

The Great Controversy



Week Five

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Revelation 12:7–11



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MORE THAN JUST A THEORY

The great controversy is the metanarrative of the whole Bible. Understanding that there's a battle between good and evil that started in heaven provides a backdrop for the pain, sadness, and problems we face every day. We can see this battle throughout the Bible and human history. Soon after the early Christian church era, Christianity made a series of compromises with paganism that led to the active suppression of the Bible during the Dark Ages.

The Reformation began to peel back layers of superstition through the influence of men like John Wycliffe, John Huss, Jerome, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. Other believers such as the Waldenses and Anabaptists promoted key biblical teachings and suffered severe persecution for it. These various historical events were succinctly summarized in the late 1850s when God gave Ellen White a vision that eventually became the book *The Great Controversy*.

The theme of the great controversy is the lens through which we view and understand all biblical truth. The remarkable Cambridge physicist Stephen Hawking wrote that should scientists discover the long-sought “theory of everything” to explain how the universe works, “we should know the mind of God” (*A Brief History of Time* [1998]). As Adventist theologian Herbert Douglas wrote in response, “Adventists have been given... a perspective which provides a ‘theory of everything.’ It introduces us to the ‘mind of God.’ We didn’t discover it; it was given to us. We call it the Great Controversy Theme” (“The Great Controversy Theme: What it Means to Adventists,” in *Ministry Magazine* [2000], 5, 6).



inScribe

Write out Revelation 12:7–11 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Why do you think Satan specifically targeted the vision on the great controversy?

How can knowing that the controversy is much bigger than we are change our perspective on the issues and trials we may endure?



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UNDER SEVERE ATTACK

God gave Ellen White her vision on the great controversy, which lasted two hours, in Lovett's Grove, Ohio during a child's funeral service. The following day, while returning home by train with her husband, Ellen White felt the presence of an unseen passenger beside them. She could tell this passenger was determined that the truth about himself would not get out. That same day, the Whites stopped at a friend's house in Jackson, Michigan to break up the journey. Only a few minutes into the visit, Ellen felt a strange, cold sensation prickle over her right side and heart and was struck with paralysis from a sudden stroke. Though only fifty miles from home, she was certain she wouldn't see her children again. Those who were present prayed earnestly for her and she was able to continue her journey home to Battle Creek, Michigan, where she slowly wrote down what she had seen. She could write only a page at a time and had to rest for three days after each one, but she eventually finished the book.

In June of the same year, Ellen received clarification on the attack she experienced in Dan Palmer's home. She wrote, "I was shown in vision that in the sudden attack at Jackson, Satan intended to take my life... but angels of God were sent to my rescue" (*Life Sketches*, [1915], 163). The first published account of that vision appeared in the 1858 edition of *Spiritual Gifts*. This was later enlarged to the four volumes of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, and then eventually to the five-part series *The Conflict of the Ages*, of which *The Great Controversy* is the last.

Revelation 12 gives an overview of this conflict, beginning with the war in heaven, covering the attempt to kill Jesus and the persecution against the church in the Middle Ages, and ending with the end-time war against the remnant church just prior to Jesus' return. It shows clearly that Satan was cast down to earth from heaven and took a significant portion of the angels with him. No one wants their sins aired in public, and Satan is no exception. He does not want the truth about his fall and former glory known, which explains why he tried to kill Ellen White before she could set it in writing.

The first half of Revelation discusses the seven churches, seals, and trumpets while the second half primarily covers the final conflict in the great controversy. Chapter 12, which begins the second half of the book, gives a summary and background of this conflict. Verses 7–11 are particularly significant as they identify where the war started, the main players in the war, and how victory in the war is gained. The great controversy reveals that the only way to save sinners involves immense risk. Satan's real motives and God's true character won't be fully evident to all until the very end, allowing for many misconceptions in the meantime. God is patient, however, and does not mind waiting, knowing He will be exonerated in the end.

WAR IN HEAVEN

In Revelation 12:7, we are introduced to the two main players in this great war: Michael and the dragon. The dragon is identified two verses later; he is called the “serpent of old... the Devil and Satan.” Each of these titles describes a different aspect of his character and how he operates. Michael is the name of the great archangel at war with Satan (Jude 9). Archangel means the chief or prince of the angels, and Michael is sometimes called “the great prince” (Dan. 12:1). Knowing that Jesus will return to this earth with the voice of an archangel (John 5:28, 29; 1 Thess. 4:16), we can deduce that Michael is one of Jesus’ many titles—not because He’s an angel or a created being, but because He’s the leader of the angels.

The war in heaven started because Satan challenged the government, authority, and character of God. God obviously did not immediately annihilate His opposition, a fact that sheds light on His character—He is patient and slow to anger (Ps. 145:8). The war between Michael and the dragon intensified until there was no longer any place for Satan and his angels in heaven.

The Bible states that the devil and his angels were thrown down to planet earth (Rev. 12:9), effectively moving the controversy from heaven to earth as well. Satan then broadened his attacks to include God’s people and “accused them before our God day and night” (v. 10). The point of attack had moved from the Creator to His creation. Causing pain to someone’s children is often more painful than if the attack came directly to the parent, something we can assume Satan knew well.

Verse 11 outlines three things we can do to have victory in this ongoing cosmic battle: claim the blood of Jesus, remember the power of our testimonies, and be willing to lay down our lives if called to do so. Christ’s blood is the only thing that can truly atone for our sins. In claiming His blood, we claim His victory over death itself. Sharing what God has done for us helps us keep a mindset of gratefulness rather than bitterness and uplifts the church at large. We were not meant to live in isolation, so do not shy away from partaking in the encouraging act of sharing with your spiritual family. Being willing to give our lives for the gospel reveals a total commitment to God. When someone values a belief (in this instance, a belief in God) above life, there is nothing that can be done to deter them from that belief. Our life on earth is precious, but we must love our eternal lives more. We must be willing to give up the one to gain the other.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

How do you think the angels would’ve responded if God had immediately annihilated Satan in response to his rebellion?

How can weak sinners like us hope for victory over Satan?



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What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 12:7–11?

Satan and his attacks against God:

Isaiah 14:12–14

Ezekiel 28:12–18

Genesis 3:1–6

Genesis 2:15–17

Job 1:6–20

Character of God:

Deuteronomy 32:4

1 John 4:16

Michael the archangel's voice:

Jude 9

1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

John 5:28, 29

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Revelation 12:7–11.

TAKING THE RISK TO LOVE

At the heart of the great controversy is the issue of God's character. Satan challenged God's government and made the accusation that God's law cannot be kept. He claimed that God is unjust and unfair for establishing a law that no one can follow. Many wonder why God didn't immediately destroy Satan when he rebelled in heaven. Wouldn't God have been able to spare the universe from much pain and heartache by ending the source of the problem before others could be affected?

God desires love and worship, not power. Neither of these things can be forced. God can't force us to love and worship Him any more than He can force Satan to do so. True love must be a choice, and choice does not come without risk. Anyone who has pursued someone else's affections knows the fear of rejection, and nothing stings deeper than being rejected by someone you love. The two exist side by side; it's impossible to provide the option to love without also providing the option to reject. Some people don't pursue love because they fear rejection, but most people find that love is worth the risk. God knew the only way to have a universe where love is cultivated and can flourish is one in which His created beings have the freedom to choose.

If God created humans and angels without the ability to choose, evil might never have existed. After all, in a world without options, there's no room to make the wrong choice. But such a scenario would also prevent love, because love requires freedom. God had to allow Satan's rebellion to run its course so the angels and other created beings could see two things: first, that Satan's plan was a ploy to exalt himself, and second, that though Satan's departure from God seemed to be minor at first, the end result is the death of untold millions throughout history, including Jesus Christ Himself. Satan's claims against God and His leadership seemed mild at first. God could not force Satan to obey Him, and God could not destroy him instantly because it would appear as though his accusations were right. Satan's claims and the consequences of rejecting God and His rule had to play out so the unfallen universe could see the full results of rebellion.

Satan seeks to accuse God and His followers, but Revelation 12:11 points out that we can overcome by the blood of the Lamb. In living as a human and then dying on the cross, Jesus revealed the true love of God. The cross also exposed Satan's cruel hatred for all to see. The contrast could not be greater! Jesus humbled Himself and was exalted by God (Phil. 2:5-11). Satan exalts himself and is humbled by God (Isaiah 14:12-14). Jesus sacrificed His life to pay the price the broken law demanded, thus demonstrating that the law *can* be followed and that God *is* a just and loving ruler. Today, if we place our trust in God, we can overcome Satan because Jesus already defeated him and shares the rewards of His victory with us.



inVite

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



How do you think God handles all the pain He witnesses knowing it's the result of the choice He gave us?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

Prayer Response:



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Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the
chapter, what are some decisions
that must be made in your
personal life?

What are some practical
decisions you must make in your
school, family, workplace, and
church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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GOD'S UNCHANGING LOVE

"Lucifer had at first so conducted his temptations that he himself stood uncommitted. The angels whom he could not bring fully to his side, he accused of indifference to the interests of heavenly beings. The very work which he himself was doing, he charged upon the loyal angels. It was his policy to perplex with subtle arguments concerning the purposes of God. Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah. And his high position, so closely connected with the divine government, gave greater force to his representations.

"God could employ only such means as were consistent with truth and righteousness. Satan could use what God could not—flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government, claiming that God was not just in imposing laws upon the angels; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. It was therefore necessary to demonstrate before the inhabitants of heaven, and of all the worlds, that God's government is just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.

"The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore God permitted him to demonstrate the nature of his claims, to show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked.

"Even when he was cast out of heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since only the service of love can be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might be forever placed beyond all question." (Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [1890], 41, 42.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What kind of risks does love require? Why can it never be forced?

Why do you think the lie that following God is restrictive and following Satan is freedom deceives so many?

In what ways can our understanding of God's character be impacted if we don't understand the great controversy theme?

Why does Satan direct his accusations against both God *and* God's children?

How does the fact that Ellen White faced such difficulties when she received the vision and wrote *The Great Controversy* add to the importance of the message?

How does the cross demonstrate the true characters of God and of Satan at the same time?