for her mother.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Africa and around the world.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *John 17:17*

Study Focus: *John 17:17; Rev. 14:6, 7, 12; Rev. 4:11; Rev. 12:3, 4, 17; Rev. 13:1–17.*

Introduction: Biblical prophecy forewarns that the long cosmic conflict between the two opposite, irreconcilable forces, God and the devil, is drawing to a close and will culminate in a final battle. This last battle will be over issues of authority and worship: who shall sit on the throne of the universe, and who will receive the glory due the Creator, the Provider, and the Savior. For these reasons, the conflict will involve the Sabbath, God’s symbol of all His power as Creator, Provider, and Savior. The rebellious force will be led by Satan himself. While Satan has tirelessly worked throughout history to recruit adherents, his main focus has been the church. Unfortunately, the traditional church compromised and became Babylon, symbolized by the beast from the sea. Satan gave this beast its seat of authority and its power, and it stands on Satan’s side in the final battle.

In the end times, the dragon also will succeed in attracting to his side the most prosperous nation on earth, the United States of America. This nation, born out of the centuries-long yearning of persecuted Christians to find a place of religious safety and freedom, will compromise, as did the papal church before it in the Old World. Thus, America will fulfill its prophetic role as the beast from the earth, becoming a global leader in the final battle.

But God has never been without a people in the great controversy. To the end of the conflict, He always will have a people, a faithful remnant church. God’s remnant church always has acknowledged Him as King, worshiped Him, and kept the commandments and the principles of His kingdom. God’s faithful remnant people will reverence the Sabbath and honor Him as Creator and King of the universe. The end-time remnant not only will worship God as their personal Savior but also will expose the confederacy of evil publicly. The remnant church will call the entire human race to return to God and worship Him. Despite the efforts of the dragon and the beasts from the earth and the sea, the victory will belong to God.

Lesson Themes: This study highlights two major themes:

1. Biblical prophecy describes a final battle between God and His people on the one side, and the devil and his agents (symbolized, in Revelation 13, by the beasts from the sea and the earth) on the other. The battle will focus on worship and the Sabbath, which celebrates God’s Creatorship, Kingship, and salvation.

2. God will emerge victorious. He calls His people to partake in His victory over evil and over the devil by proclaiming His eternal gospel.

Part II: Commentary

The Bet Over Prophecy

Anastasia was an atheist economist, educated in a Soviet university, during the height of the prosperity and stability of the Soviet Union. She embraced the dream of the Communist utopia and fervently believed it offered humanity its brightest hope for the future. She anticipated the day when the Soviet Union would lead all nations to abandon the free-market capitalism of the United States and adopt Soviet values.

Anastasia's husband, Petru, however, did not share his wife's optimism. Although Petru was not practicing his religion at that time, he had been born and raised in a Seventh-day Adventist family and church. As a youth, Petru had studied the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, following the Adventist historicist approach. Now married, he shared with his atheist wife that, according to the biblical prophecies, the United States would eventually dominate the world and lead all nations and governments on the earth in an act of rebellion against God, during the final stage of human history. For this reason, based on the prophecies of the book of Revelation, Petru argued that the Soviet Union would lose the Cold War and that the United States would emerge as the only superpower of the last days. Knowing the power of the Soviet Union, Anastasia could not accept this prophecy. At an impasse, the couple decided to solve their differences with a bet. Anastasia told Peter that if the Soviet Union would collapse, she would become a Seventh-day Adventist. Years passed, and at the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union crumbled and disappeared without any military attack from the outside. Anastasia's atheism and Communism collapsed together with the Soviet Union. Soon afterward, Anastasia accepted Petru's invitation to join him in baptism into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Petru's prediction of the collapse of the Soviet Union was not based on geopolitics, social studies, psychology, economics, or military studies. Because he was living behind the Iron Curtain, the main source for Petru's prediction of the fall of the Soviet Union was his historicist biblical interpretation of Revelation 13, as taught in his local Adventist church. Like many other Adventists in the Soviet world, Petru did not think the collapse of the Soviet Union would happen in his lifetime or so rapidly. Like many other Adventists, Petru's faith was confirmed and strengthened when the collapse happened. He made the decision to return to his church, and happily, his family followed him.

In our days, the Adventist historicist interpretation of Revelation 13, pointing to the United States as the lamblike beast who will lead the world in rebellion against the law of God, is being actively challenged. Many renowned experts predict, or even announce, that the sun will soon set on American hegemony. However, biblical prophecy will never fail. Like Petru, we need to completely trust biblical prophecy and its historicist interpretation, even if perceived reality suggests, and experts prognosticate, otherwise.

Conspiracy Theories

Lately, conspiracy theories flood both cyber and media spaces. Such theories often gain momentum and become social phenomena. Adventists rightly have been cautious about engaging in the propagation of conspiracy theories of any type. We need to continue to maintain this course. At the same time, our pursuit of this policy does not mean that conspiracies do not exist. Sad to say, they do.

David, Jesus, and the apostles suffered because of various conspiracies against them. Learning from their examples, Adventists have committed all such theories to God's providence, choosing instead to focus on the mission with which God has entrusted us. Yes, the great controversy itself was the result of Satan's conspiracy. Yes, we are called to denounce the end-time conspiracies of Satan and his adherents, who are preparing for the final battle against God. However, we must not permit ourselves to get mired in details of the myriad conspiracy theories abounding. Our task is to announce the fall of Babylon and the soon coming of the Lord. As such, our mission is to save as many people as possible from Satan's conspiracy.

Identifying the Beasts and the Mission of the Church

Some theologians have claimed that the first Adventist pioneers' identification of the beast from the sea with the Roman Catholic Church and of the beast from the earth with the United States were conclusions dictated by their sociopolitical contexts. Some of these theologians, then, call for Adventists to move away from these initial positions and find other more relevant spiritual, or political, forces in our own times that would better fit the descriptions of the beast from the sea and/or the beast from the earth.

However, we need to emphasize two important points. First, while the Adventist pioneers did look at the fulfillment of prophecy within their historical contexts, they consistently followed historicist principles of prophetic interpretation. They also identified the fulfillment of the prophecies in harmony with a wholistic biblical system of teaching.

Second, as God's prophet for the remnant church, Ellen G. White clearly has warned us against abandoning our original prophetic interpretations regarding the two beasts of Revelation 13. She was especially

concerned that Adventists would fall into the trap of thinking that the Roman Catholic Church has now changed and is no longer the tyrannical beast from the sea, thus necessitating the search for another candidate for this post. The following quotations from her monumental book *The Great Controversy* are remarkable and clearly militate against such a course of action:

“Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence, there is an increasing indifference concerning the doctrines that separate the reformed churches from the papal hierarchy; the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome. . . .

“The defenders of the papacy declare that the church has been maligned, and the Protestant world are inclined to accept the statement. Many urge that it is unjust to judge the church of today by the abominations and absurdities that marked her reign during the centuries of ignorance and darkness. They excuse her horrible cruelty as the result of the barbarism of the times and plead that the influence of modern civilization has changed her sentiments.”—Page 563.

“But Romanism as a system is no more in harmony with the gospel of Christ now than at any former period in her history. The Protestant churches are in great darkness, or they would discern the signs of the times. The Roman Church is far-reaching in her plans and modes of operation. She is employing every device to extend her influence and increase her power in preparation for a fierce and determined conflict to regain control of the world, to re-establish persecution, and to undo all that Protestantism has done. Catholicism is gaining ground upon every side. See the increasing number of her churches and chapels in Protestant countries. Look at the popularity of her colleges and seminaries in America, so widely patronized by Protestants. Look at the growth of ritualism in England and the frequent defections to the ranks of the Catholics. These things should awaken the anxiety of all who prize the pure principles of the gospel.”—Pages 565, 566.

“The Roman Church now presents a fair front to the world, covering with apologies her record of horrible cruelties. She has clothed herself in Christlike garments; but she is unchanged. Every principle of the papacy that existed in past ages exists today. The doctrines devised in the darkest ages are still held. Let none deceive themselves. The papacy that Protestants are now so ready to honor is the same that ruled the world in the days of the Reformation, when men of God stood up, at the peril of their lives, to expose her iniquity. She possesses the same pride and arrogant assumption that lorded it over kings and princes, and claimed the prerogatives of God. Her spirit is no less cruel and despotic now than when she crushed out human liberty and slew the saints of the Most High. . . .

“It is not without reason that the claim has been put forth in Protestant countries that Catholicism differs less widely from Protestantism than in former times. There has been a change; but the change is not in the papacy. Catholicism indeed resembles much of the Protestantism that now exists, because Protestantism has so greatly degenerated since the days of the Reformers.”—Page 571.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Maybe you live in a place far from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church or from an American presence or impact. How would you, then, best explain to your friends the prophecies about the beast from the sea and the beast from the land?**

- 2. Is it consistent for us to identify the Roman Catholic Church as the sea beast and the United States as the earth beast and, at the same time, pray for the salvation of the people associated with these entities? Explain your answer.**

- 3. The prophet Daniel, the medieval Christians, the nineteenth-century Adventists, the Adventists in the Soviet Union and in many other places and times trusted Bible prophecy against all odds. How can you trust Bible prophecy when all evidence seems contrary to its fulfillment?**

Earth's Closing Events



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 8:32; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Rev. 7:1, 2; Rev. 14:1; Joel 2:21–24; Hos. 6:3; James 5:7, 8; Rev. 18:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding” (*Proverbs 23:23, NKJV*).

Suppose you had a daughter driving home from college for summer vacation. As you wait for her to arrive, you anxiously monitor the weather reports. You become worried as the weather rapidly deteriorates. Storm clouds loom on the horizon. Winds blow fiercely. The heavens open and rain pours down. Trees are blown over. Soon the main road home is impassable. Then you hear from one of your neighbors that it is possible to get through on a secondary road. Cars can navigate around some downed tree limbs. Although communication is difficult, you are able to get a text message to your daughter, carefully detailing how she can get home safely.

More than anything else, Jesus wants to take us through the storms of life and get us home. Ellen G. White writes, “A storm is coming, relentless in its fury. Are we prepared to meet it?”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 315. The purpose of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ministry in heaven's sanctuary is to ensure that we get home. The prophetic messages of Daniel and Revelation are divine instructions, especially for an end-time people, to help us through life's storms so that one day we can feel the warm embrace of a loving Savior.

The aim of this week's lesson is to reveal what the prophetic Word says about the closing events and discover anew Christ's strength to take us through earth's final conflict and get us home.

* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 37 and 38 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.

Loyalty to God and His Word

Read Proverbs 23:23, John 8:32, and John 17:17. What common thread runs through these verses?

Throughout the ages, the great controversy has been a battle between truth and error. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (*John 8:44*). Jesus is the author of all truth. He declared, “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’” (*John 14:6*). The truth that sets us free from Satan’s deceptions is found in God’s Word. The Bible unmasks Satan’s strategy and reveals God’s plans. Scripture is a lamp to our feet (*Ps. 119:105*). The psalmist declares, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (*Ps. 119:130, NKJV*). He then adds, “The entirety of Your word is truth” (*Ps. 119:160, NKJV*).

Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. What assurance does the apostle give us regarding prophecy? What illustration does he use to show the importance of God’s prophetic Word?

We have not followed “cunningly devised fables.” The prophecies of God’s Word light up the road ahead. They help us distinguish truth from error. Without the Bible, we would be left to the whims of human opinion and easily be deceived. “The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness. Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions. . . . The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. . . . None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

Consider the questions in the quote above. What will enable us to stand in the final crisis? What distracts us from studying God’s Word? How might we be compromising truth for personal pleasure?

Sealed for Heaven

In the coming crisis over worship, God's faithful people will not yield to worldly pressures (*Rev. 14:12*). They will be sealed by the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 4:30*) and cannot be moved. In ancient times, seals attested to the authenticity of official documents. They were a distinctive, individualized mark. Since the final conflict centers on worship and God's authority as revealed in His law, we would expect God's seal to be embedded in His law (*compare Isa. 8:16*).

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What elements of a seal are contained in the Sabbath commandment?

Here we have three elements of an authentic seal: (1) the name to whom the seal belongs, "the LORD thy God;" (2) His title, the One who "made"—the Creator; (3) and His territory, "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is." A seal is sometimes called a sign in the Bible (*Rom. 4:11*). The two words are interchangeable. As God's sign or seal in the heart of God's law, the Sabbath is at the center of the final conflict over worship (*Ezek. 20:12, 20; Rev. 12:17*).

Compare Revelation 7:1, 2 and Revelation 14:1 with Revelation 13:16, 17. Where are the seal of God and the mark of the beast received? Why do you think there is a difference?

The seal of God is placed on the forehead. The forehead is a symbol of the mind and represents a conscious decision.

The mark of the beast is received either in the forehead or in the hand indicating that people are convinced intellectually and by their own choice accept Satan's lies or, alternatively, they conform to false worship to avoid being killed.

The devil hates those who are obedient to God. The great controversy comes to a climax when the dragon (Satan) wages war on the believing remnant, who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). They are settled in their loyalty to Christ.

Why is day-by-day faithfulness to the Lord the key to being prepared when the final crisis arrives?

Whom Do We Worship?

In the last days, the great controversy will be played out, in a dramatic way, over worship. Do we worship the Creator, or do we worship the beast and its image? There is no middle ground. The first angel of Revelation 14 urges men and women to “ ‘worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). In further support of heaven’s appeal, the third angel reveals the dire consequences of worshipping the beast: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation” (*Rev. 14:10*). By contrast, those who worship the Creator are described as keeping “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

Creation is the basis of true worship (*Rev. 4:11*). Since God “created all things through Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 3:9, NKJV*), Satan hates the Creator and has attempted, through earthly powers, to change the Sabbath, the memorial of Creation (*Dan. 7:25*). The coming conflict over the law of God focuses on authority. If Satan can eradicate Sabbath worship, he will declare that his authority is greater than God’s authority. To accomplish this, Satan will attempt to convince or coerce the entire world to accept a counterfeit Sabbath.

However hard it may be now to see this happening, as we have noted before, the world is changing dramatically. The COVID-19 crisis showed us that, overnight, our world can become a different place. Though we don’t know the details that lead to the mark of the beast, it’s not terribly hard to imagine. The world is very unstable, and with the amazing technology out there now, what the Bible warns about can, indeed, come to pass more quickly than we might now imagine.

Read Revelation 13:13–17. What specific penalties are inflicted upon those who do not receive the mark of the beast?

Those who are faithful to Christ, as opposed to following the beast and its image, will face economic penalties as well as the threat of death. Humanity remains what it has always been: corrupt, power-hungry, and violent. However much we don’t yet know about exactly how the final events will unfold, it should not be too hard to envision end-time persecution. Though written in another context completely, these words in John say it all. Talking about Jesus, John wrote that He “had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (*John 2:25, NKJV*).

Think about the corruption of humanity and the evil that humans are capable of doing. Why does this show how easily final events could come about? Also, even more important, what should this sad truth teach us about guarding our own hearts?

The Early and Latter Rain

Read Joel 2:21–24 and Acts 2:1–4, 41–47. What prediction was fulfilled in the first century? What impact did it have?

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost powerfully launched the Christian church. Three thousand were converted in a day. Acts records miracle after miracle of God’s transforming grace: “Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (*Acts 4:4, NKJV*). Only 120 believers gathered to pray, but prayer made a dramatic difference. Rapidly the church added thousands of believers. Even “a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (*Acts 6:7, NKJV*). Yes, even many priests became followers of Jesus.

When the disciples were fiercely persecuted in Jerusalem, they “went everywhere preaching the word” (*Acts 8:4, NKJV*). Churches were planted throughout all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (see *Acts 9:31*). After his conversion, the apostle Paul proclaimed Christ throughout the Mediterranean world. In Thessalonica, some Jews opposed to the gospel made this astonishing statement: “ ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too’ ” (*Acts 17:6, NKJV*). What a powerful testimony to what the early church was able to accomplish. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples reached the then-known world in a relatively short time. Joel’s prediction of the early rain was fulfilled at Pentecost, but the latter rain will fall with greater power to ready earth’s final harvest.

Read Zechariah 4:6; Zechariah 10:1; Hosea 6:3; and James 5:7, 8. According to these verses, how will the work of God on earth be finished?

The terms “early” and “latter” rain are taken from Israel’s harvest cycle. The early rain fell in the fall of the year to germinate the seed. The latter rain fell in the spring to ripen the harvest. This describes the work of the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel. “As the ‘former rain’ was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the ‘latter rain’ will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

The Loud Cry

Read Revelation 18:1–4, Habakkuk 2:14, and Matthew 24:14. How do these verses say God’s work on earth will be finished?

The angel announcing the fall of Babylon has “great authority.” Like the angels of Revelation 14, this angel represents human messengers. This angel reveals the glory of God so fully that it illuminates the entire earth. The Greek word for authority or power in the New Testament is *exousia*. It often refers to Christ’s triumph over the principalities and powers of hell. Jesus uses this word in the gospel of Matthew in harmony with the sending out of His disciples. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples authority over the principalities and powers of hell. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28, He once again sends them out with “ ‘all authority . . . in heaven and on earth’ ” to “ ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, 19, NKJV*).

Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, going forth with the authority of the living Christ who in His life and death triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell, the New Testament church lightened the earth with the glory of God. In a few short years, the disciples proclaimed the gospel to the then-known world (*Col. 1:23*).

At the end time, the Holy Spirit will be poured out in unprecedented power, and the gospel will be spread rapidly to the ends of the earth. Thousands will be converted in a day, and God’s grace and truth will impact the entire planet. In this way, the world will be warned and the gospel, and the hope it offers, will be spread worldwide.

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. . . .

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

What is holding back the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the latter rain, and the loud cry? However small our role as individuals might be, what role can we fill in being open and receptive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

Further Thought: As early as 1851, Adventist pioneers identified the second beast of Revelation 13:11–17 with the United States of America. But it must have been difficult back then to see how the United States could cause all the world to worship the first beast (*Rev. 13:12*). Even by the 1880s the entire United States Navy consisted of just forty-eight aging ships.

But since the end of the Cold War, no power matches the United States militarily. And though Americans have enjoyed wonderful freedoms, as times get harder, it's not difficult to see those freedoms being trampled on—or even completely undermined. Many believe that even now we are seeing this happen.

“All who refuse compliance [in observing the false sabbath] will be visited with civil penalties, and it will finally be declared that they are deserving of death. On the other hand, the law of God enjoining the Creator's rest day demands obedience and threatens wrath against all who transgress its precepts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 604.

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 608.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is an understanding of last-day events so important in the coming crisis? How are the Scriptures a safeguard from deception?
- 2 Democratic societies worldwide have been bastions of religious freedom for centuries. How might that change rather quickly?
- 3 Look at Ellen White's statement above. What choices are you making today that could result in your being with those professed Adventists tomorrow?
- 4 How does the second angel's message change under the loud cry, and what personal preparation can we make for receiving the latter rain to finish God's work on earth?

Reaching Russian Speakers

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ukrainian national Vadym Krynychny moved to Portugal to install air conditioners. Two decades later, he was ministering to the needs of Ukrainian refugees as the pastor of a Russian-speaking church in Spain.

What happened?

“We started with just a few members, but our church has become a center of influence for many,” said Vadym, 44. “This is a blessing from God.”

After leaving Ukraine, Vadym and his wife, Alina, established a successful air-conditioning business in Portugal and obtained Portuguese citizenship.

But 12 years into their new life, their path changed abruptly when they were asked to help a newly arrived family who didn’t speak Portuguese. Vadym and Alina invited the Russian-speaking family to attend church with them, and the family also accepted an offer to study the Bible together. Three months later, the family gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism.

Vadym and Alina were delighted, and they sought out more Russian speakers to help. In 18 months, they formed a house church of 20 people. Vadym preached every Sabbath, and Alina oversaw the music. “On Saturday evenings, we were exhausted from the day’s activities,” Vadym said. “But we were filled with an inexpressible satisfaction, joy, and happiness.”

The couple sensed that God was calling them to a new purpose. Their sole desire was to win souls for God’s kingdom. Closing their business, they moved to Sagunto Adventist College in neighboring Spain. Vadym graduated four years later with a master’s degree in theology.

Vadym formed a group of 20 Russian speakers that met every Sabbath afternoon for Bible studies while he worked as an intern pastor in Valencia, a city near the college. Visitors to the group were invited to church. Before long, about 10 visitors were attending church services regularly, and the Sabbath afternoon group kept growing. “We noticed that people had a need to gather with their own language group,” Vadym said.

When the number of Russian-speaking church members reached 26, a Russian-speaking church was born in Valencia with the support of the Adventist Church in Spain and the Inter-European Division, whose territory includes Spain.

“Our idea was to serve all Russian-speaking people, no matter whether or not they are Russian citizens, and to bring them to Jesus,” Vadym said. “God has abundantly blessed us in our mission.”



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering next Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the Euro-Asia Division, the home of many Russian speakers. Thank you for planning a generous offering. This mission story will conclude next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Proverbs 23:23*

Study Focus: *Rev. 7:1, 2; Rev. 14:1; Prov. 23:23; Isa. 8:20; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:21–24; James 5:7, 8; Rev. 18:1–4.*

Introduction: God’s people, engaged in the final conflict between Christ and Satan, are not left in the dark about final events, nor are they abandoned by God during their fulfillment. Like a trusted general who inspires His troops for the decisive fight, God prepares us for battle by giving us His prophetic Word to serve as inspiration, orientation, and empowerment.

This week, we focus on several key elements of the end-time preparation of God’s people. First, we are reminded that the Word of God is our only trustworthy guide; it is the source of all truth and power. We will be safe only as we remain faithful to this Word. Thus, we must adhere to the Bible’s counsel and wisdom, regardless of appearances to the contrary in the arena of world events. Second, Sabbath keeping is the sign of our commitment and loyalty to our Creator and Savior. Third, we are not, and never will be, alone in our involvement in the great controversy and in the accomplishment of God’s mission of proclaiming His eternal gospel. Rather, the Holy Spirit Himself will empower God’s people in a special way to publicly witness to the end-time world about the power of the gospel and about God’s call to all people to return to Him, abandoning the devil and his positions. These developments are known as the latter rain, or God’s empowerment of His people, and the loud cry, which constitutes the final public proclamation of the gospel.

Lesson Themes: This week’s study focuses on two major themes:

1. Accepting God’s love and salvation in Jesus Christ will generate in us an unwavering love for Him and a resolution to be faithful to Him, to His Word, and to His Sabbath.
2. The Holy Spirit will empower us with the outpouring of the latter rain. This outpouring will enable us to give the “loud cry,” or the final call to the world to repent and be saved.

Part II: Commentary

Be Faithful: God Will Have the Last Word

Ian was born and raised in a faithful Adventist family in the Soviet Union. Though his family was poor and was forced to work hard, he had a carefree and happy childhood and youth. At the age of 18, Ian was drafted to serve

in the Soviet army. With other conscripts, he boarded a train and, seven days later, found himself 1,865 miles (3,000 kilometers) away from home. Thus, his long, two-year military term started. Apart from feeling lonely and homesick, Ian knew his biggest challenge was yet ahead. Even before being drafted, he had decided in his heart that he would remain loyal to God and keep the Sabbath, irrespective of what might happen to him. The first couple of Sabbaths he explained to his immediate superiors that he could not work on the Sabbath because of his religious convictions. The commanders tolerated him for those first few Saturdays, thinking that he would soon give up his strange, “provincial,” and “primitive” customs.

Soon, however, Ian’s commanders realized the young man was serious, and they took decisive disciplinary and “educational” measures. One Friday afternoon, after an exhausting workday, they told Ian he did not deserve to sleep on a comfortable bed on the weekend if he refused to work Sabbaths. Instead, they informed him he would spend the weekend in the temporary detention center. When Ian and his commanders reached the jail, the officers discovered the jail was locked and the warden had gone somewhere else. As they waited for the warden to return, the officers chatted while Ian watched the sun set on the beautiful Lake Balkhash. Silently, Ian sought reassurance and support from God. Suddenly, a sergeant who was passing by stopped and casually asked Ian’s superiors who they brought to jail.

“A Sabbath keeper,” they replied. “We want to re-educate him to obey orders and to work on Saturdays.”

“Never!” exclaimed the sergeant, “I know these people. They would rather die than work on Sabbaths!”

The officers realized they made a mistake by allowing the sergeant to speak in Ian’s hearing. But it was too late. Ian received his much-needed dose of encouragement.

The warden arrived, and just as the Sabbath commenced, he escorted Ian into the jail: a 6.5x10-foot (2x3-meter) room, packed with more than ten other soldiers, most of whom were smoking. The heavy metal door closed, and Ian occupied the only available spot by the entrance, prepared to stand or sit the rest of the weekend. The young soldier of Christ was determined to remain faithful to God’s Sabbath. Minutes became hours, and by midnight, Ian began to imagine how the brethren back in his hometown were happily walking to church to worship God during vespers while he remained locked up in a dark jail cell, filled with cigarette smoke, with two more days to go.

Suddenly, Ian remembered the last sermon he heard in his church before leaving for military service; it was about the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel and how he prayed seven times for rain. *What if I also pray seven times?* thought Ian to himself. Though it seemed almost a presumption,

Ian decided to give it a try. He uttered the first simple prayer in his heart. Nothing happened. His second prayer followed. Still, no “cloud.” Third prayer. Then fourth. Fifth. And sixth. Then finally, he uttered in his heart the seventh prayer. Total midnight silence reigned after he finished. The silence did nothing to change Ian’s resolve or faith. He was ready to be loyal to God, even if God would not answer his seven prayers in any apparent way. At least, he thought to himself, *I tried, right?*

However, just a minute later, the silence was broken by footsteps outside the jail. The steps were followed by clinking keys, then by the squeaking of the door as it was opened. The warden appeared in the doorway and searched the room with his flashlight. When the warden spotted Ian, he commanded him to step outside. Once outside, the supervisor took Ian to his office, improvised a simple but comfortable bed, and invited the youth to sleep. Ian collapsed and was asleep in a moment. In the morning, Ian awoke to another surprise: the supervisor brought him breakfast. Even more, the warden gave Ian a bundle with food and conducted him to the shore of the lake where he set him free to enjoy the Sabbath in nature.

Ian spent the following several Sabbaths in the same way. The officers would bring him to the jail for the weekends. The warden would free Ian and feed him for the rest of the weekend. Then on Monday morning, Ian would return to his barracks. The following months and years were replete with many other similar experiences of God’s miraculous interventions on his behalf. After two years, Ian returned home a mature, strong young man, faithful to God. Yes, he went against the behemoth of the Soviet army, which had sought to crush his faith. Yes, his officers had told him he was not worthy to sleep on the army’s mattresses, but God had the last word. God cares for His faithful people, who make the decision—as Daniel did in the Bible and as Ian did—to remain loyal to Him.

Christian Loyalty

Loyalty has always fascinated the students of human nature and history. As a behavioral attitude, loyalty has its basis in various things. Some of these bases are biological or predetermined, such as one’s family or the place of one’s birth. Personal decisions form another basis for loyalty. These decisions may be related to various things, such as monetary benefits (payment, rewards), convictions or worldviews, and morality. Some people base their loyalty on duty, others on preference, and still others on utility. The objects of loyalty are related to these bases. People show their devotion to their families, tribes, nations, religions, ideologies, philosophies, nature, and businesses, to name just a few allegiances. But what is Christian loyalty? Why are Christians loyal, and to whom are they loyal?

To help answer these questions, let us consider the story of Job. In conversations with Satan, God highlights Job’s blamelessness, uprightness, and loyalty or fear of God (*Job 1:8*). True to his doubtful, deceitful, and

rebellious nature, Satan raised one of his essential questions: “ ‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’ ” (*Job 1:9, NASB*). Satan then claimed that the basis for human loyalty to God was selfish: “ ‘Have You not made a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But reach out with Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will certainly curse You to Your face’ ” (*Job 1:10, 11, NASB*). Before he was cast out of heaven, Satan accused God of falsely, abusively, and selfishly imposing Himself on the affections and loyalties of the unfallen beings in the universe. Thus, their loyalty to God was motivated by benefit and self-interest. Likewise, Satan contended that the basis for the loyalty of God’s people on earth was also rooted in a personal, selfish desire to survive and thrive. This misinterpretation of reality by Satan gave birth to the universal great controversy and, also, to Job’s time of suffering and his many questions. However, Job’s amazing faithfulness proved Satan wrong and illustrated the true basis of Christian loyalty to God: an unwavering and unconditional love for Him and the deep desire to be righteous.

On that first Friday night in the jail cell, Ian’s loyalty to God was immediately rewarded. But this reward was not the basis of his faithfulness to God. Ian was determined to remain faithful to God, apart from any apparent response. Similarly, when facing the prospect of a horrifying death in “ ‘a furnace of blazing fire’ ” on the plain of Dura (*Dan. 3:15, NASB*), Daniel’s friends valiantly answered Nebuchadnezzar: “We are not in need of an answer to give you concerning this matter. . . . Our God whom we serve is able to rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods nor worship the golden statue that you have set up” (*Dan. 3:16–18, NASB*). Years later, the prophet Habakkuk sang:

Even if the fig tree does not blossom,
and there is no fruit on the vines,
if the yield of the olive fails,
and the fields produce no food,
Even if the flock disappears from the fold,
And there are no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will triumph in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation (*Hab. 3:17, 18, NASB*).

But how is such loyalty generated in the hearts and minds of God’s people? Yes, God’s people, and the rest of the universe, feel the impulse to be loyal to Him because He is their Creator and, thus, their Father. Family is a compelling reason in and of itself. But there is more: God’s people get their loyalty from God. They are created in His image (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). God is love, and by His grace, humans are loving. God is righteous, and humans originally were

created righteous. God is faithful or loyal, and humans can choose to be faithful or loyal, too, with God's help. It is precisely His love and faithfulness to us that generates in us love and loyalty for Him. The apostle John explained that we are not loyal to God because of fear, for "there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love;" rather, "we love, because He first loved us" (*1 John 4:18, 19, NASB*). John explains, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (*1 John 4:10, NASB; see also John 3:16*).

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Ian's story is, truly, an amazing and encouraging one. But we also know that for every account like that, there are many others whose faithfulness brought calamity and suffering upon them and, perhaps, their loved ones. How do we understand stories like that?**

- 2. While we may imagine how we will stand firm and venerate God's Sabbath during times of persecution, how many times do we fail to maintain the sacredness and the solemnity of the Sabbath during times of peace and prosperity? Sometimes, we may find ourselves wondering whether it isn't easier to betray the Lord of the Sabbath during times of freedom than during times of persecution. If we cannot keep the Sabbath holy when we have all the freedom to do so, how can we expect to be faithful to the Sabbath in times of turbulence and pressure? Create a strategy for being faithful to God's Sabbath, during both good times and bad times.**

The Triumph of God's Love



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 22:11, 12; Jer. 30:5–7; Ps. 91:1–11; Jer. 25:33; Rev. 21:2; Rev. 20:11–15.*

Memory Text: “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’” (*Revelation 21:3, 4, NKJV*).

We can face the future with hope. Although challenging times are coming, whatever suffering we must go through, whatever hardships we must endure, whatever sorrows we experience, if we have hope a better day is coming, we can live life today with purpose and joy. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president during 1933–1945, one of the most difficult periods of U.S. history. He was paralyzed by polio and unable to walk unaided. He once wrote, “We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction, that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.” Albert Einstein, one of the world’s most brilliant men, wrote, “Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.” Alfred Lord Tennyson, a popular English poet during Queen Victoria’s reign, once wrote, “Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering ‘It will be happier.’”

In this quarter’s final lesson, we will see Christ’s steadfast love during the most exciting time in the history of the universe and His complete triumph in the great controversy. The Bible’s last book, Revelation, gives us hope for today, tomorrow, and forever.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 39–42 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 29.

Hope in the Time of Trouble

Read Revelation 22:11, 12; Daniel 12:1, 2; and Jeremiah 30:5–7. What events occur just before the Second Advent?

The close of human probation is followed by a time of trouble “ ‘such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.’ ” Revelation 16 describes seven last plagues that will be poured out on the wicked world. But, as with the plagues that fell on Egypt, God’s people will be shielded from them. Note the promise in Daniel: “ ‘And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book’ ” (*Dan. 12:1, NKJV*). This must be referring to the “book of life” (*see Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; Rev. 20:12, 15; Rev. 22:19*). If we have stayed faithful to Jesus, our names will not be blotted out of the book of life (*Rev. 3:5*).

Read 1 John 3:1–3, John 8:29, and John 14:30. What is the only sufficient preparation for the coming time of trouble?

In the time of trouble, God’s people have a personal relationship with Jesus so deep that nothing can change it. Their consummate desire is to please Him in all things so that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will be as pure as He is pure. There was nothing in Christ’s heart that responded to Satan’s deceptions. We can reflect this aspect of His character, as well.

Read Psalm 27:5, Psalm 91:1–11, and Revelation 3:10–12. What reassuring promises does God give us for the time of trouble?

There are some who have misunderstood the concept of living through the time of trouble without a mediator. Jesus ceases His mediation in heaven’s sanctuary when everyone has made their final decision for or against Him. But this does not mean we are alone during this time, trusting our own strength. Jesus has assured us He will be with us always (*Matt. 28:20*). Faith trusts when it cannot see and believes even when the world around us is falling apart. During the time of trouble, our faith strengthens and our longing for eternity increases so that our one desire is to live forever with Jesus.

Hope in Jesus' Soon Return

Read John 14:1–3 and Titus 2:11–14. In the light of the challenges of the future and the coming time of trouble, why are these verses so encouraging?

Jesus' words, “ ‘Let not your heart be troubled,’ ” are His reassurance that He will never leave us and is coming again to take us home. This world is not our home. A better day is coming. Once in every 25 verses, the New Testament speaks of the return of our Lord. When the days are dark and the oppressive enactments of a church-state power threaten our lives, the promise of Christ's coming fills our hearts with hope. This is the “blessed hope” that has inspired the faithful people of God in every generation.

Read Revelation 6:15–17 and Isaiah 25:8, 9. Contrast the attitudes of the saved and the lost revealed in these verses. What explains the difference between these two mindsets?

The wicked realize the horrible consequences of sin while the righteous have accepted the marvelous provisions of grace. Rebellion against God leads to fear, guilt, condemnation, and eventually eternal loss. Our response to His saving grace leads to forgiveness, peace, and joy eternally at His glorious return.

Read Revelation 15:3, 4 and Revelation 19:7. How will the redeemed respond to the glorious salvation provided so freely through Christ?

“The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. . . . That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.

Read Revelation 12:17; Revelation 17:13, 14; and Revelation 19:11–16. Carefully notice the progression of these verses. What does the progression in these verses say about earth's last war and Christ's ultimate victory?

The Millennium on Earth

Revelation 19 ends with a dramatic portrayal of the return of Jesus and the destruction of the wicked. But the story is not over. Revelation 20 introduces us to a period lasting 1,000 years, known as the “millennium.”

Read Revelation 20:1–3. What is Satan’s fate when Jesus returns?

The imagery in Revelation 20:1–3 is symbolic. Satan is not literally bound with a chain and locked in a pit. For 1,000 years, he is confined to this desolate, depopulated earth, bound by the circumstances he himself has created. In 2 Peter 2:4, we read that Satan and his angels were reserved for punishment by “chains of darkness.” Satan will be confined to the earth by a chain of circumstances, with no one to tempt. For 1,000 years, he will see the devastation, destruction, and disaster that his rebellion has created.

The Greek word translated “bottomless pit” is the same word from which we get our English word “abyss.” It also is the same word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe the earth at Creation. “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (*Gen. 1:2, NKJV*). In the Septuagint, the word “deep” here is the Greek word *abyssos*, “abyss.” It describes a desolate earth. The “bottomless pit” is not some subterranean cavern or some yawning chasm somewhere out there in the universe. Satan’s work of sin and destruction, along with the tremendous chaos preceding the Second Coming, has brought the earth back to a dark, disorganized mass like its condition at the beginning of Creation.

Read Jeremiah 4:23–26 and Jeremiah 25:33. How does the biblical prophet describe this scene?

The prophet here emphasizes the catastrophic destruction at the second coming of Christ and that no person is left alive on earth during this thousand-year period. Satan and his evil angels are left to contemplate the havoc caused by his rebellion. The entire universe recognizes anew that the wages of sin is death. God deals with the sin problem so that it will never rise again (*Nah. 1:9*). There are three prime ways God does this. First, He reveals His limitless love, passionate desire, and relentless efforts to save all humanity. Second, He reveals His justice, fairness, and righteousness. Third, He allows the universe to see the ultimate results of sin and rebellion.

Judgment in the Millennium

Read Revelation 20:4–6. What are the righteous doing during the 1,000 years, and why is it important?

During the millennium, the righteous will have an opportunity to observe firsthand God’s justice and love in how He has dealt with the sin problem. Who doesn’t have questions they would like to ask God about a lot of things? Now, during the millennium in heaven, the redeemed get to ask those questions. If a loved one or close friend is absent from heaven, the saved have the opportunity to understand God’s decisions more fully. In a new way, more forcefully than ever before, the redeemed will grasp God’s powerful attempts to save every person who has ever lived. They will realize anew that everyone who is lost has missed out on heaven because of their own personal rejection of Christ. Only then does God bring final judgment—the second death, which is eternal destruction—on the lost.

Read Revelation 20:7–9. How do the 1,000 years conclude? What is the fate of Satan and his followers?

For 1,000 years, Satan has had no one to tempt or deceive. He and his angels have been alone to reflect on the deadly consequences of sin. At the end of the millennium, the wicked dead are resurrected to face the judgment and receive their final reward (*Rev. 20:5*).

Now Satan has a vast army of followers. Although Satan has suffered defeat after defeat in the great controversy, he is encouraged as he sees the huge throng of the lost. Not yet ready to end his rebellion, he goes out to deceive these “nations.” Satan inspires them to make one last great effort to overthrow God and set up their own kingdom. The term “Gog and Magog” is used to symbolize Satan and the unsaved of all ages. Satan and his followers surround “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (*Rev. 20:9, NKJV*).

At the close of the millennium, not only are all the wicked raised to life, but the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends to earth from heaven (*Rev. 21:2*)! The saints have been living and reigning with Christ in the New Jerusalem for the millennium. Now, at the end of the 1,000 years, the city descends to earth along with God, Jesus, the angels, and all the redeemed. Everyone is present for the final battle of the great controversy. Sin is about to be eradicated once and for all!

What does the timing of the final judgment say about God’s character?

Two Eternities

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10, 11; and Revelation 20:11–15. What do they say about why the wicked are raised to life again?

To resolve the sin problem so evil never arises again, everyone must be convinced that God has been fair and just in all His ways. Ultimately, every knee shall bow and acknowledge God’s justice in the great controversy, even Satan and his evil angels, and that there was never any justification for rebellion against God. Notice this insight from Ellen G. White: “As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart—all appear as if written in letters of fire. . . .

“The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 666, 668.

Read Revelation 20:9; Psalm 37:20; and Malachi 4:1, 2. What insights do these passages give us about the ultimate destruction of sin and sinners and the reward of the righteous?

The good news is that Satan and his evil angels will be destroyed in the lake of fire. Sin and sinners will be consumed. According to Revelation 20:9, they will be devoured, destroyed, and not eternally tormented. The next verse uses the expression “forever and ever.” Depending on the context, the word “forever” does not always mean “endless” but, until something is completely accomplished. (See *Exod. 21:6; 1 Sam. 1:22, 28; Jude 7; and 2 Pet. 2:4–6.*) For the lost, the destruction itself, not the act of destroying, is eternal. God is not the eternal torturer.

In the end, one of two eternities await us all. The lost, unfortunately, receive the “wages” they have earned—eternal death. Why, then, is our only hope of not getting what we deserve, which is death, found in trusting in Jesus’ righteousness?

Further Thought: “There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home. . . .

“There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 675, 677.

“With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God’s handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator’s name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 677, 678.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why do you think God has allowed sin to go on for so long? At the same time, no human being suffers in this world longer than their own existence here. That is, no one suffers more than his or her own lifetime. How short is a human lifetime compared to the thousands of years of sin? How might this perspective help us deal with the difficult question of evil?
- 2 How does the thousand-year period known as the millennium fit into the plan of salvation? Think about what it says about the character of God that—not until all of the redeemed will have had a chance to see the justice and fairness and love of God—will final judgment be brought upon the lost.

Refuge for Russian Speakers

By ANDREW McCHESNEY

Ukrainian pastor Vadym Krynychny faced a major challenge finding a building for a Russian-speaking church in the Spanish city of Valencia. But, with prayer, he managed to lease a hall seating 100 people in the city center for a token 500 euros (US\$550) a month.

“It is worth much more,” Vadym said.

The hall was large for the initial group of 26 worshipers, but Vadym got to work on outreach programs. The church began to host a get-together with a meal on Sundays. Russian-speaking children were invited to special activities. Additional programs were organized around such holidays as New Year’s and Easter. Concerts proved especially popular, filling the church to overflowing and sometimes requiring the rental of a larger hall.

The church forged strong ties with the local Russian-speaking community and became a center for Russian speakers. About 80 percent of Spain’s estimated 400,000 Russian speakers live in Valencia and along the nearby Mediterranean coast. Of those 400,000 people, at least 500 are Adventists.

But the first person baptized at the new church was not from Russia or another former Soviet republic. The woman was born in Iran and had been raised in a non-Christian world religion. She spoke Russian fluently after studying for 12 years in the former Soviet republic of Belarus, and she came to the church after someone invited her off the street.

After 25 baptisms and several former Adventist families recommitted their hearts to Jesus, weekly church attendance stood at 65 adults and 40 children when the conflict erupted in Ukraine in 2022.

Vadym realized with astonishment that the church was well positioned to help people fleeing the conflict. The church quickly used its local connections to establish a refugee center. In the first two months of the conflict, 200 people visited the center, receiving lodging and food. About half of them were Adventists. Since then, many more people have received assistance.

“Many have come to us, knowing no one in Spain,” Vadym said. “But they come to us because we speak Russian, and they seek something familiar.”

He credited God for positioning the church to help refugees even before the conflict started. He said he longed to share the hope of Jesus’ soon coming with them and all Russian speakers in Spain. “We are concentrating all our efforts on meeting the needs of these people,” he said.



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the Euro-Asia Division, the home of many Russian speakers. Thank you for planning a generous offering.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Revelation 21:3, 4*

Study Focus: *Jer. 30:5–7; Rev. 3:10; Isa. 33:15, 16; Ps. 91:1–11; Rev. 1:7; Rev. 19:11–16; Rev. 20:1–15; Jer. 25:33; Jer. 4:23–28; Rev. 21:1–4; Matt. 8:11; Isa. 65:17, 22, 23; Rev. 22:1–5, 11.*

Introduction: This week's lesson wraps up our study, highlighting the final developments in the cosmic war between God and Satan. Among the notable events that transpire during the culmination of the great controversy are: (1) the time of trouble; (2) the second coming of Jesus; (3) the executive judgment in heaven during the millennium, with a synopsis of events both on earth and in heaven at that time; and (4) the restoration of all things for eternity. The Bible promises that the great controversy will end in God's victory. Scripture calls us to trust God, participate with Him in the salvation of as many souls as possible, and share in His past (the Cross), present (individual, church, and salvation), and future (final cosmic) victory.

Lesson Themes: This week's study focuses on four related themes:

1. God Himself will sustain and protect His people during the most brutal parts of the final battle of the great controversy.
2. The great controversy will end with God's victory over the devil, over evil and sin, and over suffering and death. This threefold victory is assured because it has already been secured by Christ through His death and resurrection.
3. We share in God's victory when we accept it by faith and allow the Holy Spirit to work it out in us.
4. God's victory will culminate in the second coming of Jesus, in the millennial judgment, and in the restoration of all things.

Part II: Commentary

The Close of Probation

The close of probation is a topic that often induces fear in many people. Probation closes for each individual at his or her death. That is, the window of opportunity for an individual to respond to God's grace has been closed by death. His or her attitude toward God's revealed grace will have eternal consequences. God is righteous and will treat each individual's case according to the light that he or she received; but our individual response decisively matters.

However, Adventists understand from Scripture that, apart from the closing of probation at one's death, there will be a moment in the history of the great controversy when God will declare that the time when people can accept His forgiving grace in order to be saved has ended. That moment will be the point of no return, and no one will be saved beyond that time. The world then will live under the pronouncement recorded in the book of Revelation: " 'Let the one who does wrong still do wrong, and the one who is filthy still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness, and the one who is holy still keep himself holy' " (*Rev. 22:11, NASB*). Truly concerned for their salvation, many Christians and Adventists ask such questions as: What if the moment of the close of probation will catch me off guard or unaware? What if I will not be completely ready at that moment?

At least two clarifications are necessary here.

First, the close of probation is real, and it will take place. The deceptions, intrigues, and evils of the devil will not continue forever. Sin, suffering, and death will not hold sway eternally. To eternalize the devil, evil, and death would mean that God is not a God of love and righteousness. But because He is, He will put an end to the sources, and forces, of evil. God has patiently waited and given every opportunity to humans to test His promises, to come to know Him, and to return to Him and to His kingdom of grace. How much God would have loved for all humanity to accept His gospel! But there will be a moment when God must say, "Enough; it is finished."

Second, God will not withdraw His gift of sustaining grace from His people, despite His withdrawal of mercy and forgiving grace to the unrepentant at the close of probation. This point is very important: the end of probation does not imply that God's love and grace for humanity have reached their limits or that they have been consumed. God never ceases to be the God of love, grace, and righteousness portrayed in the Bible. For this reason, there will be no one after probation closes who would have sincerely wanted to receive God's grace and who would have responded with faith to God's mercy to whom God would say, "Sorry, too late; I would love to have saved you, but the grace period is ended."

God's closure of probation will be His confirmation that every individual has made his or her final decision about His grace and His kingdom. At a future moment in history, the historical setting of the world will be such that all the inhabitants of the earth will make this final decision and will side with either God or Satan. However, that decision will not be made in the impulse of the moment. Rather, each person's decision for eternity will be made based on his or her free choice and in full consciousness of its consequences. Just as Northern Israel and Judah when they rejected God's covenant and Messiah, some will decide they do not want to be with the God of the Bible. Others will agree with Lucifer's lie that they are gods and immortal; they do not relish the idea of being with God in His kingdom. God is saddened by these unalterable decisions; He

provided all the evidence and love necessary to save them, but He will respect their final choice. Others, however, decide to accept God's grace because they love Him and want to stay with Him forever.

On another note, the close of probation does not imply that, after that moment, God's faithful people will stand without His presence and grace and covering righteousness. Christ assured us that He will be with us " 'always, to the end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NASB*). The empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which we will receive in order to give the loud cry, will not be removed from us. All God's people, from Adam and Abel to Abraham and Moses, from David and Isaiah to Paul and the last Christian sealed before probation closes, will be saved exclusively by Christ's righteousness and mediation, through faith. Thus, the idea that some Christians at the end of time will stand on their own merit and power is not biblical.

The Biblical New Heaven and the New Earth

Christians generally talk and sing about heaven as the place of their final destination and eternal rest. However, we must maintain the biblical understanding of heaven and guard against falling into pagan or philosophical views on Paradise. According to many worldviews—such as Greek, Hindu, or Buddhist philosophies—heaven is an alleged transcendent, timeless, and spaceless sphere that only a disembodied human mind or soul could reach. In Greek philosophy, the human mind that reaches heaven somehow keeps its identity and consciousness. In Hinduism, Buddhism, and Neoplatonism, the human consciousness that reaches heaven must disappear by dissolving into the universal consciousness.

As a result of the influence of classical Greek philosophy on traditional Christianity, most Christians now believe in the immortality of the soul and in a spiritual, as opposed to a material, heaven. These Christians do not realize that these philosophical concepts create irreconcilable contradictions in their theology and lives. On the one hand, when thinking about death and heaven, traditional Christians think in Greek philosophical terms: at death, the immortal soul goes to a transcendent, timeless, spaceless realm, called either hell or heaven. On the other hand, these same Christians believe in the exceedingly clear biblical teaching of the resurrection of the body. *However, they do not realize that the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body are simply incompatible and generate a lot of inconsistencies.*

If our souls are immortal and are in heaven with God, why resurrect the body? Under such circumstances, the resurrection of the body would imply that the soul would leave the spiritual realm of heaven and re-enter the material, temporal, and spatial sphere. Even so, if only the soul is immortal, one must ask, *Will the resurrection of the body be permanent? Will the body now also be eternal?*

The biblical teachings on human nature and the resurrection eliminate

all these inconsistencies and problems. First, the biblical teaching of the unitary human nature indicates that humans do not possess an immortal soul but are complex, indivisible, integrated living beings. At His return, Jesus will resurrect the whole human being. Second, the biblical teaching of the nature of humanity rejects Greek dualism and its concept that heaven is a transcendent, timeless, spaceless, divine sphere.

According to the Bible, at death our being is not divided. We do not survive as an ethereal soul, and that soul does not transition, fully conscious, to a state of transcendence beyond the created universe. When we die, our entire being dies. However, when Christ returns, He will resurrect our entire being and welcome us into His real, historical, temporal, and spatial kingdom. Yes, at the second coming of Christ, we will travel with Him to the throne of God, to the heavenly sanctuary, somewhere in the center of the universe. But that travel will take place in the temporal and spatial universe, meaning we will be traveling in space and time. We will never go beyond the universe. In fact, no created being will ever be transcendent because only God is transcendent or beyond the created universe. To want to reach the transcendent is to want to be God.

The millennial judgment in heaven will also be a historical event that will take place in space and time in God's heavenly sanctuary before His throne, which is also located in a central place in the universe. After that judgment, we will return to earth. Following God's executive judgment against the devil and the rest of the rebels, God will restore our planet to its original beauty and perfection. The new earth will be our home. There we will live as we were originally intended to live before the Fall: smelling flowers, cultivating a garden, studying a leaf, playing with a lion, meeting and interacting with redeemed of all ages, as well as with angels and other created beings. Most important, we will enjoy the privilege of face-to-face communion with God; we will worship Him in person. The earth and the universe will be reconciled and will be brought back to the harmony and unity that existed before the Fall. We will be able to travel freely throughout the universe. The reason we cannot travel to heaven now is not because of constraints or barriers of time, space, substance, or speed, but sin. When the great controversy finally is over and sin is removed once and for all, the new (renewed) earth will be integrated with heaven, and then will be realized that most precious of Bible promises: a new earth and a new heaven.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Do you have Adventists in your congregation who are afraid to talk about last-day events? Are you one of them? How would you help**

them to overcome this fear? How could you and your Adventist community communicate our biblical message as good news rather than as some warped version, produced by Hollywood, of a scary, postapocalyptic movie? On the other hand, what is the best way to present realistically many of the darker aspects of the great controversy, such as religious persecution and the time of trouble?

2. Do people in your culture believe in the return of a divinity or of a great guru? What does this belief tell us about humanity's hope for the return of a savior from "the beyond"? How could you share the hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ with such an audience? What points would you emphasize?

3. Some Christians or secular persons believe that the second coming of Christ is merely a symbol of a profound moral transformation of the human individual or society. How could you explain to such persons that Christ's coming will be a literal, visible, and audible event, one in which Jesus Himself will enter into our history, time, and space, in person?

4. What do the people in your culture think of heaven? What is problematic about their views of heaven, as compared with Scripture? How could you share with them the biblical description of heaven? What points in the biblical view of heaven would be especially attractive to the people in your culture?

The Gospel of Mark, our study for this quarter written by Thomas Shepherd, can be divided into two halves. Most of the first eight chapters deal with the question of who Jesus is. The answer is displayed in Jesus' teachings and miracles, which clearly reveal that He is the Messiah. The second half of the book (*Mark 8:31 until the end of the book*) answer the question of where Jesus is going. The answer, of course, is to the Cross. This gospel shows us the darkness that Christ experienced—the cost of our salvation. But the Cross is not the end of the journey. After His resurrection, Jesus plans a meeting with His disciples in Galilee—and, as we know, the Christian church began. It is a remarkable story, told in a terse, fast-moving style with little commentary from Mark himself. Mark simply tells the story and then allows the words, the deeds, and the actions to speak for themselves, regarding the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is our prayer that you will be blessed by this study.

Lesson 1—The Beginning of the Gospel

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Failed Missionary** (*Acts 13:1–5, 13*)

MONDAY: **A Second Chance** (*Acts 15:36–39*)

TUESDAY: **The Messenger** (*Mark 1:1–8*)

WEDNESDAY: **Jesus' Baptism** (*Mark 1:9–13*)

THURSDAY: **The Gospel According to Jesus** (*Mark 1:14, 15*)

Memory Text—*Mark 1:14, 15*

Sabbath Gem: This week's lesson will focus on the identity of Mark as recorded in Scripture, from his early failure to becoming a restored missionary.

Lesson 2—A Day in the Ministry of Jesus

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **“Follow Me”** (*Mark 1:16–20*)

MONDAY: **An Unforgettable Worship Service** (*Mark 1:21–28*)

TUESDAY: **More Sabbath Ministry** (*Mark 1:29–34*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Secret of Jesus' Ministry** (*Mark 1:35–39*)

THURSDAY: **Can You Keep a Secret?** (*Mark 1:40–45*)

Memory Text—*Mark 1:17*

Sabbath Gem: The emphasis in the beginning of the Gospel of Mark is on action, particularly of Jesus' healing of people. Mark often uses the word *immediately* to illustrate the fast-action movement of Jesus' ministry.

Lessons for People Who are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services Inc., P.O. Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.