

# War in Heaven

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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I learn something new every time I study the Bible. A text I've read or hear 50 times or more has been given new light for me. That makes Bible study exciting! What I learned this week I will share with you in a moment. Because of the times in which we live and because of the requests of some who have a desire to study it, today we will begin a short series focusing on the themes presented in the book of Revelation. Our approach will not be to cover every passage verse by verse (we could spend literally a whole year and more if we did this), but will concentrate on a few of the important highlights. The Book of Revelation has a message for us in 2010! It is God's final warning message to a dying planet!

Knowing what is happening and having a grasp of what's going on gives meaning to life. Try to imagine a visitor from a distant foreign land, unfamiliar to things of our culture, attending a sporting event, let's say, a baseball game for example. It would have little meaning for him, wouldn't it. What is going on? What's the objective? Why is that man running toward that square pillow? Why is it important that another man touched him with the ball in his glove? Why did everyone cheer when some guy ran around in a circle and came back to step on that five-pointed object in the ground? All of these things would have little or no meaning, unless the objectives and nuances of the game were explained to him.

I gave up sports a while back, but I can appreciate how not knowing the pertinent details of a game would cause it to have no meaning for such an observer. I've never quite figured out the game of cricket. I remember looking out the train window while traveling in India and seeing cricket matches in progress beside villages, but couldn't tell you much of what was going on. I looked up on-line and saw that there was a match between India and Sri Lanka. I tried to figure out the scoreboard with its terms and abbreviations, but didn't understand much from it. Here's the application: to not know the issues of life; to not know what is really happening in our world will cause our existence to lack meaning. Life without the knowledge the Bible reveals is not much more than a morbid march to a certain grave. If it's true as Peggy Lee sang, "Is that all there is?" then life has little meaning.

But the Bible, particularly the book of Revelation, provides just the details we need to make sense of life, to give meaning to our existence. This is not "all there is!" And what lies beyond is so stupendous that it stretches our imagination. The book of Revelation opens to our minds a world

view that cannot be obtained elsewhere. It will bring blessing and comfort to the one who “reads, hears and keeps” the things that are written therein. Revelation 1:3.

Some feel that it is a book that is incomprehensible, but the very name “Revelation” indicates that it is a Book that is “revealed.” Sometimes the last Bible book is referred to as the “Apocalypse,” because in the original, the title is *Apocalypses*, which is formed from the preposition *apo* which means “from” (an “*apostle*” is one who is “sent from”) and the root *calypses* which means “covering,” as in the name of the tree called eucalyptus which means “good covering.” The title Revelation indicates that the “cover” is being removed “from,” or pulled away. God wants us to know about Him, His plan and the future that He has waiting for us. This planet is not spinning randomly through space. It is under divine control, though it seems chaotic from our view. God’s purposes will be fulfilled and He wants to make us aware of them.

When sin separated us from the face to face communion that had been enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the Fall, our loving Father in heaven wished us to be knowledgeable of what is happening. What could be more important than that? Here’s something I learned this week that I have never seen before. It’s within a familiar text in the book of Amos. Most of us have heard this quoted before. “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7. Have you heard that Scripture before? Do you see the verb in that passage, “reveals”? Something that is revealed is by definition a revelation, isn’t it. My curiosity was nudged and so I looked that word up. I found out that when the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the second century B. C. (called the Septuagint, or LXX because 70 priests did the translating), they used the very same Greek word *apocalypses* to translate the verb in Amos 3:7 that forms the title of the book of Revelation. I had not seen this before. The text could read, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He makes an apocalypse (a “revelation”) of His secret to His servants the prophets.” Interesting!

I suppose that from that perspective, every book, at least every prophetic book could be called an Apocalypse, but that title has been reserved for last book of the Scriptures. I’m not sure why some Bibles title it the “Revelation of Saint John,” because it is defined by its opening words the “Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.” Revelation 1:1.

This book tells us about Jesus. He is the central focus. And take note by what means this message of Jesus is conveyed. Notice two words in this introduction; God gave Him to show His servants; and “He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.” These two words, “show” and “signify” indicate that this was primarily a visual representation. The word “signify” means literally “to show by sign” and the word translated “signify” is a term from which our word “semaphore” is derived. Railroads, ships and others use semaphores to convey messages through signals and signs. We are told at the very beginning that this is a book communicating through signs and picture symbols, a format not unfamiliar to the student of Bible prophecy, especially highlighted in the book of Daniel.

Our study of Revelation is going to begin in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, which brings to view the very outset of the battle which has now involved Planet Earth. John is going to report to us what he saw in vision, represented in signs and picture symbols. “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast out to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Revelation 12:7-9.

We need to spend a few moments studying the two chief characters who are placed in the spotlight; One named Michael and one identified as the dragon, or Satan. Because love is the only basis for meaningful relationship, God endowed His creatures with freedom of choice, knowing that at some time someone might choose to rebel against Him. God has revealed to us some of the details of the onset of this rebellion; enough to have some sense of how it all began. From other Scriptures we understand that one gifted in beauty, wisdom and talent called Lucifer (meaning, the “one who bears the light”) became uplifted in his heart and ascribed his glory to himself, though everything he possessed had been given to him by God.

The Bible says, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north (in ancient Jerusalem, this was where important decisions were made); I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol (the grave), to the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: ‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?’” Isaiah 14:12-17.

Notice in this passage that destruction and devastation are laid at the door of the rebel Lucifer, not God. What your insurance policy calls an “act of God” is not God’s doing; it is the work of the devil. The book of Job makes this very clear. Satan is the one who made the earth tremble (what we call an “earthquake” is also called a “trembler”), shook the kingdoms and made the earth a wilderness.

Because our lives are so short, we may not appreciate the contrast of the appearance of our present world as compared with what it was like long ago at creation and even a relatively short time ago, say last century for example. In America we’re told that vast unnumbered herds of bison and deer freely roamed the great plains, of which only a fragment remains. Towering forests that blessed the landscape of our nation are now only a token of their former glory. Now you have to buy a ticket to see the giant sequoia trees. They have to be guarded in a national park to preserve their memory. Can you imagine asking someone of a previous generation if they would like to purchase a ticket to see what were once, in their day, numberless forests of these great trees? The renowned “cedars of Lebanon” of biblical report are now just a shadow of their previous magnificence. We take it for granted that there are deserts and wildernesses. But originally it was

not so. The unmeasured reserves of coal and oil testify to a previous world that was strikingly different. What are now deserts and wildernesses didn't used to be. Who caused all this? Who "made the world as a wilderness"? It is Satan, the dragon, the devil.

We're told here that some (the redeemed) will see him and "gaze" on him who is the first cause of evil. What will it be like to set your eyes on the one who caused all sin and sorrow? The KJV translates this, "they that see thee shall narrowly look on thee." When something puzzles us, many times our eyes will squint in disbelief. That's what it means to "look narrowly." We will wonder, How could this be? It will seem a mystery how one could rebel in a perfect environment, in heaven. How could one question the wisdom and benevolence of the Almighty? Yet Lucifer did just that. He refused to dismiss thoughts of envy and discontent. He cherished pride; he nourished resentment, eventually thinking that he deserved the worship and homage given to Christ. Yet Christ is Creator God; Lucifer a creature. This reality did not prevent him from cultivating jealousy which later erupted into war.

In another passage we're told, "You (addressed to Lucifer, the one standing behind the king of Tyre) were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering; the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you....Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you." Ezekiel 28:12-15, 17.

Notice in this Scripture several things about the devil. 1) He was a created being (though he aspired to be equal with the eternal God). 2) He held a high and lofty position, that of "covering cherub," close to the very throne of God. 3) He was perfect in his ways till iniquity was found (not "put") in him. The phrase "was found" indicates the mysterious and unexplainable origin of evil. God created a perfect angel, who turned himself into a devil. 4) Pride was the source of his fall. 5) Someday we will "gaze" upon this master deceiver and destroyer.

We're told in Revelation 12 that the war led by the dragon or devil was against "Michael and His angels." Because there is much discussion today as to the identity of Michael in Scripture, we will spend a minute or two on this point. Michael is a name that in Hebrew means "the one who is like God." There were a number of names that employed this root and were given to various people; Micaiah ("who is like Jah," an abbreviated form of Jehovah) was a prophet who lived in the time of Ahab and Elijah (II Kings 22:8). The feminine form Michal (today we would say "Michelle") was borne by a daughter of King Saul who became one of David's wives (I Samuel 14:49). The name Michael was given to about a dozen people in the Old Testament.

The term Michael could be rendered as a declarative statement, "The one who is like God", or it could be posed as a question, "Who is like God?" Both are suitable. Given the aspirations of Satan, who has always desired the place that belongs to God and is the original Antichrist; given the knowledge from the Bible that Jesus is the One Who is the "express image" of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), it seems a fitting and appropriate name for Christ. The name Michael seems to appear in contexts in which the devil and Christ are in direct conflict.

As we compare the other passages in which the name Michael appears, we find that He is called "first of the chief heads" (Daniel 10:13, Young's Literal Translation) and that He is above the angel Gabriel in position (Daniel 10:21). Who, we ask, is the "First of the chief heads"? Who is above Gabriel in power? Who is above all the angels? The answer, according to the first chapter of Hebrews is Christ. "And of the angels He says; 'Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.' But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.'" Hebrews 1:7, 8. The rest of the first chapter of Hebrews underscores this point emphatically.

Michael is called "the great *Prince* (Hebrew *sar*, a word associated with the words Caesar, Czar, Tsar and Kaiser) Who stands watch over the sons of your people." Daniel 12:1. Let's look at a few other Scriptures in which this word *sar* is used. Many times it refers to earthly princes, but in other contexts the usage is obviously speaking of Someone of higher realms. In Daniel 8:11 for example, the destructive horn power is pictured as exalting himself "as high as the Prince (*Sar*) of the host," and in verse 25 the horn power "shall even rise against the Prince (*Sar*) of princes," both references we believe pointing to Christ.

This same Hebrew word *sar* appears in Joshua 5:13-15: "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are You for us our for our adversaries?' So He said, 'No, but as *Commander (Sar)* of the army of the LORD I have now come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and *worshipped*, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?' Then the *Commander* of the LORD's army said to Joshua, 'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so."

Notice carefully Joshua's reaction to meeting the *Sar* of the Lord's host; he knew that he was in the presence of Jehovah God. The command to remove his sandals reminds us of the instruction given to Moses at the burning bush, when the great I AM spoke to him. Joshua knelt in worship, a reaction that would have been inappropriate if the Being before Whom he bowed was not Deity. When the prophet John knelt before his escort in vision, a created angel, he was advised not to do so, but to "worship God." Revelation 19:10; 22:9. When Joshua knelt before the Commander of the LORD's army, would he not have been likewise advised to refrain from worship, unless the Commander, the *Sar*, was indeed the LORD? If the Being Who met Joshua was not the LORD, would He have told Joshua to remove his sandal, an act of homage, as Moses was told?

We believe the Commander of the LORD's army in this passage to be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Leader of the hosts of heaven, the *Sar* of the Lord's army. If indeed this be the case, He would be correctly referred to as the Archangel, or the Head of all the angels. *Arch* when used as a prefix to a word denotes "head" or "leader," as in the word archbishop. In the LXX of Joshua 5, where the title *Sar* is used, we're told that His title is Archistrategos, the "chief or head captain." There is another title in Greek, *strategos*, (our word "strategy" comes from this root) which means "captain or leader of an army," as in Luke 22:4 and other places. It describes one in the role of leadership. But the title Archistrategos is above that; it represents the "chief of the captains of the army," corresponding with the "First of the chief heads" referred to in Daniel 10:13.

In Jude verse nine we're told, "Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" This text obviously brings to light the resurrection of Moses, the one who had led Israel from Egypt but was himself denied entrance to Canaan because of his rash indiscretion at Kadesh. He was buried by the Lord on the top of Mt. Nebo, as Deuteronomy 34 tells us. Yet we know that he didn't remain buried, because he was one of the two who visited and encouraged Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration, as we discussed last week. Clearly, Moses was brought out of the grave and resurrected to life.

Who is it, we ask, Who has power to bring from the grave? That is most certainly Christ, the Giver of life. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." John 5:25. Jesus declares of Himself, "I am the resurrection and the life." John 11:25. It is Christ Who is Michael the Archangel, the Commander of the Lord's host, the *Sar* of the Lord's army Who will descend from heaven on that great Day and Who will raise the dead. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first." I Thessalonians 4:16.

Jesus is eternal God; He is the Head of the angels. He is the "Archangel." The angels that remained loyal to Him are identified as "His" angels, in contrast to the angels who defected with Satan. "Michael and His angels fought against the dragon." The battle that began in heaven and has continued on this earth is between Christ and His angels and Satan and his angels. Though we are not often given the privilege to peer beyond the veil separating the visible from the invisible, the effects of this battle are all too clearly about us. We are surrounded by evidence that this battle rages in the turmoil and trouble confounding this planet. Take heart! Jesus has defeated the devil, and He will soon come back to this earth and remove us from the tempter's presence. The skirmishes continue, but the victory is assured by Christ's triumph on the cross.

This battle that began in heaven continues in human hearts today. Satan is waging fierce warfare for the control of mortal minds and destinies. He throws his fiery darts of discouragement and hurls his sharpened spears of doubt. The stakes are high; eternal life or eternal death. Through Christ we can be "more than conquerors" and successfully defeat the wiles of the devil.

