

LESSON 1

Monday, 26th June

This Lesson quotes Rev. 12:7-9 (glancing also at 10-13), then offers this explanation:

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

At first glance, this appears to be a precise précis of John the Revelator's *primary* import in this epochal prediction. There is *far* more here for typical, conservative Christians like Seventh-day Adventists, though, than meets the average eye. For Tuesday's segment will swing their interpretive door much wider ajar, claiming that *this ethereal battle began in heaven before the creation of this world's inhabitants.*

I will therefore reserve all comments until that segment appends its contribution. This is also the optimum place to probe the following, tacitly answered question:

The devil is angry because he has "but a short time" (vs. 12). What does that mean? See Matt. 25:41.

Tuesday, 27th June

This segment expands upon the depiction in Rev. 12:10 of Satan as our accuser.

... [T]he serpent, Satan (Rev. 12:9), *cast out of heaven to earth*, brought about the fall of our earthly parents (Gen. 3:1-7), which, in turn, led to the fall of the whole human race, along with all its horrible consequences (Rom. 5:12) [stress supplied].

Popular though this theology certainly is, even spawning John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, there is scant evidence that it is the product of expert exegesis! On one hand, both the *details* and the *context* of Rev. 12:7-9 – Holy Writ's *sole* reference to cosmic warfare – attest to its outbreak *straight after Christ's ascension*, 5b. For one thing, this battle had decisive, *disparate* consequences for the respective inhabitants of heaven and earth. While the latter might bemoan the devil's internment amongst them, 12b, the former should rejoice, 12a, for he and his angels had been *banished* from heaven, 8f.! Yet the manifest inference of the verb *present*, Job 1:6; 2:1, and the expression "the *presence* of the LORD", 1:12; 2:7, is scarcely *consummate exclusion from heaven!* Likewise, ever since the Crucifixion our heavenly Father no longer tolerates Satan's complaints against his converts, Ro. 8:33f. It is equally noteworthy that, although Satan is an agent of fearful disaster in the Book of Job, he is consistently under Yahweh's specific control. He does not directly oppose heaven's Sovereign.

For another, there is not the remotest doubt that those whom Satan accused incessantly were sinful *humans*. For angels never overcome him through "the blood of the Lamb", or suffer martyrdom, Rev. 12:11. Nor was there any human *sinfulness* until the disastrous fall of Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:1-6. It follows that heaven's shout of triumph, "*Now* have come the *salvation* and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his *Christ. For* the accuser of our brothers... has been hurled down", Rev. 12:10, forcefully attests that *Satan's decisive expulsion followed our Saviour's death, resurrection and ascension.* There is no hint whatever here that John thrusts us back unexpectedly and inexplicably prior to this planet's creation!

On the other hand, Monday's segment is certainly correct that Satan and his host face fiery destruction in the hands of God, the righteous Judge. Yet this is scarcely an adequate clarification of the temporal term "short time", Rev. 12:12c, KJV, above all if its setting at *Creation* is cogent! For the gist of Satan's concern is this: "*When* (he) saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who *had given birth* to the male child", 13. Yet, at the risk in some ears of sounding a little sarcastic, Scripture knows nothing about him lying comatose for many millennia preceding that perception, as an ethereal battle before Creation would necessitate.

This is no place to marshall all the persuasive [evidence](#) that John's pastoral predictions were intended for his *pristine* congregations. However, this *short* time which enrages our foe makes most sense *if it warns them of looming persecution*, 13-17.

Whatever, I am happy to laud this segment, prefacing Wednesday's, for explaining how Zech. 3:1-4 stresses both such charges and God's help in vanquishing them.

Wednesday, 28th June

This initial lesson of the new quarter reaches no greater height than in enquiring, [I]t was Satan—not Joshua—who had been rebuked. How could that be? It's only because of the plan of salvation, in which Christ defeats Satan and his accusations. The language of Zechariah itself, with filthy garments and change of garments, is gospel language; that is, it's pointing to the plan of salvation and what Christ does for His fallen people.

Yet it promptly revisits Seventh-day Adventism's grandest perspective, that Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, fought out both in heaven and on earth:

There are bigger issues in the plan of salvation than just saving us from sin... [S]in didn't begin here; it began somewhere else in the universe (Isa. 14:12, Ezek. 28:15, Rev. 12:7). Though we are in the midst of the great controversy, the issues in it go beyond us. They are, literally, universal.

Here I will merely draw attention to Isa. 14:12 and Eze. 28:15, those hoary proof-texts, which, in context, are routinely paraded amongst conservative Christians of almost every dignified persuasion – *not Seventh-day Adventists alone* – in confident support of their timing Rev. 12:7-9 *prior* to Creation. It is impossible within the strict confines of this review to offer any adequate interpretation of these rather challenging OT references. However, my brief comments [elsewhere](#) may assist some of my curious readers to decide for themselves whether they refer to Satan even *remotely*.

Thursday, 29th June

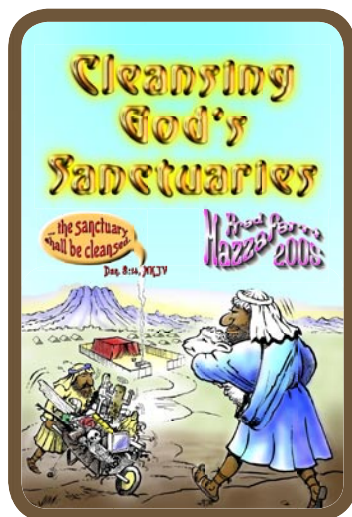
I am delighted to praise this segment as well for its generally *superb* theology, with this single, salient caveat: it is Holy Writ itself which must define its theodicy for us. Otherwise, even this cardinal subject may readily fall foul of *a priori* [suppositions!](#)

Friday, 30th June

It will suffice here to draw attention to a single detail in this segment, its reference for further study: F.B. Holbrook's relevant article in Seventh-day Adventism's latest, official apologia for its Fundamental Beliefs, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. This is highly commendable for limiting its authors to sacred Scripture. It is very instructive, therefore, to observe how pervasively Holbrook [struggles](#) without access to Ellen White's convenient writings! Indeed, his extremely effete "We may infer..." and similar recur so often that his text reads like verbal Swiss cheese!

Summary

This Lesson is praiseworthy for seeking to sketch the gospel upon the sweeping, cosmic canvas of what Seventh-day Adventists call the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. Moreover, already its author displays a good grasp of that gospel. But in my lowly opinion, at least, that canvas is mostly a figment of his imagination.



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Watch this space week by week!