

The War Over God's Character¹



SABBATH—DECEMBER 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ezekiel 28:12–17; Isaiah 14:12–15; Job 1:6–12; Zechariah 3:1–5; 1 John 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:8; Ezekiel 36:23–27.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then I heard someone from the altar say: Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous [holy] are your judgments” (Revelation 16:7, HCSB).

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS UNDERSTAND REALITY THROUGH THE GREAT CONTROVERSY [WAR] BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN. It is a war between two superpowers, God and Satan, which helps to explain our world and the things that happen in it.

The heart of this controversy is the heavenly sanctuary.² This truth presents a theme that continues from the beginning to the end of salvation history. The theme is salvation of humans through the death of Jesus on the cross. The sanctuary message also helps to show God's character. Satan has been attacking God's character since the great controversy first began in heaven.

This week we will study some important events in the great war between Christ and Satan that show the truth about God's character and that uncover Satan's lies.

1. God's character—who God is; the way God thinks, feels, and acts. God's law shows us His character.

2. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 15**REBELLION (WAR AGAINST GOD)
IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY
(Ezekiel 28:12–17)**

Read Ezekiel 28:12–17 and Isaiah 14:12–15. What do these verses teach about Lucifer's fall?

At first, Ezekiel 28:12 seems to be talking about only an earthly king. But several parts suggest that it and the following verses are really talking about Satan.

Lucifer is pictured as *the* anointed (chosen) cherub (angel) “who covers” (Ezekiel 28:14, NKJV). This reminds us of the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary. In the sanctuary, two cherubim covered the ark and the presence of the Lord (Exodus 37:7–9). This angel (Lucifer; who became Satan) also walked in the midst of the fiery stones on the “holy mountain of God” (Ezekiel 28:14) and in the center of “Eden, the garden of God” (Ezekiel 28:13, NKJV). The covering of precious stones described in verse 13 contains nine stones that are also found in the high priest's chest cloth (Exodus 39:10–13, NIV). So, even here we find more descriptions of the sanctuary.

Ezekiel 28 describes the beautiful glory (beauty and power) of the cherub. But the chapter then describes this angel's fall from goodness. His glory goes to his head. His beauty fills his heart with too much pride. His pride ruins his wisdom. And his “trading” (verse 18, NKJV)—which probably means his lying about God's character

and his stirring up rebellion—makes him very dangerous.

Also, proud earthly powers try to move from earth toward heaven. In Isaiah 14:12–15, the “son of the morning” comes from a Latin word *lucifere*. Satan's name *Lucifer* comes from this word. He falls from heaven, not the earth. Other wordings such as “throne above the stars of God,” “mount of the congregation [heavenly beings]” in the far north, and “Most High” show that Satan is an angel who once lived in heaven. While verses 12 and 13 are in past tense, verse 15 suddenly changes to the future. This change in time shows that there was first a fall from heaven to earth (Isaiah 14:12) and that there will be a second fall, from earth to Sheol (the grave), sometime in the future (Isaiah 14:15). This does not speak of any Babylonian king. Instead, it clearly points to Lucifer.

A perfect being created by a perfect God falls into sin? What does this tell us about the freedom of choice in God's universe? And what does such freedom tell us about God's character?



Satan fell from heaven to earth because of his pride.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 16**THE CHANGES (Zechariah 3:1–5)**

Satan fell from heaven and then lied about God's character. He did this in Eden (Genesis 3:1–5), in the middle of the first "sanctuary" on earth. Satan brought his rebellion (war) from the heavenly sanctuary to the earthly sanctuary of Eden. Using the serpent, Satan tried to trick Eve to sin. Then he openly planted the idea in Eve's mind that God was denying Adam and her something that would be good for them. He also suggested that God was holding something back that they should have. In this way, Satan created doubts about God's character.

The fall of Adam and Eve set Satan up on the throne of this world for a short time. Several verses suggest that Satan entered the heavenly court again as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31, NKJV). Yet, Satan did so as one who takes over the earth but does not own it, much like a thief.

Read Job 1:6–12 and Zechariah 3:1–5. How is the great controversy (war) shown in these verses?

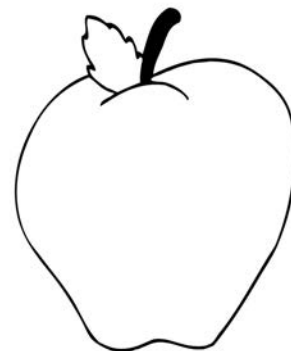
These verses show us the heavenly side of the great controversy. Satan presents Job's righteousness (holy character; life) as being selfish. For example, he says that Job believes that if he is good, God will bless him. The suggestion is that Job does not serve God because God is worthy but because it is in Job's best interest.

Satan suggests that once it becomes clear that serving God will not bring blessing, Job will drop his faith.

In the case of the high priest Joshua (again a sanctuary theme) and of other believers (read Revelation 12:10), Ellen G. White says that Satan "is accusing the children of God. He is making their case appear as hopeless as possible. Satan argues with the Lord over their evil doings and their weaknesses."—Adapted from *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 167.

But in both cases the real issue is the justice of God. The question behind all the charges is that God is not fair. God's character is on trial. Is it fair when God saves sinners? Is God fair when He announces that the unrighteous (unholy) are righteous (holy)? If God is fair then He must punish the unrighteous. But if He is merciful, He must forgive them. How can God be both fair and merciful?

If God were only a God of justice, what would be your future end? And why would you deserve it?



Satan put the idea in Eve's mind that God was denying Adam and her something good.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 17**VINDICATION (CLEARING FROM GUILT) AT THE CROSS
(Romans 3:21–26)**

From the very beginning, God left no doubt that He would prove Satan's charges useless. And He would show His unlimited love and justice. God's justice demands that there be payment of the penalty for the sins of all people. His love restores (brings back) humans into fellowship with Him. How could God show both justice and love?

Read 1 John 4:10 and Romans 3:21–26. How did God show both His love and justice?

The greatest example of God's character of love and justice has been shown through the death of Christ. God loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning (forgiving) Sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10; John 3:16). By paying with Himself the penalty for breaking the law, God showed His justice. How? The demands of the law had to be met by Jesus Himself upon the cross.

At the same time, by this act of justice, God was also able to show His grace³ and love. This is because Jesus died as our Substitute. He died *for us*, in our place, so that we do not have to face that death ourselves. This is the wonderful gift of the gos-

pel (good news about Jesus). God Himself would accept the punishment that His own justice required. But it is the punishment that we deserved to get.

Romans 3:21–26 is the Bible's jewel on the theme of God's righteousness and Jesus' death as payment for our sins. Christ's death is a good example of God's righteousness so "that he is right. He also made right with himself those who believe in Jesus" (Romans 3:26, NIV).

Again, the sanctuary theme gives the framework (main outline) for Christ's death. In past weeks, we have seen that Jesus' death is a perfect sacrifice as man's Substitute. Christ also is the "atonement cover" (Romans 3:25). In short, both Testaments revealed (made known) that Christ's mission was symbolized (shown) by the earthly sanctuary service.

"With great interest the sinless worlds had expected to watch and see God arise to sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. . . . But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. . . . At the worst moment, when Satan seemed about to succeed, the Son of God came with the perfect example of His grace."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 37. What does this quote tell you about the character of God?

3. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.



God's act of justice (paying for our sins Himself) allowed Him to show us His mercy and love.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 18

GOD'S CHARACTER CLEARED IN THE JUDGMENT (Revelation 16:5, 7)

As the Bible has shown, God's judgment is good news for those of us who believe in Him, who trust in Him, and who are loyal to Him. This is especially true when "we cannot answer the charges of Satan against us."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁴ for the Church, volume 5, page 472. But the judgment is not only for us. It also serves the purpose of clearing God's character before the entire universe.

Read Psalm 96:10, 13; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 16:5, 7; and Revelation 19:2. How is God's character shown in these verses about judgment?

God's character will be shown in His judgment. What Abraham already understood will be made clear to

all humans in the end. " 'Won't [will not] the Judge of the whole earth do what is right?' " (Genesis 18:25, NIV). The three different parts of judgment make sure that the angels (in the pre-Advent judgment) and the righteous (in the millennial [thousand year] judgment) can prove and be sure that God is righteous and fair in His dealings with all humans. The judgment will prove that God has been merciful in each case.

Read Philippians 2:5–11. What wonderful event do these verses show?

Verses 9–11 foretell the future glory (honor and praise) that Christ receives. The main two actions show the same thought: Jesus is Lord, and all creation will accept Him as such. First, "every knee will bow" (verse 10, NASB). The bowing of the knee is a usual way for recognizing the authority of a person. Here it means giving special honors to Christ. This also means that people recognized His right to be King of the earth and universe. The phrase "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (verse 10, NASB) includes every living being: the angels in heaven, the living people on earth, and the resurrected (risen from the grave) dead. Therefore, those who will pay respect are not only limited to the saved. Everyone will bow to Christ's lordship, even the people who are lost.

The second action is that everyone "will confess [admit] that Jesus Christ

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

is Lord” (verse 11, NASB). In the end, all will accept the justice of God in honoring Christ as Lord. The character of God has been at the center of the great controversy. But all creation will accept Him as just and faithful. Even Satan, the enemy of Christ, will admit God's justice and bow to the lordship of Christ (see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 670, 671).

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 19

THE HEAVENLY SHOW (Ezekiel 36:23–27)

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks these wonderful words: “let your light shine in front of others. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will praise your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NIV). With this, Jesus explains a principle (important rule) that is seen throughout the Bible. It tells how, as followers of Christ, we can bring glory or shame to God by our actions.



Let your light shine before others.

Read Ezekiel 36:23–27. How was God going to clear His name in ancient Israel in early Bible times?

These verses are well known for describing the new covenant.⁵ God desires to work a wonderful change among His people. He will cleanse them (verse 25) and give them a new heart and a new spirit (verse 26). In this way, they will become a holy people who will follow God's commandments (verse 27). What God wants to do is to forgive and make believers holy. By their lives they will honor God for who He is and what He does (verse 23).

Of course, the most important part in clearing God's character before the universe is the Cross. “Satan saw that his tricks were torn away. His work was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had shown himself as a murderer. By making the blood of the Son of God flow, Satan had removed himself from the sympathies of the angels in heaven.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 761.

At the same time, the New Testament followers of Christ “have been made a show for the whole creation to see. Angels and people are staring at us” (1 Corinthians 4:9, NIV). In other words, what we do is being seen by other people and by angels in heaven, too. What kind of witness do we give? By our lives we can help “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly world

5. new covenant—the promise or agreement between God and His people. God promises to heal and save His people and take them to heaven one day. This agreement also includes the wonderful blessings God will give to those who love and serve Him. This agreement was made when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave.

to come to know his [God's] great wisdom" (Ephesians 3:10, NIV). Or our lives can bring shame to the name of the Lord whom we claim to serve.

What kind of witness, both to other people and to angels, does your life give? Is it one that gives God glory or one that makes Satan happy, especially because you claim to be a follower of Jesus?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 20

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, "Why Was Sin Permitted?" pages 33–43, in *Patriarchs [Leaders and Forefathers] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*; "The Character of God Revealed [Shown] in Christ," pages 737–746, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5.

"There stood in the world One [Jesus] who was a perfect representative of the Father. He is the One whose character and work proved Satan to be a liar. Satan accused God of having the character that he himself had. In Christ, Satan saw God's true character—a kind, merciful Father. He doesn't [does not] want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins. He wants them to have eternal life." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 254.

"People understand very little about the mission [work] of Christ which called Him from the throne of God to the mystery of the cross as man's Substitute. But as time goes on, they

will more and more understand His mission. They will later see that Jesus' sacrifice is the basis of every one of His other missions of love."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, page 319.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Think deeply about the idea that when the whole great controversy ends, every being in the universe, including Satan and the lost, will admit that God is righteous and fair in His dealing with sin and rebellion. It is a heavy (difficult) subject for us to understand. But what does this tell us about the character of God? What does it teach us about how important moral freedom (righteous; the ability to choose right or wrong) is to the kind of universe that God has created?

② There are many Christians who deny that Satan is alive. They see him as just an old-fashioned fairy tale held by uneducated people who were trying to explain evil and suffering in the world. Think about how great a lie this is. It is hard to imagine what kind of Christianity could deny that Satan is real after the Bible has shown him to be real so often, especially the New Testament. What does this tell us about how much modern and worldly ideas have influenced some churches? What can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, learn from the mistakes that we see others make so that we do not believe the same lies, too? Without a real Satan, what happens to the whole great controversy theme?