

Satan, a Defeated Enemy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Revelation 12; Gen. 3:15; Isa. 14:12–15; Dan. 7:23–25; 2 Thess. 2:8–12; Rev. 13:13, 14; Rev. 19:20.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’ ” (*Revelation 12:11, NKJV*).

Revelation 12–14 prepares us for the last-day events section of the book (*Rev. 15:1–22:21*). While the first half of the book (*Rev. 1:1–11:19*) describes the spiritual struggles of the church in a hostile world throughout the Christian Era, the remainder focuses on key events leading up to the Second Coming and God’s kingdom.

The purpose of chapter 12 is to give us the big picture behind the final crisis of world history. It shows us the development throughout history of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

In the book of Revelation, Satan is the archenemy of God and His people. His existence is real, and he stands behind all evil and rebellion in the universe. He knows that his last chance to succeed against God before the Second Coming is to win the battle of Armageddon. So, he focuses all his efforts on preparing for that event.

Revelation 12 is intended to provide God’s people with an assurance that Satan will not succeed. It is also a warning that Satan is determined and will wage all-out war against God’s last-day remnant church and that their only hope and power to overcome is found in Christ.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 23.

The Woman and the Dragon

Read Revelation 12:1–5. In vision, John sees two great signs. The first is a woman pregnant with a Child, and the second is a dragon. What do these signs (or symbols) represent, and what do these verses teach?

A woman in the Bible is used as a symbol for God's people (*2 Cor. 11:2*): a chaste woman stands for faithful believers, while a harlot stands for apostate Christians. The woman in Revelation 12 first symbolizes Israel, to whom the Messiah came (*Rev. 12:1–5*); in verses 13–17 she stands for the true church that gives birth to the remnant.

This woman is portrayed as clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet. The sun represents the glory of Christ's character, His righteousness (*Mal. 4:2*). He is "the light of the world" (*John 8:12*), and His people are to reflect the light of God's loving character to the world (*Matt. 5:14–16*). The moon, as "the lesser light" (*Gen. 1:16*), points to the Old Testament promises foreshadowing the work of Christ in the gospel era.

The next thing John sees in the vision is a "fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns" (*Rev. 12:3, NKJV*). This dragon is later identified as Satan (*Rev. 12:9*). His "tail," symbolizing the means used to deceive (*Isa. 9:14, 15; Rev. 9:10*), dragged a third of the stars from heaven down to the earth (*Rev. 12:4*). This action shows that, having fallen from his exalted position in heaven (*Isa. 14:12–15*), Satan was able to deceive a third of the angels. These fallen angels are the demons who assist the devil in opposing God and His work of salvation (*see 1 Tim. 4:1*). Revelation also uses the dragon, described as "having seven heads and ten horns," as a symbol of those agents in the world used by Satan—pagan Rome (*Rev. 12:4*) and spiritualism (*Rev. 16:13*). "The dragon is said to be Satan (Revelation 12:9); he it was that moved upon Herod to put the Saviour to death. But the chief agent of Satan in making war upon Christ and His people during the first centuries of the Christian Era was the Roman Empire, in which paganism was the prevailing religion. Thus while the dragon, primarily, represents Satan, it is, in a secondary sense, a symbol of pagan Rome."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 438.

Read Revelation 12:9. Satan is called "that serpent of old" (*NKJV*). What connection exists between Genesis 3:15 and the dragon's attempt to destroy the seed of the woman "as soon as it was born" (*Rev. 12:4*)?

From the beginning, Satan was waiting for the Messiah—the Child to be born—in order to destroy Him. When the Messiah was finally born, Satan used pagan Rome (also symbolized as the dragon in Revelation 12:4) to try to destroy Him (*see Matt. 2:13–16*). But the Child was "caught up to God and His throne" (*Rev. 12:5, NKJV*).

Satan Cast Down to Earth

Read Revelation 12:7–9, which talks about a war in heaven. What was the nature of that war that resulted in Satan’s expulsion from heaven?

Satan was cast out of heaven at the beginning of the great controversy, when he rebelled against God’s government. He wanted to seize God’s throne in heaven and be “like the most High” (*Isa. 14:12–15*). He stood in open revolt against God but was defeated and exiled on earth. However, by deceiving Adam and Eve, Satan usurped Adam’s rule over this world (*Luke 4:6*). As the self-proclaimed ruler of this world (*John 12:31*), Satan claimed the right to attend the heavenly council as earth’s representative (*Job 1:6–12*). However, since his defeat at the cross, Satan and his fallen angels have been confined to the earth as a prison until they receive their punishment (*2 Pet. 2:4, Jude 6*).

By His death, Jesus redeemed what was lost, and Satan’s true character was revealed before the universe. “Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761. Before the whole universe, the rule over the earth was transferred from Satan to Jesus, and He was proclaimed the legitimate ruler over the earth (*Eph. 1:20–22, Phil. 2:9–11*).

Jesus foretold this event, saying: “‘Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out’ ” (*John 12:31, NASB*).

With this judgment on Satan, the “‘salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come’ ” (*Rev. 12:10, NKJV*). Satan still has limited power to harm God’s people on earth, but it is with a realization that “he has a short time” left (*Rev. 12:12, NKJV*). Although his time is indeed “short,” he is doing all that he can to cause pain, suffering, and havoc here.

What does Revelation 12:11 teach about how to defend against the devil? (*See also Eph. 6:10–18.*)

The War on Earth

Read Revelation 12:13, 14. Having been barred from heaven, Satan continues his attack on the church during the prophetic 1,260 days/years. How was God involved with the church during that period?

“The casting down of Satan as an accuser of the brethren in Heaven was accomplished by the great work of Christ in giving up his life. Notwithstanding Satan’s persistent opposition, the plan of redemption was being carried out. . . . Satan, knowing that the empire he had usurped would in the end be wrested from him, determined to spare no pains to destroy as many as possible of the creatures whom God had created in his image. He hated man because Christ had manifested for him such forgiving love and pity, and he now prepared to practice upon him every species of deception by which he might be lost; he pursued his course with more energy because of his own hopeless condition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, pp. 194, 195.

No question, Satan continues his activities on earth by pouring his fury against the great object of Christ’s love on earth—the church. However, the church finds divine protection in the desolate, wilderness places of the earth during the prophetic period of 1,260 days/years.

The period of Satan’s persecution is mentioned twice in Revelation 12 in terms of 1,260 days/years (*Rev. 12:6*) and “a time and times and half a time” (*Rev. 12:14, NKJV*). Both time periods refer to the duration of the little horn’s persecuting activity mentioned in Daniel 7:23–25. In the Bible, prophetic days symbolize years. The time in history that fits this prophetic period is A.D. 538–1798, during which time the Roman Catholic church, as a church-state power, dominated the Western world until 1798, when Napoleon’s General Berthier brought Rome’s oppressive power to an end, at least temporarily.

During this long period of persecution, the dragon spews flooding waters out of his mouth in order to destroy the woman. Waters represent peoples and nations (*Rev. 17:15*). Armies and nations were sent by Rome against God’s faithful people during this time. Near the end of this prophetic period, a friendly earth swallows the waters and saves the woman, providing a safe haven for her. This provision points to the refuge that America, with its religious freedom, supplied (*Rev. 12:16*).

Think of how long the persecution here lasted: 1,260 years. What should this great duration tell us about how limited we are in understanding why things, such as the return of Christ, seem to be taking so long, at least from our perspective?

War Against the Remnant

Read Revelation 12:17. At the end time, against whom does Satan make all-out war?

The word “rest,” or “remnant,” describes those who remain faithful to God while the majority apostatize (*1 Kings 19:18, Rev. 2:24*). While the majority of people in the world side with Satan at the end of time, a group of people whom God raised up after 1798 will remain faithful to Christ in the face of Satan’s full fury.

What are the two characteristics of the remnant in Revelation 12:17? How can one be sure that he or she belongs to God’s end-time remnant?

The end-time remnant keeps God’s commandments. Revelation 13 shows that the first tablet of the Decalogue will be central to the end-time conflict. The key component of the first four commandments is worship. The main issue in the final crisis is who should be worshiped. While the people in the world will choose to worship the image of the beast, the remnant will worship God the Creator (*Rev. 14:7*). The fourth commandment, the Sabbath, points specifically to God as our Creator, which is one reason it will play a pivotal role in the final crisis at the end.

Also, the end-time remnant’s second characteristic is that they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which Revelation 19:10 (*NKJV*) explains is “the spirit of prophecy.” By comparing this verse with Revelation 22:9, we see that John’s “brethren” who have the testimony of Jesus are prophets. Therefore, “the testimony of Jesus” refers to Jesus testifying to the truth through His prophets, just as He did through John (*Rev. 1:2*). Revelation shows that at the time of the end, God’s people will have the “spirit of prophecy” in their midst to guide them through those difficult times, as Satan will make every effort to deceive and destroy them. As Adventists, we have been given that gift of prophetic insight in the ministry and writings of Ellen G. White.

What do you see as some of the most incredible insights we have been given through “the spirit of prophecy”? What obligations does this gift put on us, individually and as a church?

Satan's End-Time Strategy

Revelation 12:17 marks a shift in Satan's strategy as he tries to win the people of the world and even seeks to deceive Christ's faithful followers. Throughout Christian history, Satan has opposed God's work of salvation, primarily by means of subtle compromise within the church and through coercion and persecution from without. History shows that, while successful for many centuries, this strategy was counteracted by the Reformation and the gradual rediscovery of Bible truth by God's people. However, as Satan realizes that his time is running out, he intensifies his efforts and goes "to wage war" against God's end-time remnant (*Rev. 12:17, MEV*). His attacks on the remnant will include a large element of deception. Demons working miracles and spiritualistic manifestations will be introduced (*Rev. 16:14*). This shift in Satan's strategy corresponds to the transition from a historical to an end-time focus (*see Matt. 24:24*).

It is significant that the word "deceive" is used regularly in Revelation 12-20 to describe Satan's end-time activities. The word "deceive" begins (*Rev. 12:9*) and concludes (*Rev. 20:7-10*) the description of Satan's end-time activities in Revelation.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 along with Revelation 13:13, 14 and Revelation 19:20. What is the nature of Satan's end-time deception?

Revelation 12-20 portrays Satan, endeavoring to deceive the world (*see Rev. 12:9, 13:14, 18:23, 19:20, 20:8*). He uses, in turn, political and religious powers to do his work: pagan Rome, symbolized by the dragon (*Rev. 12:4, 5*); followed by a power symbolized by the sea beast (*Rev. 12:6, 15; Rev. 13:1-8*); and, finally, a power symbolized by the earth beast (*Rev. 13:11*). Throughout the rest of the book, the members of this satanic triad—paganism/spiritualism as symbolized by the dragon; Roman Catholicism, symbolized by the sea beast; and apostate Protestantism, symbolized by the lamblike, or earth beast—are inseparably united in opposing God's activities in the world. They work together to deceive people, in order to turn them away from God and to get them to side with Satan in the "battle of that great day of God Almighty" (*Rev. 16:13, 14, NKJV*). These false religious systems will be destroyed together at the Second Coming (*Rev. 19:20*), while the dragon, symbolizing the devil, who worked through these earthly powers (*Rev. 12:9*), will be destroyed at the end of the thousand years (*Rev. 20:10*). Revelation shows that the end-time deception will be so great that most people will be led to choose the way of destruction (*Matt. 7:13*).

Twice in Revelation a call is made for wisdom and spiritual discernment in order to perceive and withstand the deceptive nature of Satan's end-time activities (*Rev. 13:18, Rev. 17:9*). What kind of wisdom is in view here? According to James 1:5, how can we obtain that wisdom?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Snares of Satan,” pp. 518–530, in *The Great Controversy*.

The purpose of Revelation 12 is, first of all, to tell God’s people that end-time events are a part of the great conflict between Christ and Satan. The book warns God’s people about what they are facing today and are about to confront in an even more serious manner in the future—an experienced and furious enemy. Paul warns us of the end-time activity “of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:9, 10, NKJV).

Revelation urges us to take the future seriously and make our dependence on God our priority. On the other side, Revelation assures us that although Satan is a strong and experienced enemy, he is not strong enough to overcome Christ (see Rev. 12:8). For God’s people, hope can be found only in the One who in the past has victoriously defeated Satan and his demonic forces. And He has promised to be with His faithful followers “ ‘always, even to the end of the age’ ” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV).

Discussion Questions:

- ① As Seventh-day Adventists, we see ourselves as fulfilling the characteristics of the end-time remnant. What a privilege! Also, what a responsibility! (See Luke 12:48.) Why must we be careful, however, not to think that this role guarantees our own personal salvation?
- ② “We talk altogether too much about the power of Satan. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but I thank God for a mighty Saviour, who cast the evil one from heaven. We talk of our adversary, we pray about him, we think of him; and he looms up greater and greater in our imagination. Now why not talk of Jesus? Why not think of his power and his love? Satan is pleased to have us magnify his power. Hold up Jesus, meditate upon him, and by beholding, you will become changed into his image.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 19, 1889. In what ways do Christians magnify Satan’s power? On the other hand, what dangers are there in denying not just the reality of Satan’s power but the reality of his very existence, as well?

Gift of Time

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Tracey Lee, a mother of four living near Fort Worth, Texas, wondered what gift she could give to God.

She didn't have much money, and she has struggled for years with attention-deficit disorder. But between homeschooling and five pets, she realized that she had one thing that she could dedicate to the Lord: time.

So, Tracey volunteered to correspond with inmates through a prison ministries program at Grandview Seventh-day Adventist Church in Grandview, Texas.

"The more I did it, the more I enjoyed it," Tracey said. "I felt like I was making a difference, so I have continued doing it."

Six years later, she is responsible for a prison ministries program larger than her church of about 35 members. She guides dozens of inmates through Bible correspondence lessons every week and maintains contact with about 300 people.

It is unclear how many people have been baptized through her work, but several inmates have described big changes in their lives. One inmate wrote that a family member exclaimed during a prison visit, "What did you do? I see something different about you. There is like a glow about you."

"I got an opportunity to witness to this person because he saw a difference in me," the inmate wrote to Tracey. "Thank you for taking the time to teach me."

Tracey, 46, was raised in a Sunday church, got married, and spent several years visiting various churches, trying to find a place to grow her children. One day, she was browsing at a half-priced bookstore with her eldest son, Kyle, when a customer struck up a conversation.

"He mentioned Grandview as a church and invited us to come try it out," Tracey said.

The family attended a couple of church concerts and began to attend worship services on Saturdays. About seven months after joining the church, Tracey volunteered to help with prison ministries.



The prison work not only gives her joy but also has helped her control the attention-deficit disorder. Tracey said she is thrilled that it has forced her to stop procrastinating and to organize her week in such a way that she can assist the inmates in a timely manner—and care for her family at the same time.

Tracey still doesn't have much money, but she is eager to keep giving her time.

"That's what I feel that I need to give," she said.