ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

TEACHERS EDITION

Final Publication Copy

The Great Controversy

by: Mark Finley

April, May, June

2024
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Contents: *The Great Controversy*

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Version: *The Great Controversy*

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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
Introduction: The Great Controversy

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
1 triumph of God’s love over all the principalities and
2 powers of hell, that ushers in the creation of new heavens
3 and a new earth.
4 Though the basis of this quarter’s lessons is the
5 Bible, we will use the book The Great Controversy, by Ellen
6 G. White, as our thematic outline in studying this
7 tremendous topic. The chapters on which each lesson is
8 based are noted to facilitate its use as a companion book
9 for further study and sharing that we all might more fully
10 “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph.
11 3:19, NKJV).
12
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14 internationally known evangelist, was a vice president at
15 the General Conference from 2005 to 2010. After retiring
16 from full-time employment, he became an assistant to the
17 president of the General Conference. Pastor Finley and his
18 wife, Ernestine, have three children and five
19 grandchildren.
Part I: Overview

Key Text: Revelation 12:7, 8


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
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. The ultimate consequence of evil and sin is rebellion against God and His kingdom.

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 Doctrine 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 doctrine 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.”—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, as well, Adventists have articulated these concepts in the form of a unique doctrine, encapsulated in Fundamental Belief No. 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, entitled the “Nature of Humanity”:

“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.”—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:

(a) The teaching of Creation as an expression of God’s love, freedom, and power.
(b) The origin of human nature, its present condition and its final destiny.
(c) The fall of humanity from its original righteousness and communion with God.
(d) 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.
(e) God’s redemptive plan of justification, sanctification, and the promise of future glorification for the human race.
(f) 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.
(g) 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 worldviews? What elements would you include in the outline of your description of the great controversy?
Part I: Overview

Key Text: Isaiah 41:10


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. 66-73), its annihilation commencing toward the end of the reign of the emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68). 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 a 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, 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: the leadership of Israel’s 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 for the Jewish nation; they rejected 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 fifteen hundred 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.
1 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 Himself 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.

16

17

Types and Antitypes

18 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?
Part I: Overview

Key Text: John 12:35


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
Lesson 3

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
able 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, for God, would mean capitulation.

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 because, if He renounces His throne, all
of us and the entire universe will disappear from
existence, because 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. He maintained that, because Adam and Eve did
not die immediately after disobeying God, his so-called
theory was correct. 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?
Lesson 4

Part I: Overview

Key Text: John 3:14, 15

Study Focus: John 14:6; Jude 3, 4; Rev. 2:10; 1 John 1:7;
John 3:14, 15; 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 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, Wycliffe, and 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 no freedom apart from God and His government.

**Waldensians, Franciscans, and Scripture**

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’ 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
hundreds of 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 Scriptures. 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,

• 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, John Wycliffe and John 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.
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),
- *soli 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 sole 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. One way 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, morality, 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 the Fall into
sin, God’s special revelation was manifest 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,” to “[set] aside the command of God,” and to “nullify the word of God” (Mark 7:1-13, 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 and 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, once again, to 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?
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 3.5 years under the pressure and persecution of His own people, who were supposed to receive Him, Scripture ministered to the world for 3.5 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 highlights 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,
通过耶稣和在祂的言辞，最终的胜利在
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 their 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 Emperor
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 wearing 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? Their 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 is
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 to 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, it 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 falsely 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 (Mediatrix), 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 longstanding 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. 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?
Part I: Overview

Key Text: Isaiah 25:9


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. William 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.
Lesson 7

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 naïve 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 one thousand 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 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 ammillennialism 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.
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;

• 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, and 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 in order 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 serving 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?
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 that 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,
- the Adventist movement as the remnant church, called to proclaim God’s last invitation to humanity to return to His kingdom.
Lesson 9

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 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,

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 does each of these laws relate to Jesus Christ?
Part I: Overview

Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

Study Focus: Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 9:5; Isa. 8:19, 20;

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.
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
(NDEs) 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 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?
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 to 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 they will also 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 even 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 it 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
lamb-like 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?
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

Ivan 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, Ivan 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, Ivan 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, Ivan’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 Ivan 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 Ivan and his commanders reached the jail, the officers discovered that the jail was locked and the warden had gone somewhere else. As they waited for the warden to return, the officers chatted while Ivan watched the sun set on the beautiful Lake Balkhash. Silently, Ivan sought reassurance and support from God. Suddenly, a sergeant who was passing by stopped and casually asked Ivan’s superiors who they had brought to jail. “A Sabbath keeper,” they replied. “We want to reeducate 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 Ivan’s hearing. But it was too late. Ivan received his much-needed dose of encouragement.

The warden arrived, and just as the Sabbath commenced he escorted Ivan into the jail: a 6.5-x10-foot (2-x3-meter) room, packed with more than ten other soldiers, most of whom were smoking. The heavy metal door closed, and Ivan 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 Ivan 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 three more days to go.

Suddenly, Ivan 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 Ivan to himself. Though it seemed almost a presumption, Ivan 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 Ivan’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 Ivan, he commanded him to step outside. Once outside, the supervisor took Ivan to his office, improvised a simple but comfortable bed, and invited the youth to sleep. Ivan collapsed and was asleep in a moment. In the morning, Ivan awoke to another surprise: the supervisor brought him breakfast. Even more, the warden gave Ivan a bundle with food and conducted him to the shore of the lake where he set him free to enjoy the Sabbath in nature.
Ivan spent the following several Sabbaths in the same way. The officers would bring him to the jail for the weekends. The warden would free Ivan and feed him for the rest of the weekend. Then on Monday morning, Ivan 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, Ivan returned home a mature, strong young man, faithful to God. Yes, he went against the behemoth of the Soviet army, which sought to crush his faith. Yes, his officers 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 did Daniel in the Bible and as did Ivan—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
1 heaven, Satan accused God of falsely, abusively, and
2 selfishly imposing Himself on the affections and loyalties
3 of the unfallen beings in the universe. Thus, their loyalty
4 to God was motivated by benefit and self-interest.
5 Likewise, Satan contended that the basis for the loyalty of
6 God’s people on earth was also rooted in a personal,
7 selfish desire to survive and thrive. This
8 misinterpretation of reality by Satan gave birth to the
9 universal great controversy and, also, to Job’s time of
10 suffering and his many questions. However, Job’s amazing
11 faithfulness proved Satan wrong and illustrated the true
12 basis of Christian loyalty to God: an unwavering and
13 unconditional love for Him and the deep desire to be
14 righteous.
15 On that first Friday night in the jail cell, Ivan’s
16 loyalty to God was immediately rewarded. But this reward
17 was not the basis of his faithfulness to God. Ivan was
18 determined to remain faithful to God, apart from any
19 apparent response. Similarly, when facing the prospect of a
20 horrifying death in “‘a furnace of blazing fire’” on the
21 plain of Dura (Dan. 3:15, NASB), Daniel’s friends valiantly
22 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. Ivan’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.
Lesson 13

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; Revelation 20; 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, and church, 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,
ever, 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 has reached its limits or that it has 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, even
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
in 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 reenter 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 wholistic 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 which transitions, 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, post-apocalyptic movie? On the other hand, what is the best way to realistically present 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?