

“Principalities *and* Powers”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“When the Morning Stars Sang”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Devil's Wrath

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

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

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

- 1** Where does the strife begin?
- 2** Where does this battle wind up being fought?
- 3** What are the three specific things the devil is depicted as doing against us?
- 4** The devil is angry because he has “but a short time” (*vs. 12*). What does that mean? *See Matt. 25:41.*
- 5** How do God's people overcome the attacks of the enemy?

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

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

“The Accuser of Our Brethren”

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

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

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

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

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

“The Lord Rebuke Thee, O Satan”

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

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

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

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

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

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

The “Justification” of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Labor of Love

Valerie Fidelia

Jane lives in northern Uganda. Like many others, she fled her home in southern Sudan during heavy fighting. It is still too dangerous for her to return. Jane is a displaced person, but she does not live in a tent and receive food from charities. She lives in a thatched-roof mud hut that she helped build. Every morning she rises before dawn and walks four kilometers to her garden, where she tends her cassava and peanut crops, which will feed her family. Then she returns home, showers, and walks another six kilometers to teach sewing to displaced persons in another village.

Because there is no electricity, Jane uses two treadle sewing machines to teach her students. They learn the principles of cutting and sewing using brown paper rather than cloth. Once they are proficient using their paper garments, Jane gives them cotton cloth to cut and sew.

Jane could get a job teaching sewing in a city, but she prefers to help others who can't afford to pay. Her sewing-school ministry will improve the lives of many who have no other source of income. Jane also dreams of teaching women to read and write in their own language and in English, but she has no resources to start a literacy project.

Sewing and teaching are not Jane's only ministries. Several evenings a week she directs the church choir and works with the youth. Often she arrives home after dark to prepare food and wash and iron her clothes.

When Jane dreams of the future, she does not dream of an easier life. She dreams of using her skills and knowledge to help others. Jane receives no income from the sewing students. Her work is her ministry for God,

teaching and leading them to the feet of Jesus. With willing hands such as Jane's, the work of God is moving forward rapidly in southern Sudan and northern Uganda. Our mission offerings provide resources to lay men and women such as Jane to share God's love with others.



Jane (left). Valerie Fidelia is director of family, women's, children's, and health ministries in the Middle East Union in Cyprus.