

The Cosmic Controversy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezek. 28:1, 2, 11–17; Gen. 3:1–7; Rev. 12:1–17; Rom. 8:31–39; Rev. 14:12.*

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

The cosmic controversy, sometimes called “the great controversy,” is the biblical worldview. It forms the background against which the drama of our world, and even of the universe, unfolds. Sin, suffering, death, the rise and fall of nations, the spread of the gospel, last-day events—these all occur in the context of the cosmic controversy.

This week, we will look at a few crucial places where the controversy took hold. It began mysteriously in the heart of a perfect being known as Lucifer, who brought his rebellion to earth through the fall of other perfect beings, Adam and Eve. From these two pivot points, the fall of Lucifer and then of our first parents, the great controversy took root and has been raging ever since. Each one of us, then, is a part of this cosmic drama.

The good news is that one day it will not only end, but it will end with the total victory of Christ over Satan. The even better news is that, because of the completeness of what Jesus did on the cross, all of us can share in that victory. Finally, as part of that victory, God calls us to faith and obedience as we await all that we have been promised in Jesus, whose coming is assured.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.*

The Fall of a Perfect Being

If the cosmic controversy forms the background biblical worldview, this leads to a number of questions. An important one is, *How did it all get started?* Because a loving God created the universe, it's reasonable to assume that evil, violence, and conflict certainly were not built into the creation from the beginning. Thus, the controversy must have arisen separately from the original creation and definitely not as a necessary result of it. Nevertheless, the controversy is here, it's real, and we are all involved.

Read Ezekiel 28:1, 2, 11–17 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What do these texts teach us about the fall of Lucifer and the rise of evil?

Lucifer was a perfect being living in heaven. How could iniquity have arisen in him, especially in an environment such as that? We don't know. Perhaps that's one reason why the Bible talks about "the mystery of iniquity" (2 *Thess.* 2:7).

Outside the reality of the free will that God has given all His intelligent creatures, no reason exists for the fall of Lucifer. As Ellen G. White so profoundly stated it: "It is impossible to explain the origin of sin so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 492, 493.

Replace the word *sin* with *evil*, and the statement works just as well: "It is impossible to explain the origin of [evil] so as to give a reason for its existence. . . . [Evil] is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be [evil]."

Think about your own experiences with the reality of free will. Why should we prayerfully and carefully think about the choices we make using our free will?

More Than Head Knowledge

Although we cannot explain *why* evil arose (since no justification for it exists), Scripture reveals that it began in the heart of Lucifer in heaven. Besides the fascinating insights that we get from the writings of Ellen G. White (see, for instance, the chapter “The Origin of Evil” in *The Great Controversy*), Scripture doesn’t tell us much more about how it started in heaven. The Word of God is more explicit, though, in regard to how it arose on earth.

Read Genesis 3:1–7. What happened here that shows Adam and Eve’s culpability in what transpired?

What’s so sad here is that Eve knew what God had said. “ ‘God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” ’ ” (*Gen. 3:3, NKJV*). Although as far as the Scripture tells us, God had said nothing about touching the fruit, Eve knew the truth that eating from it would lead to death.

Then, Satan openly and blatantly contradicted those words: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*).

How much starker could the contrast be? However subtle Satan’s approach to Eve was at first, once he got her attention and saw that she was not resisting, he openly challenged the Lord’s command. As we have seen, Eve was not working from a position of ignorance. She couldn’t claim, “I didn’t know; I didn’t know.”

She did know.

Yet, despite this knowledge, she did wrong anyway. If even in the perfect environment of Eden, knowledge itself wasn’t enough to keep Eve (and then Adam, who also knew the truth) from sinning, we shouldn’t fool ourselves into thinking that knowledge alone is enough to save us now. Yes, we need to know what the Word of God tells us. But along with knowing that, we need the kind of surrender in which we will obey what it tells us, as well.

God said one thing, Satan said another. Despite the knowledge that Adam and Eve had, they chose to listen to Satan. Think about how little has changed over the millennia. How can we avoid making the same kind of error?

War in Heaven and on Earth

The fall of our first parents plunged the world into sin, evil, and death. People might disagree on the immediate causes, or who's at fault, but who can deny the reality of the turmoil, violence, upheaval, and conflict that afflict us all here?

We talk about a *cosmic* controversy, or a *cosmic* conflict, and that's fine and true. But whatever the cosmic origins of this conflict, it is being played out here on earth, as well. Indeed, so much biblical history—from the Fall in Eden up through final events leading to the second coming of Jesus—is in many ways the biblical exposition of the great controversy. We live amid this controversy. The Word of God explains to us what is going on, what is behind it, and most important, how it is going to end.

Read Revelation 12:1–17. What battles does this chapter portray as unfolding both in heaven and on earth?

We see a battle in heaven and battles on earth, as well. The first battle is between the dragon (Satan) and Michael (Hebrew meaning: “Who is like God?”) (*Rev. 12:7–9*). The rebel Lucifer became known as Satan (Adversary), who is merely a created being fighting against the eternal Creator, Jesus (*Heb. 1:1, 2; John 1:1–4*).

Lucifer was rebelling against his Maker. The great controversy is not about dueling gods; it's about a *creature* rebelling against his *Creator* and manifesting that rebellion by attacking the creation, as well.

Failing in his battle against Christ in heaven, Satan sought to go after Him on earth right after His human birth (*Rev. 12:4*). Failing in his battle against Christ here, and then failing against Him in the wilderness and later at the cross, Satan—after his irreversible defeat at Calvary—went to war against Christ's people. This war has raged through much of Christian history (*Rev. 12:6, 14–16*) and will continue until the end (*Rev. 12:17*), until Satan faces another defeat, this time at the second coming of Jesus.

Read Revelation 12:10–12. What hope do we find in these verses amid all the controversy and conflict seen in the other texts?

With You Always, Even Unto the End

The book of Revelation foretold the persecution that God's people would face through a good portion of church history. The 1,260 prophetic days of Revelation 12:6 (*see also Rev. 12:14*) point to 1,260 years of persecution against the church.

"These persecutions, beginning under Nero about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, continued with greater or less fury for centuries. Christians were falsely accused of the most dreadful crimes and declared to be the cause of great calamities—famine, pestilence, and earthquake. As they became the objects of popular hatred and suspicion, informers stood ready, for the sake of gain, to betray the innocent. They were condemned as rebels against the empire, as foes of religion, and pests to society. Great numbers were thrown to wild beasts or burned alive in the amphitheaters."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 40.

As a result of persecution, "the woman [church] fled into the wilderness" (*Rev. 12:6*). She is described as having two wings like an eagle. This gives the picture of flying away where help could be found. She was taken care of in the wilderness, and the serpent, or Satan, could not get to her (*Rev. 12:14*). God always has preserved a remnant even during major persecutions, and He will do so again in the end time.

In the context of the perils of the last days, Christ said to His people: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (*Matt. 28:20, NIV*). How do we understand this wonderful promise, even in the face of the vast martyrdom of many of His followers? (*See Rom. 8:31–39 and Matt. 10:28.*)

Nothing—not persecution, famine, or death—can separate us from God's love. However, Christ's presence with us, whether now or in the end times, does not mean that we are spared pain, suffering, trials, or even death. We have never been promised such exemptions in this life. It means that, through Jesus and what He has done for us, we can live with the hope and promise that God is with us in these trials and that we have the promise of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. We can live with the hope that regardless of anything we go through here, like Paul, we can be certain that "there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (*2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV*). We who have "loved His appearing" can claim this hope and promise for ourselves, as well.

The Law and the Gospel

As Seventh-day Adventists, we carry in our name so much of what we stand for. The *Seventh-day* part represents the seventh-day Sabbath, which points to our belief not just in that one commandment alone but, by implication, in all ten. The *Adventist* part points to our belief in the second advent of Jesus, a truth that can exist only because of what Christ did with His atoning death at His first advent. Hence, our name *Seventh-day Adventist* points to two crucial and inseparable components of present truth: the law and the gospel.

How do these texts indicate just how closely the law and the gospel are linked?

Jer. 44:23_____

Rom. 3:20–26_____

Rom. 7:7_____

The gospel is good news, the good news that though we have sinned in that we have broken God’s law, through faith in what Christ did for us at the cross we can be forgiven our sins, for our transgression of His law. Also, we have been given the power to obey that law, fully and completely.

No wonder then that, in the context of the last days, as the great controversy rages in special ferocity, God’s people are depicted in a very specific manner.

Read Revelation 14:12. How does this text reveal the link between the law and the gospel?

As Seventh-day Adventists, a people who believe in obedience to God’s law, how can we show others that obedience to the law is not legalism but a natural outgrowth of loving God and being saved by Him? How do such texts as Deuteronomy 11:1 and 1 John 5:3 buttress this point?

Further Study: Read Revelation 12:9–12 and Ellen G. White, “Why Was Sin Permitted?” pp. 33–43, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. But a change came over this happy state. There was one who perverted the freedom that God had granted to His creatures. Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 35.

Notice Ellen White’s words, the “allegiance of love.” This powerful phrase, full of meaning, points to the fact that love leads to allegiance, to faithfulness. A spouse who loves his or her mate, then, will manifest that love through allegiance. It was that way with the heavenly host, and it should be that way with us now in our relationship to God.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What scriptural evidence do we have that points to the reality not just of Satan but of his role in the great controversy? How can we help people understand the reality of Satan as a personal being and not just a symbol of the evil in the human heart?
- ❷ As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been blessed with an incredible amount of knowledge in regard to biblical truth. As wonderful as it is, though, why is this knowledge not enough to save us? What more do we need than just intellectual knowledge?
- ❸ What are ways in which you have experienced the presence of Jesus in your life even now? How can these experiences help you in whatever time of trouble you have to face?
- ❹ In class, talk more about the phrase “the allegiance of love.” How can this idea help us to understand better the relationship between law and grace and between faith and obedience? What does it teach about the freedom inherent in the whole idea of love? In what ways, even now, can we reveal the “allegiance of love”?

Hawaiian Wedding: Part 1

by BENJIE LEACH

Sabbath afternoon began as planned.

About 30 band students from Campion Academy, where I worked as a chaplain, distributed copies of Ellen G. White's book *Steps to Christ* in a town located at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in the U.S. state of Colorado.

After that, we returned to the local Seventh-day Adventist church, where the students earlier had performed and changed clothing for a hike in nearby Rocky Mountain National Park.

But when our bus stopped at a scenic lookout spot near the mountaintop, I immediately wanted to turn around and leave. Dozens of people dressed in long robes greeted our eyes. At first glance, I thought they belonged to some sort of pushy Eastern religion, and I didn't want to argue with them.

But the band members pleaded for five minutes to witness to these people. I reluctantly agreed.

After a few minutes, a student came over to me and said, "This is not an Eastern religion. This is a Hawaiian wedding."

I was surprised. "Why is a Hawaiian wedding being held in Colorado?" I asked.

It turned out that the groom was originally from Hawaii. But, the student said, the bride and groom had a problem: the minister was 45 minutes late.

"Aren't you a minister?" the student asked.

I assured him that the minister would arrive. But the minister didn't show up. We saw the bride crying near a car, and I approached her. The woman tearfully explained that the minister had been involved in an accident and could not come to the wedding.

The bride had won my sympathy now. "All right," I said. "I guess I can have your wedding."

She looked surprised. "What makes you think that you can have my wedding?" she said.

"I am a minister," I said.

"You don't look like a minister."

"Lady, I wouldn't lie to you," I said, pulling out my wallet to show her my ministerial license.

Her eyes grew big. "You really are a minister! Can you do our wedding?" she asked.

Now I wasn't so sure. I said to her, "I want to see your wedding license."

I carefully examined the piece of paper. It was in order.

"I guess I'll have your wedding," I said. "So what are your names?"

The band members saw what was happening, and they became excited. Several band members played music for the couple before the ceremony began.

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Daniel *and the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 16:10; Daniel 1, 2, 3:1–6; Rev. 13:11–15; Dan. 3:13–18; John 3:7; Daniel 4; Daniel 6.*

Memory Text: “The king answered Daniel, and said, ‘Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret’ ” (*Daniel 2:47, NKJV*).

The Lord had great plans for ancient Israel. “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (*Exod. 19:6*). This holy nation, this kingdom of priests, was to be His witness to the world that Yahweh was the only God (*see Isa. 43:10, 12*). Unfortunately, the nation didn’t live up to the holy calling that God had given it. Eventually, its people even went into captivity in Babylon.

Interestingly enough, God still was able to use individual Judeans to be His witnesses, despite the disaster of their captivity. In other words, to some degree God accomplished through Daniel and his three fellow captives what He did not achieve through Israel and Judah. In one sense, these men were examples of what Israel as a nation was to have been and done.

Yes, their stories unfold in a time and place far removed from the last days. But we still can find traits and characteristics in these men that can serve as models for us, a people who not only live in the end time but who are called to be witnesses about God to a world that, like the pagans in the Babylonian court, does not know Him. What can we learn from their stories?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.

Faithful in What Is Least

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (*Luke 16:10, NKJV*).

Look at the words of Jesus here. It’s so easy, isn’t it, to compromise, to be “‘unjust in what is least.’” The problem isn’t so much that “what is least” is important in and of itself; it’s not. That’s why it is “the least.” As most of us know either by personal experience or by the examples of others (or both), the problem is that the first compromise leads to another, and then another, and then another, until we become “‘unjust also in much.’”

With this thought in mind, we pick up the story in Daniel 1, the first account of the experiences of these four Judeans in Babylonian captivity.

Read Daniel 1. In what ways did the stand that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah took reflect what ancient Israel was to be to the nations? See also Deut. 4:6–8, Zech. 8:23.

Although the text directly does not link what they ate to their being “ten times better” in “wisdom and understanding” than all others (*Dan. 1:20*), the link is clearly there. The chapter also says that God gave them this knowledge and wisdom. That is, the Lord was able to work with them because of their faithfulness to Him in refusing to eat the unclean food of Babylon. They obeyed, and God blessed their obedience. Would God not have done something just like this for ancient Israel *as a whole* had it adhered to the teaching of the Bible as diligently and faithfully as these four young men did? Of course. And will He not also do that for us today, in the last days, if we are faithful?

Since we have been given so much light and truth, as a church we need to ask ourselves: *Have we been faithful and obedient to what we have been given?* At the same time, how can each one of us individually take positions that will enable us to be powerful witnesses for God?

The Humility of Daniel

All over the world, Daniel 2 has helped untold numbers of people come to believe in the God of the Bible. It provides powerfully *rational* evidence, not only for the existence of God but for His foreknowledge. Indeed, it is the revelation that the chapter provides of God's foreknowledge that presents evidence for God's existence.

Read Daniel 2. How does the chapter provide such convincing evidence for the reality of God? Look, too, at Europe today as depicted in the book (*Dan. 2:40–43*). How could a man who lived about twenty-six hundred years ago have described so accurately the situation there, other than through divine revelation?

Daniel openly and unashamedly had given all the credit to God for what had been revealed to him. How easily he could have attributed his ability to know and interpret the king's dream to his own wisdom and understanding. But Daniel knew better than that. The prayers that he and the others prayed (*Dan. 2:17–23*) showed their knowledge of their utter dependence upon God; they knew that without Him they would have died with the rest of the wise men.

Later Daniel reminded the king that none of his professional wise men, enchanters, or magicians proved able to tell the king his dream. By contrast, the God in heaven can reveal mysteries because He is the only true God.

Thus, in his humility and in his dependence upon God, Daniel was able to be a powerful witness. If Daniel, back then, showed humility, how much more should we reveal our own humility today? After all, we have a revelation of the plan of salvation that Daniel didn't; and if anything should keep us humble, it should be the knowledge of what Jesus did at the cross.

What should the Cross teach us about humility? What does it say to us, not only about our own sinfulness but also about our utter dependence upon God for salvation? Think about where you would be without the Cross. What, then, do you have to boast about, other than the Cross? See Gal. 6:14.

The Golden Image

Bible students have long noticed the link between Daniel 3, the story of the three Hebrews on the plain of Dura, and Revelation 13, a depiction of the persecution that God's people have faced in the past and will face in the last days.

Compare Daniel 3:1–6 with Revelation 13:11–15. What are the parallels between these two passages?

In both cases, the issue of worship is central, but both talk about a worship that is forced. That is, the political powers in control demand the worship that is due to the Lord alone.

Read Daniel 3:13–18. What can we learn from the story that should help us understand not only what we will face in the last days but also *how* we should face what is coming?

As the most powerful leader on earth, Nebuchadnezzar mocked these men and their God, saying, “Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (*Dan. 3:15*). He was soon to find out for himself just who that God was, for later he declared: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God” (*Dan. 3:28*).

After seeing such a miracle as that, there is no question that the king was convinced there was something special about the God whom these men served.

Suppose, though, that these young men had not been delivered from the flames. This outcome is one the men realized was a distinct possibility (*Dan. 3:18*). Why would they still have done the right thing in not obeying the king's command even if it meant being burned alive? This story presents a powerful testimony to the men's faith and their willingness to stand for what they believed, regardless of the consequences.

When the issue of worship arises in the last days, how can we be sure that we will stand as faithfully as these four men did? If we are not faithful now in what is “least,” what makes us think we will be faithful in something as big as the final crisis?

Conversion of the Gentiles

Daniel 3 ends with Nebuchadnezzar acknowledging the existence and power of the true God. But knowledge of God and of His power isn't the same as having the born-again experience that Jesus said was crucial for salvation (*see John 3:7*). Indeed, the man depicted in Daniel 4:30 was anything but a converted soul.

Read Daniel 4:30. What was this man's problem? *See also John 15:5, Acts 17:28, Dan. 5:23.*

By the time that the chapter is done, though, Nebuchadnezzar learns, even if it is the hard way, that all true power exists in God, and without God, he is nothing at all.

"The once proud monarch had become a humble child of God; the tyrannical, overbearing ruler, a wise and compassionate king. He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven, now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects. Under the rebuke of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Nebuchadnezzar had learned at last the lesson which all rulers need to learn—that true greatness consists in true goodness. He acknowledged Jehovah as the living God, saying, 'I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.'"—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 521.

Read Daniel 4:35. What truths about God did Nebuchadnezzar express here, as well?

Daniel 4 ends with a Gentile acknowledging the authority, dominion, and power of the "Hebrew" God. In a sense, this scene is a precursor to what happened in the early church, when, through the witness of Jews and through the power of God, Gentiles learned the truth about the Lord and began to proclaim that truth to the world.

Read John 3:7. Although we think of last-day events in terms of the death decree, worship, and persecution, what does Jesus say here that, above and beyond everything else, prepares people for the end of time?

The Faithfulness of Daniel

Read Daniel 6 and then answer the following questions:

1. What does Daniel 6:4, 5 reveal about the character of Daniel? What lessons can we take from these verses about how we should be seen?

2. What parallels can we find in this chapter that link it to final events as depicted in the book of Revelation? See *Rev. 13:4, 8, 11–17*.

3. Put yourself in the place of Daniel in this situation. What rationale or argument could he have used in order not to pray? That is, how could he have justified not doing what he did, and, thus, spared himself the ordeal of getting thrown into the lions' den?

4. Why do you think Daniel continued to pray as he always did, even though he necessarily didn't have to do so?

5. What did King Darius say (*Dan. 6:16*) even before Daniel was thrown into the lions' den that showed he knew something about the power of Daniel's God? What in his words showed the witness of Daniel himself to the king concerning the God whom Daniel worshiped and served?

Further Thought: “As we near the close of this world’s history, the prophecies recorded by Daniel demand our special attention, as they relate to the very time in which we are living. With them should be linked the teachings of the last book of the New Testament Scriptures. Satan has led many to believe that the prophetic portions of the writings of Daniel and of John the revelator cannot be understood. But the promise is plain that special blessing will accompany the study of these prophecies. ‘The wise shall understand’ [Dan. 12:10], was spoken of the visions of Daniel that were to be unsealed in the latter days; and of the revelation that Christ gave to His servant John for the guidance of God’s people all through the centuries, the promise is, ‘Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.’ Revelation 1:3.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 547, 548.

Although we tend to look at the book of Daniel in the context of the rise and fall of nations, the judgment (*Dan. 7:22, 26; 8:14*), and the final deliverance of God’s people in the time of trouble (*Dan. 12:1*), we saw this week that the book of Daniel also can give us examples of what it means for us individually to be prepared for trials and persecution, whenever they come. In this sense, these stories present us with crucially important messages in the last days. After all, however helpful it may be to know about the “mark of the beast,” the “time of trouble,” and the upcoming persecution, if we haven’t had the kind of experience with God that we need, all this knowledge will only condemn us. More than anything else, we need the “born-again” experience that Daniel and the others, including Nebuchadnezzar, had.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9:3–19. How does this prayer show that Daniel understood grace, and that God loves and redeems us out of His own graciousness as opposed to any merit or goodness on our own part? Why is this so important a truth not just to understand but to experience?
- ❷ In class, discuss the challenges that the three Hebrews (*Daniel 3*) and Daniel (*Daniel 6*) faced in regard to standing up when their religious practices were threatened by political authorities. What similarities do you find in the two accounts? What differences? And what can we learn from both accounts about how we can be powerful witnesses by being faithful?
- ❸ What does it mean to be “born again”? Why would Jesus say that we “must be born again” (*John 3:7*)?

Hawaiian Wedding: Part 2

by BENJIE LEACH

The bride's father escorted his daughter, now smiling, to the front of the crowd. The groom played a guitar and sang "The Hawaiian Wedding Song."

The Lord gave me a few things to say, and I pronounced the couple husband and wife.

Afterward, the groom's mother said something to me that still sends chills up and down my spine.

"I don't think this was an accident," she said. "I think this was meant to happen. Look at your shirt."

I looked down at my clothing. I was wearing jeans, tennis shoes, and a powder-blue shirt. Stitched over the shirt's pocket was the word, "Hawaii," and a colorful rainbow. I had bought the shirt while vacationing with my wife in Hawaii several years earlier.

When they put the lei around my neck, it was as if my participation in the wedding had been meant to happen.

We gave the newlyweds a wedding gift: a copy of *Steps to Christ*. The couple had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists.

If the story had ended there, I would have been happy. But it didn't.

Two years later, I was living in Texas and received an early Sabbath-morning phone call from a veteran literature evangelist in Colorado.

"Do you remember that couple you married in Rocky Mountain National Park?" he said.

The couple had read *Steps to Christ* and reached out to the Adventist Church for more information. "So, we sent them more literature," he said. "Then they wanted Bible studies, and I've been studying the Bible with them for the last six months. You'll be happy to know that today they are being baptized into the Greeley Seventh-day Adventist Church."

Two more years passed. Campion Academy invited me to return to give a week of prayer. As I stood up to give the Sabbath sermon, I saw the literature evangelist walk in with the married couple and their toddler.

After the church service, they told me the rest of the story.

After being baptized, the couple had invited their friends to evangelistic meetings in the Greeley church, and three of them had been baptized. In addition, the groom's mother had been baptized and was working at an Adventist hospital in Hawaii.

I hadn't wanted to stop that day to argue with the people in white robes. But the Lord was able to use a few academy students and a guy wearing a Hawaiian shirt to witness.



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Jesus *and the* Book of Revelation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 10:1–11, Rev. 12:1–17, 19:11–15, Eph. 1:20, Rev. 11:19, 1:10–18.*

Memory Text: “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne” (*Revelation 3:21, NIV*).

Even the quickest reading of the New Testament reveals an important truth: the New Testament is tied directly to the Old. Time and time again the Gospels and the Epistles refer either to events in the Old Testament or quote directly or indirectly from it. In addition, when referring to Himself and His ministry, how often did Jesus talk about how the “Scriptures” need to be “fulfilled” (see *Matt. 26:54, 56; Mark 14:49; John 13:18; 17:12*)?

The same thing can be said for the book of Revelation. Indeed, it's all but impossible to make sense of the book of Revelation apart from the Old Testament, especially the book of Daniel. This is one reason why we often study both books together.

A crucial aspect of those Old Testament references in Revelation is that, taken together with the rest of the book, they reveal Jesus. Revelation is all about Jesus, about who He is, about what He has done for His people, and about what He will do for us at the end of time. Any focus on last-day events must keep Jesus front and center out of necessity, which is exactly what the book of Revelation does. This week's lesson looks at Jesus in the book of Revelation.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 21.*

The Structure of Revelation

Among the many things that Daniel and Revelation have in common are their two basic divisions: historical and eschatological (dealing with end-time events). Both these concepts are linked intricately in each book. We may view the historical events as precursors or examples (even if on a smaller scale) of grand and global events in the last days. That is, by studying what happened in Old Testament history, we can have insights for what will happen in our days and beyond. This principle, however, is not limited only to Daniel and Revelation.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–11. In these verses how do we see the principle talked about above?

As we found last week, some of the stories in Daniel (*Dan. 3:6, 15, 27; and 6:6–9, 21, 22*) were localized historical incidents that reflect, somewhat, the end-time events depicted in Revelation. By studying these stories, we can get glimpses and insights into some of the things that God's people will face on a broader scale in the end. Perhaps, though, the most important point is that, regardless of our immediate situation here, we are assured of ultimate deliverance. Whatever else Revelation teaches, it assures the faithful of victory.

Although there are some exceptions, the historical portion of Revelation is chapters 1–11, followed by the end-time chapters 13–22.

Read Revelation 12:1–17. Where should we categorize this chapter—historical or eschatological, and why?

As we can see, this chapter belongs to both categories. Why? Because it talks about historical conflicts—the expulsion of Satan from heaven (*Rev. 12:7–9*), Satan's attack on Baby Jesus (*Rev. 12:4*), and the persecution of the church in subsequent church history (*Rev. 12:14–16*)—followed by a depiction of the devil's attack on the end-time remnant (*Rev. 12:17*).

It has been said that one of the lessons we learn from history is that we *never* learn from history. In other words, regardless of when they live, people keep making the same mistakes. With so much history behind us to learn from, how can we avoid doing just that?

Images of Jesus

Read the following texts. Each contains various names and/or descriptions of Jesus, as well as what He has done, is doing, or will do. What do the texts teach us about Jesus?

Rev. 1:5 _____

Rev. 1:18 _____

Rev. 5:8 _____

Rev. 19:11–15 _____

Rev. 21:6 _____

These are only a few of the many texts in Revelation that depict Jesus in various roles and functions. He is the Lamb, which points to His first coming, in which He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (*1 Cor. 5:7*). He was also the One who “was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (*Rev. 1:18*), a clear reference to His death and resurrection from the dead. “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day” (*Luke 24:46, ASV*). Finally, in Revelation 19:11–15, He is depicted in His role at the Second Coming, when He will return to the earth in power and glory and judgment. “ ‘For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works’ ” (*Matt. 16:27, NKJV*).

How can we learn to make the life, death, resurrection, and the return of Jesus the central focus of our own existence and the foundation for the moral choices we make?

The Sanctuary Motif in Revelation

Besides being historical and eschatological, Revelation also has another structural layer, one built around the Hebrew sanctuary. This sanctuary motif is not confined to either of the two major divisions but goes through them both.

In the earthly sanctuary one begins in the courtyard, at the altar of burnt offering, where the animals were slain. After the death of the animal, symbolic of the Cross, the priest would enter into the first apartment of the sanctuary, which was a model of what Jesus did in the heavenly sanctuary after His ascension. This is represented by Jesus' walking among the lampstands (*Rev 1:13*).

Read Revelation 4:1, 2. What does the open door represent? Where is this scene located? See also Acts 2:33; 5:31; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 10:12, 13; Ps. 110:1; Rev. 12:5.

Soon after His ascension, Christ was inaugurated in the Holy Place of the heavenly temple, through this first open door. When Christ first appears in the book of Revelation, He is standing before the lampstands of the first apartment in the heavenly sanctuary (*see Rev. 1:10–18*).

Read Revelation 11:19. What is the significance of the fact that as the heavenly temple was opened, John could see the ark of His covenant, which sat in the second apartment of the earthly sanctuary (*see Lev. 16:12–14*)?

The image of the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary is an indisputable reference to the Most Holy Place, or second apartment. In the book of Revelation, we can see not just Jesus' two-apartment ministry but the crucial and comforting fact that events in heaven and earth are linked. Even amid the trials of history and the last days as depicted in the book of Revelation, we can have the assurance that "all heaven is engaged in the work of preparing a people to stand in the day of the Lord's preparation. The connection of heaven with earth seems very close."—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 307.

Christ in Revelation: Part One

Everything in Revelation, from the structure to the content, has one purpose: to reveal Jesus Christ.

That's why the opening words of the book are, "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Apocalypsis Iesou Christou*). This generally is understood as (1) "the revelation from Jesus Christ" or (2) "the revelation about Jesus Christ" (*Rev. 1:2*). The fact that it is a "revelation" argues against those who believe Revelation is too hard to understand. Why would the Lord have included the book in the Bible if He hadn't meant for it to be understood by those who read it?

Read Revelation 1:1–8. What do these verses teach us about Jesus?

In Revelation, Christ is introduced as "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (*Rev. 1:5, NIV*), and near the end of the book He is described as "KING OF KINGS" (*Rev. 19:16*). The great news here is that amid all the chaos and confusion on earth, we can have the assurance that our loving Lord and Savior has ultimate control.

In Revelation 1:5, we have been given a clear reference to Christ as the Redeemer. "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (*NKJV*). This text points to His atoning death on the cross. He has not only justified us but sanctified us, as well (*1 Cor. 6:11*). It is in texts such as this one that we can find assurance of salvation because they show us that Jesus is the One who washes away our sins. We certainly can't do it ourselves.

Read Revelation 1:7. What does this teach us about Jesus?

Central to the whole Christian faith is the promise of Christ's return "with the clouds." Jesus will come again, a literal return in an event that the whole world will witness—an event that once and for all ends the suffering, chaos, and ruin of this world and ushers in all the promises of eternity.

What does Revelation 1:8 teach us about Jesus? What hope can we find in this verse that can give us comfort amid whatever trials we are facing?

Christ in Revelation: Part Two

Read Revelation 1:10–18. What does Jesus say about Himself there?

When Jesus appears in these verses, He is standing in the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. The revelation of Him in this role was so great that John fell at His feet in fear. Jesus, ever comforting, tells him not to be afraid and points to Himself as “the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last” (*Rev. 1:11, NKJV*)—references to His eternal existence as God. Later He talks about His death and resurrection and the hope that His resurrection brings. Jesus also has the keys of “Hades and of Death” (*NKJV*). In other words, Jesus here is saying to John what He said to Martha at the death of her brother, words that John also recorded: “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ ” (*John 11:25, 26, NKJV*).

With Martha and now with John, Jesus points us to the hope of the resurrection, the culmination and climax of the Christian faith. Without this particular hope, what hope is there?

Read Revelation 22:7, 12, 13. What do these verses reveal about Jesus?

“Christ Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Genesis of the Old Testament, and the Revelation of the New. Both meet together in Christ. Adam and God are reconciled by the obedience of the second Adam, who accomplished the work of overcoming the temptations of Satan and redeeming Adam’s disgraceful failure and fall.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1092, 1093. Yes, Jesus is the beginning and the end. He created us in the beginning, and He will re-create us in the end.

From start to finish, as it teaches us about not only history but about end-time events, the book of Revelation is still the *Apocalypsis Iesou Christou*, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Again, whatever else we may study about final events, Jesus Christ must be the center of it all.

How can we keep Jesus at the center of our lives each and every day?

Further Thought: “In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God. The very name given to its inspired pages, ‘the Revelation,’ contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth’s history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 584.

The texts we looked at this week, in both the beginning and the end of the book, show just how much of Revelation is about Jesus. Even with all the Old Testament references to historical events, the book of Revelation teaches us more about our Lord Jesus. See Revelation 3:14; 5:5, 6; 7:14; and 19:11–16 for even more texts in Revelation about Him. When we put these texts together, we can get a powerful representation of Jesus and what He should mean to us as those who claim to be His followers.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What does it mean for us that all through the New Testament constant reference is made to the Old Testament? What should it tell us about how central Scripture should be to our faith and how seriously we must take the Word of God? How can we protect ourselves against any and all attempts to lessen the authority of the Scriptures in our personal lives and in the life of the church?
- ❷ Skim through the book of Revelation and collect as many other texts as you can that talk specifically about Jesus. In class, read the texts aloud. What else do they reveal to you about the nature, work, power, and character of our Lord? What comfort do you derive from what these texts reveal?
- ❸ In a world of death, how can we learn to find hope and comfort in the promise of the resurrection of the dead?

“A Small Woman”

by VANESSA ROCHA

Seventh-day Adventist leaders assigned me to lead evangelistic meetings at an Adventist university during a 2016 outreach effort that resulted in an unprecedented 110,000 baptisms in Rwanda.

The pastor approached me after 173 young people were baptized at the end of my meetings.

“Now that we are friends, I can tell you this,” he said. “When I was told I was going to have an American preacher come to my site, I was very excited. I was expecting a big, strong, tall, white man. But when they presented you, a small woman, as our speaker, I was very disappointed. So, I didn’t expect much. But my dear sister preacher, I’m so sorry for my little faith. You have done a work that none of us has been able to do at this school.”

Truthfully, I don’t have much to offer. But when you have a willing heart, God will do extraordinary things. What made the mission to Rwanda so successful? The answer is simple: Total Member Involvement—having every church member do his or her part in sharing Jesus.

In Rwanda, I saw that local church members made it their personal duty to reach out to their communities. They put aside the idea that evangelism is the pastors’ job alone. Church members had no special training; they simply used their God-given talents to reach those Christ came to save. They realized that Jesus is coming soon and that we as Seventh-day Adventists have a higher calling. They said, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”

I met many Rwandans, young and old, who said, “Vanessa, I have been in the church for so many years and never have I seen the church do something like this. But now I realize I don’t have to wait on the church. It simply starts with one person. It starts with me.”

Young people came to me and said, “I’m not a preacher. I’m not a singer. But I have many friends and a lot of influence. My life will be the sermon. Because of everything I’ve learned during this evangelistic series, I will start giving Bible studies.”

The sincerity of these church members changed Rwanda in much the same way that Jesus and His 12 disciples changed the world in three years. How much more could we do if we took hold of this mission of Total Member Involvement in our local churches? How much sooner would we see Jesus?



VANESSA ROCHA, 23, is a Bible worker and musician in southern California.

Salvation *and the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:9; Zeph. 3:17; John 1:1–3; Rom. 8:38, 39; Ps. 91:15, 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; Eph. 1:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (*1 John 4:10, NIV*).

One fascinating but crucial difference between Christianity and non-Christian religions is that while the others emphasize what their founders have taught them, they do not emphasize what their founders *have done for them*. And that’s because whatever their founders may have done for them, it cannot save them. All these leaders can do is try to teach the people how to “save” themselves.

In contrast, Christians emphasize not only what Jesus taught but what He did. This is because what Christ did provides the only means by which we are saved. Christ’s incarnation in human flesh (*Rom. 8:3*), His death on the cross (*Rom. 5:8*), His resurrection (*1 Pet. 1:3*), and His ministry in heaven (*Heb. 7:25*)—these acts alone are what save us. It’s certainly not anything in ourselves. “If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 24.

This wonderful truth is especially important for us amid the perils and deceptions of the last days.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.

The Love of the Father

Not too long before the cross, Jesus spoke with His inner circle about how people can come to the Father through Him. It was then that Philip said: “ ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us’ ” (*John 14:8, NKJV*).

How did Jesus respond to Philip? See *John 14:9*. What does His response teach us about the Father? What misconceptions about God should His response clear up?

Some people say that the God of the Old Testament is a God of justice in comparison to the God of the New Testament, who is full of mercy and grace and forgiveness. They draw a distinction between the two that is not valid. He is the same God, with the same traits, in both the Old and New Testaments.

One reason Christ came to this world was to reveal the truth about God the Father. Through the centuries, wrong ideas about Him and His character had become widespread, not just among the heathen but among God’s chosen nation, as well. “The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. These were some of the reasons that Jesus came to this earth.

God does not change. If we knew all the facts surrounding events in the Old Testament, we would find God just as merciful in the Old Testament as He is in the New. Scripture declares, “God is love” (*1 John 4:8*) and that God does not change. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Heb. 13:8, NRSV*).

Remember, too, it was the God of the Old Testament who hung on the cross.

This God is also gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger (*Ps. 145:8*). He is faithful, has unfailing love (*Ps. 143:8*), and delights in His followers (*Ps. 147:11*). God plans to prosper people and give them hope (*Jer. 29:11*). In His love, He will no longer rebuke but rejoices over His people with singing (*Zeph. 3:17*). This, and so much more, is what God the Father is truly like.

Think about the fact that Jesus represents God the Father. Why is this such a wonderful and hopeful truth, especially for those who sometimes might be afraid of God?

The Love of Christ

Sin separated the human race from God; a yawning chasm opened between them, and unless that chasm closed, humanity was doomed to eternal destruction. The gulf was deep and dangerous. Yet, it took something utterly incredible to solve the problem of sin and to reunite sinful humanity with a righteous and holy God. It took One eternal with God Himself, One as divine as God Himself, to become a human being and, in that humanity, offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

Read John 1:1–3, 14 and Philippians 2:5–8. What do they teach us about who Jesus is?

Christ was eternal and not dependent upon anyone or anything for His existence. He was God—not the mere outward appearance of God but God Himself. His essential nature was divine and eternal. Jesus retained that divinity but became a human being in order to keep the law in human flesh and to die as a Substitute for all those who have broken the law, which is all of us (*Rom. 3:23*).

Christ became human, without any advantage over other humans. He kept God's law, not through His internal divine power but by relying upon the same external divine power available to any other human.

Jesus was fully God and fully human. This means that the One who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (*Heb. 1:3*) was the same One who was found as a “babe lying in a manger” (*Luke 2:16*). This means that the One who “is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (*Col. 1:17, NKJV*) is the same One who, as a human child, “increased in wisdom and stature” (*Luke 2:52*). This means that the One without whom “nothing was made that was made” (*John 1:3, NKJV*) was the same One who was “murdered by hanging on a tree” (*Acts 5:30, NKJV*).

If all this reveals to us Christ's love for us, and Christ's love for us is but a manifestation of the Father's love for us, then no wonder we have so many reasons to rejoice and be thankful!

Read Romans 8:38, 39. How does what we read in the study today give us powerful reasons to trust in what Paul says to us here?

The Love of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been misunderstood almost as much as the Father. Some theologians have thought of the Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son. In other words, the Spirit would be merely affection between the Father and the Son. This means that He would be diminished to a relationship between two members of the Godhead and not a member Himself.

But Scripture proves His personhood. Christians are baptized in His name along with the Father and Son (*Matt. 28:19*). The Spirit glorifies Christ (*John 16:14*). The Spirit convicts people (*John 16:8*). He can be grieved (*Eph. 4:30*). He is a Comforter (*John 14:16*), Helper (*NKJV*), Counselor (*RSV*). He teaches (*Luke 12:12*), intercedes (*Rom. 8:26*), and sanctifies (*1 Pet. 1:2*). Christ said the Spirit guides people into all truth (*John 16:13*).

In short, the Holy Spirit is God, as are the Father and the Son. Together, they are One God.

Everything the Spirit does reveals divine love. What are some of the things He does? *Luke 12:12, John 16:8–13, Acts 13:2.*

The greatest evidence that the Holy Spirit is God is the incarnation of Christ. Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit (*Matt. 1:20*). Only God could “create” like that.

The Holy Spirit performed two opposite miracles for Christ. First, He brought the omnipresent Christ into the womb of Mary. Christ ascended to heaven confined within that human body. Second, the Spirit brings Christ confined by His humanity and, in another inexplicable miracle, makes Him present to Christians around the world.

Thus, the Holy Spirit, along with the Father and the Son, is working in our behalf. “The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 222.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit love us equally and are working in order to save us into God’s eternal kingdom. How can we, then, neglect so great a salvation?

How much comfort can we draw from the fact that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all at work for our eternal good?

Assurance of Salvation

Some Seventh-day Adventists wonder if they will be saved. They lack assurance and long to know their future, in terms of eternal life. They work hard to be good enough and yet know that they come up short. They look within and find little to encourage them in their journey through life.

When we see the immense gap between the character of Jesus and our own character or when we read a text such as “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (*Matt. 7:14*), who of us doesn’t have moments when we wonder if we are going to make it?

To be prepared for the end time, people must have assurance of salvation in the present. They must revel in the reality of salvation in order to face the future unafraid. Yet, as we have seen, all the living Persons of the Godhead are at work to save us. Thus, we can and should live with the assurance of our salvation.

Read the following texts. What hope and assurances come from them regarding salvation and what God has done for us and promises to do?

Ps. 91:15, 16 _____

Joel 2:31, 32 _____

John 10:28 _____

Rom. 10:9–13 _____

1 John 5:11–13 _____

We are called, even commanded, to live holy lives, but these lives are the result of having been saved by Christ, not the means of achieving that salvation. Although we must be faithful, even unto death, we must lean always on the gift as our only hope of salvation. God’s people will be found faithful and obedient in the last days, a faithfulness and obedience that arises from the assurance of what Christ has done for them.

The Everlasting Gospel

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the “everlasting gospel”?

The gospel is referred to here as “everlasting.” This is further evidence that God does not change. An unchanging God has an unchanging gospel. This eternal gospel gives assurance to all who are willing to accept it. The gospel reveals the unchanging love of God, and it’s this message that needs to go to the world. Everyone needs a chance to hear it, which is why God has called His people to spread it.

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (*Eph. 1:4, 5, NKJV*). What more does this tell us about just how “everlasting” the gospel really is?

We were chosen in Him “before the foundation of the world.” Talk about an “everlasting” gospel! Even before the Creation of this world, God’s plan was for us to have salvation in Him.

Look at some of the words here: “chose,” “predestined,” “good pleasure,” “adoption.” Look at how much these two verses point to God’s desire for us to have eternal life “in Him.” And the fact that God did all this in eternity past (*see also 2 Thess. 2:13, 2 Tim. 1:9*) points so clearly to His grace and shows that our salvation comes not from anything we can do or from any creature merit but totally as an act arising from God’s own loving character. How could salvation come from anything we could do if we were elected to have that salvation in Him even before we existed? The choice is for us to accept or reject it.

And how is this election made manifest in the lives of the elect? To “be holy and without blame before Him in love” (*Eph. 1:4, NKJV*). This, too, is what we have been chosen for.

We are called to spread the “everlasting gospel” to the world as part of the end-time message prior to Christ’s return. Why must we know and experience the reality of the “everlasting gospel” in our own lives before we can share it with others?

Further Thought: We can have assurance of salvation, but we must not be presumptuous about it. Is there such a thing as a false assurance of salvation? Of course. And Jesus warned about it, too, saying: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” ’ ” (*Matt. 7:21–23, NKJV*).

These people made two fatal mistakes. First, despite whatever great things they had done in the Lord’s name, they weren’t doing the Lord’s will, which was to obey His law. Jesus didn’t say, “Depart from me” you who were “not sinless,” or you who were not “without fault,” or who were “not perfect.” Instead, He described them as “lawless”—a translation of *anomia*, or “without law.” Second, notice their emphasis on themselves and on what they had accomplished: *Didn’t we do this in your name? Or Didn’t we do that in your name? Or Didn’t we do this other thing, and all in your name, too?* Please! How far removed from Christ must they have been to point to their own works in an attempt to justify themselves before God? The only works that will save us are Christ’s, credited to us by faith. Here is where our assurance exists—not in ourselves or in our works but only in what Christ has done for us. You want assurance? Obey God’s law and rest only in the merits of Christ’s righteousness, and you will have all the assurance you need.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Martin Luther reportedly said: “When I look to myself, I don’t know how I can be saved. When I look to Jesus, I don’t know how I can be lost.” What great wisdom is found in these words? Why is it a good idea to keep this sentiment ever before us?
- ❷ Dwell more on this idea that we have been chosen for salvation even before the foundation of the world. Why does this not mean that everyone will be saved? If people are not saved, will it be because God didn’t choose them or because of the choices they made? Discuss this question in class.
- ❸ How does the reality of the great-controversy scenario help us to deal better with the reality of evil even in a world that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit love?

Introducing God

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A coworker asked Seventh-day Adventist business executive David Kim about his favorite weekend activities, while making small talk at a funeral.

“I go to church and spend time with family,” David replied.

The coworker said he also liked to spend time with family, causing David to realize that he didn’t want to discuss faith.

The two men chatted about family. Then David said, “We have talked about family for a while, now how about faith?”

The coworker said quickly, “I am an atheist.”

“Why are you an atheist?” David asked.

The resulting conversation drew in other funeral guests and planted a seed that David hopes will lead to a Bible study.

David says it’s simple to bring God into a casual conversation. Here are some ways that he responds to everyday questions:

- *How was the weekend?* I had a great weekend! On Saturday we went to church, and on Sunday we went to the supermarket.
- *How did you meet your wife?* We met at church in Chicago.
- *Do you still play the cello?* Not like I used to, but I do teach my son, and I also have begun working with a Christian singer who has put together some interesting recording projects on the books of Daniel and Revelation.
- *What do you do for fun?* I spend most of my free time on activities related to my family and faith.
- *How do you manage your ambition versus your desire for work-life balance?* This can be a real challenge, but one of the most helpful things for me—and I don’t know how you feel about these things—is my prayer life.
- *Do you have any advice for how to be successful at work?* One of the things I find most helpful is spending time every morning in prayer and reading the Bible. It helps me to start every day focused on the big picture. David likens himself to a fly fisherman.



“Fly fisherman are always casting,” he said. “I try to put bait out there and allow the hungry fish to respond.”

Coworkers have asked for more information about God through such conversations, and David conducts two to four Bible studies a week. Two coworkers have been baptized.

David Kim is a Seventh-day Adventist business executive and the founder of the Nicodemus Society, an organization that shares the Adventist message with the wealthy, worldly, and well-educated.

Christ *in the* Heavenly Sanctuary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:3, John 1:29, Rev. 5:12, Heb. 7:1–28, 9:11–15, Lev. 16:13, Heb. 9:20–23.*

Memory Text: “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (*Philippians 2:9, 10, NIV*).

Talking about Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, the book of Hebrews says: “where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (*Heb. 6:20, NKJV*).

Scripture, especially the New Testament, is so clear about Christ's role as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary—a role He took after He completed His work as our sacrifice here on earth (*see Heb. 10:12*).

This week we will explore the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. His intercessory work is crucial to the preparation of His people to be ready for the end time. So, we have been given this crucial admonition: “The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

What is Christ doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary, and why is it so important for us to understand it, especially in the last days?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.

Supreme Sacrifice

Studying the supreme sacrifice of Christ does so much to prepare believers for the end time. Often humans look to the goal ahead of them, and that makes sense. But it is also good to realize that the goal is behind them. We speak of Calvary. The goal, reached here by Jesus for us, is irreversible and final, and it gives certainty to the goal ahead, as well.

Read Romans 8:3, 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16, and 1 Corinthians 15:53. Why did God send His Son into the world?

God sent Christ to be a sin offering in order to condemn sin in the flesh. What does this mean? As an immortal Being, Christ could not die. Therefore, the Lord became a human, taking our mortality upon Himself so that He could die as our substitute.

Although divine, and although in nature God, Jesus took on “human likeness,” and He humbled Himself “by becoming obedient to death” on the cross (*Phil. 2:6–8, NIV*). In a way known only to God, the divinity of Christ did not die when Jesus died on the cross. In some way beyond human comprehension, the divinity of Jesus was quiescent during the nine months in the womb and in the days in the tomb, and Jesus never used it to aid His humanity during His life and ministry here.

Read Luke 9:22. What does this tell us about the intentionality of Christ’s death?

Christ was born to die. We can imagine that there was never a moment in eternity when He was free from thoughts of the mocking, the flogging, and the heartbreaking crucifixion that He would face. This is unparalleled love, never witnessed before and not fully understood.

What can we humans do in the face of this kind of love but fall down and worship in faith and obedience? What does the reality of the Cross tell us about the worthlessness of human merit?

The Lamb of God

Read John 1:29, Revelation 5:12, and 13:8. What is the one image that these texts have in common, and what is the importance of that image in helping us to understand the plan of salvation?

When John the Baptist called Jesus the “Lamb of God,” he was making an unmistakable reference to the sanctuary. Even more directly, he was making a reference to Christ’s death for sin as the one and only fulfillment of all the lambs (and every other sacrificial animal in the Hebrew sanctuary ritual) that had ever been slain as a sacrifice for sin. Indeed, the four Gospels, whatever else they teach, ultimately tell the story of what Jesus did in His role as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

But the story of Jesus and His work for our salvation does not end in the Gospels, even with His death and resurrection.

From the beginning, the book of Hebrews touches on the theme of Christ as the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary after His work as the sacrificial Lamb. From the first mention of Him in this role after the Cross (*Heb. 1:3*), succeeding chapters in the book make reference to Jesus as High Priest. The depiction of His work in the heavenly sanctuary is developed fully in detail in Hebrews 7:1–28.

Read Hebrews 7:1–28. What is the author saying here about Jesus?

Although these verses are so deep, so rich, the essence of what they are saying is that Jesus Christ has a better priesthood than did the priests from the line of Aaron in the earthly sanctuary service. But now, instead of an earthly priesthood in an earthly sanctuary, we have a heavenly High Priest ministering for us in the sanctuary in heaven. So when we focus our eyes on Jesus, we can focus them on Him as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Our High Priest

Read Hebrews 7:24–27, 8:6. What great hope do these texts give to us?

Christ is able to save completely because of several qualifications that no other priest could ever have. He is God, who has authority to forgive sins. He has a permanent priesthood. During the Christian era, He is interceding all the time for His people with the same loving compassion as when He healed the sick and comforted the lonely on earth. He is also human but was born sinless and remained that way. And, as the sinless One, He died under the staggering weight of the sum total of human sin. Only He, then, as the God-man, can intercede for sinners in heaven's sanctuary.

What these texts show, too, is that Christ's sacrifice was once and for all. It needed to happen only one time, and it was sufficient to bring salvation to every human being.

After all, considering who it was who died on the cross, how could such an offering not be sufficient for every human being?

Read Hebrews 9:11–15. What has Christ obtained for us through His death and now His ministry in heaven?

Hebrews 9:12 says that Christ has “obtained eternal redemption” (*NKJV*). The Greek word translated as “redemption” also means “ransoming,” “releasing,” and “deliverance.” It's the same word used in Luke 1:68, when Zacharias declares that God has “visited and redeemed His people” (*NKJV*). The reference to Christ's blood—the blood of the only sufficient sacrifice—means that it was Christ, as the sacrificial Lamb, who obtained this redemption, this deliverance. And the great news of the gospel is that Christ obtained this not for Himself but for us, and it becomes efficacious for all who accept Christ's sacrifice for them.

Dwell on the idea that Christ has “obtained” “eternal redemption” for us and that only after He accomplished this did He enter into His work in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. What hope does this offer us regarding what Christ is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary?

Our Intercessor

Although sin brought a fearful separation between God and humanity, through Christ's sacrificial death we as human beings are brought to God and can continue to have access to Him. *See Eph. 2:18, 1 Pet. 3:18.*

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (*Heb. 6:19, 20*). According to these verses, what has Jesus done for us?

Read Hebrews 9:24. What does this text say that Christ's work includes?

Jesus is the forerunner, having entered as our Representative into the heavenly sanctuary, even into the very presence of God *for us*. That is, Jesus is standing before the Father, ministering the merits of His atonement, the “eternal redemption” that He “obtained” in our behalf.

Yes, when we accepted Jesus our sins were forgiven, and we stood before God pardoned and cleansed. But the fact remains that even though we have become Christians, we at times still sin, despite all the wonderful promises of victory. In such cases, Jesus intercedes as our High Priest in heaven. He represents the repenting sinner, not pleading our merits (for we have none) but pleading His own on our behalf before the Father. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (*Heb. 7:25, NKJV*).

What born-again Christian does not sense his or her own need of Christ's continuing mercy and grace? That is, despite the new life we have in Jesus, despite the wonderful changes in our existence, who doesn't realize his or her own constant need of pardon and forgiveness? Why, then, is the knowledge of Christ as our High Priest so precious to us?

The Day of Atonement

The book of Hebrews teaches that the earthly Hebrew sanctuary service was a model of the heavenly sanctuary, the one that Christ entered and inaugurated as our High Priest. The earthly service, with its two apartments and its sacrificial and cleansing rituals, was “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle” (*Heb. 8:5, NKJV*).

And just as the earthly sanctuary ritual included a ministry in the two compartments, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, so also does Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. In the earthly sanctuary, the concept of judgment was represented on the Day of Atonement, which resulted in the cleansing of the sanctuary, as depicted in Leviticus 16. This was the one time a year when the High Priest entered into the second compartment, the Most Holy Place (*Lev. 16:12–14*), to do a work of cleansing and atonement on behalf of the people.

Read Hebrews 9:20–23. What needs to be purified and cleansed, and why is this a clear reference to the Day of Atonement ministry of Christ?

Scholars have been surprised by the statement that the heavenly sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed or “purified.” However, once this is understood as a Day of Atonement reference, the problem vanishes. Hebrews 9:23 shows that the work Christ does in the heavenly sanctuary is the true expression of what the earthly high priest did in the yearly Day of Atonement service in the Israelite sanctuary. The ministry of the earthly priest in cleansing the earthly sanctuary foreshadowed the work that Christ would do one day in the heavenly. The text does not say that this heavenly cleansing takes place immediately after Christ’s ascension. From the study of the book of Daniel, we can see that this phase of ministry began in the year 1844. So as Christians facing the last days, we need to understand the solemnity of the time that we are in but rest in the assurance of what Christ has done for us in the past and is doing for us now in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.

The first angel’s message declares: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). The reality of the judgment points to the nearness of the end. How should this reality impact how we live?

Further Thought: The book of Hebrews points to the earthly sanctuary as the model, the type, of what Christ would do for us both on earth as our sacrifice and in heaven as our High Priest. The Israelite sanctuary was meant always to be an object lesson of the gospel. It was to teach the Jews the plan of salvation, which included sacrifice, intercession, judgment, and the final end of sin. The book of Daniel, meanwhile, adds more light in terms of helping readers to understand the apocalyptic (end time) dimension of Christ's final work in the heavenly sanctuary. "With its emphasis on cleansing, judgment, and vindication, the apocalyptic visions of Daniel project the imagery of the Day of Atonement to the very end of earth's history. The cleansing is connected directly to the heavenly sanctuary and to the work of the Messiah as king and priest. The visions introduce the time element, making it possible for the reader to identify a specific moment within salvation history when the Messiah would begin His work of final cleansing, judgment, and vindication in the heavenly dwelling of God."—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 394.

Discussion Questions:

① Look at this quote from Ellen G. White. "As anciently the sins of the people were by faith placed upon the sin offering and through its blood transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary, so in the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary. And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 421, 422. What does she say are the two things that reveal those who are entitled to the "benefits of His atonement"? Why is it so important for God's people to grasp what these two things are, especially in the trials of the last days?

② Read Leviticus 16:15, 16. What is the significance of the blood? What did the blood represent? Why was the blood so crucial to the Day of Atonement ritual back then, and what does it mean for us today?

On Czech Television

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Irena Metzova doesn't know why she narrowly missed boarding a passenger jet that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. But the sparing of her life allowed her to share the Sabbath on national television.

Irena had planned to fly from New York to her native Czech Republic after a summer of working as a volunteer cook for a group of student literature evangelists, including her college-age son. But the airline, KLM, suspended flights amid an industrial strike and rebooked her on a Swissair flight at the last minute. She alerted her sister in the Czech Republic about the change of plans, and the sister agreed to meet her at the Prague airport the next day.

In the morning, the sister woke up to the news that a Swissair DC-10 jet had crashed about two hours after takeoff from New York. It was her sister's plane.

In tears, she called Irena's husband. "I lost my sister. You lost your wife," she said.

But Irena hadn't taken the flight. When Irena approached the Swissair desk to check in for Flight 111 at New York's John F. Kennedy Airport, the Swissair representative said something that changed everything.

"Mrs. Metzova, you are Czech," the airline representative said. "We can put you on a direct flight from here to the Czech Republic on Czech Airlines. How would you like that?"

Irena liked the idea of not having to change planes in Geneva, and the airline representative printed her a new boarding pass.

"You have 15 minutes to catch the plane," the airline representative said. "Run!"

At 10:30 P.M. on September 2, 1998, the Swissair plane crashed off Canada's coast, killing all 229 people onboard, including a Seventh-day Adventist college student planning to study for a year in France. An in-flight fire was blamed for the tragedy.

As the world mourned, Irena's sister learned about the change in the itinerary.

Irena, now 68, can't explain what happened. But several years after the tragedy, she was given the opportunity to speak about her faith on Czech national television. On the television program, *Answered Prayers*, Irena told about God's goodness amid repressions in Communist-era Czechoslovakia. She read the fourth commandment about the Sabbath.



Many people heard about the biblical seventh-day Sabbath for the first time, said her son, Kamil Metz, international coordinator for the Giving Light to Our World (GLOW) tracts ministry.

"After the program aired, other Adventists told us that their relatives had called them and said, 'We never knew that the Sabbath was in the Bible,' " he said.

All because Irena somehow missed a flight.

The “Change” of the Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rom. 8:1; 7:15–25; Rom. 7:1–14; John 20:19–23; Acts 20:6, 7; Dan. 7:23–25; Rev. 13:1–17.*

Memory Text: “He will speak against the Most High and oppress [H]is holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time” (*Daniel 7:25, NIV*).

Central to our understanding of last-day events is the question of the law of God. More specifically, it is the question of the fourth commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath. Although we understand that salvation is by faith alone and that keeping the law, including the Sabbath, can never bring salvation, we also understand that in the last days, obedience to God’s law, including the seventh-day Sabbath, will be an outward sign, a mark, of where our true allegiance lies.

This distinction will become especially obvious amid the climactic end-time events depicted in Revelation 13 and 14, when an all-powerful conglomeration of religious and political forces will unite to enforce a false form of worship upon the inhabitants of the world. All this is in contrast to Revelation 14:7, where God’s people are called to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (*NKJV*); that is, to worship only the Creator and no one else.

This week we will look at the law of God, especially the Sabbath, and we will touch on issues surrounding the attempted change of that law and what it means for us, upon whom the end is soon to come.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 12.

The Promise

One of the greatest promises in the Bible is found in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (*NKJV*). These words come as a “capstone,” or a culmination of the train of thought that came right before. Only by studying what Paul talked about just preceding this verse can we better grasp the hope and promise found in it.

Read Romans 7:15–25. What is the essence of what Paul is saying in these verses that makes what he says in Romans 8:1 so assuring?

Although great debate has existed in Christendom over whether or not Paul was talking specifically about himself as a believer here, one thing is clear: Paul is, indeed, talking about the reality of sin. Everyone, even Christians, can relate in some way to the struggle that Paul refers to here. Who hasn’t felt the pull of the flesh and of the “sin that dwells in” (*Rom. 7:17, NKJV*) them, which causes them to do what they know they should not do, or not to do what they know they should? For Paul, the problem isn’t the law; the problem is our flesh.

Who hasn’t found himself or herself wanting to do what is right but doing what is wrong? Even if Paul is not talking about the inevitability of sin in the life of a born-again Christian here, he certainly is making a strong case for the ever-present struggle facing anyone who seeks to obey God.

So, he comes to the famous words: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (*Rom. 7:24, NKJV*). His answer is found in Jesus, and in the great promise of “no condemnation” for the believer in Jesus who, by grace, walks according to the spirit. Yes, believers struggle; yes, they face temptations; yes, sin is real. But by faith in Jesus, those who believe are no longer condemned by the law; indeed, they obey it. Thus, they learn to walk in the spirit and not “according to the flesh.”

Read again the texts for today. In what ways can you relate to what Paul is saying there? Why, then, is Romans 8:1 such a wonderful promise?

The Law and Sin

In yesterday's study we looked at verses (*Rom. 7:15–25*) that talked about the reality of sin for everyone, even Christians. However, in the verses before these, Paul points to the law, which shows just how prevalent sin is, and how deadly.

Read Romans 7:1–14. What is the relationship between the law and sin? What do these verses also tell us about the impossibility of being saved by the law?

Two crucial points come from what Paul teaches here. First, he shows that the law is not the problem. The law is “holy, and just, and good.” The problem is sin, which leads to death. The other point is that the law is powerless to save us from sin and death. The law points out the problem of sin and death; if anything, the law makes the problem of sin and death even more apparent, but it offers nothing by way of solving the problem.

Only a superficial reader could use these verses to argue that the law, the Ten Commandments, has been nullified. That's the opposite of Paul's point. Nothing Paul writes here makes sense if the law were nullified. His argument functions on the assumption that the law is still binding, because it's the law that points out the reality of sin and the resulting need of the gospel. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’ ” (*Rom. 7:7, NKJV*).

Read Romans 7:13 carefully. What is Paul saying not only about the law but about why it's still necessary?

The law does not produce death; sin does. The law is what shows just how deadly sin is. The law is good in that it points to sin. It just has no answer for it. Only the gospel does. Paul's point is that as Christians, as those who are saved in Christ, we need to serve in the “newness of the Spirit” (*Rom. 7:6, NKJV*); that is, we live in a faith relationship with Jesus, trusting in His merits and His righteousness for salvation (the theme of so much of what came before in Romans).

How has your own experience with keeping the law shown you your need of God's grace?

From Sabbath to Sunday?

As Seventh-day Adventists we often hear fellow Christian brothers and sisters in other denominations argue that the law has been done away with, or that we are not under law but under grace. What they are really saying, however, is that only the fourth commandment has been done away with. Many, though, are not saying even that. They are saying instead that the seventh-day Sabbath has been replaced by the first day, Sunday, in honor of the resurrection of Jesus.

And they believe they have the texts to prove it, too.

Below are some of the common texts in the New Testament that many Christians believe indicate the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day in the Old Testament to the first day in the New Testament. As we read them, we need to ask ourselves if they truly talk about a change of the day, or are they merely describing events that happened on the day, but without rising to the level of prescribing a change?

Read John 20:19–23. What reason does this text give for the disciples’ being assembled in that room? What do these verses say about whether it was a worship service in honor of the resurrection of Jesus, as some claim?

Read Acts 20:6, 7. What, if anything, in these verses indicates that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday, the first day of the week? *See also Acts 2:46.*

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. Outside of the fact that they were to store up offerings at home on the first day of the week, what does this text teach about any change of the Sabbath to Sunday?

Here is the essence of the textual “evidence” used to promote the doctrine that the first day of the week superseded the seventh-day Sabbath. Outside of describing a few times when, for various reasons, believers were gathered, not one text indicates that these gatherings were worship services held on the first day as a replacement for the seventh-day Sabbath. This argument is merely reading back into the texts the centuries-long Christian tradition of Sunday keeping. It is putting something into these verses that was never there to begin with.

The Seventh Day in the New Testament

As we saw yesterday, the texts commonly used to promote the idea that Sunday replaced the Sabbath say no such thing. In fact, every reference to the seventh-day Sabbath in the New Testament reveals that it was still being kept as one of God's Ten Commandments.

Read Luke 4:14–16; 23:55, 56. What do these passages tell us about the seventh-day Sabbath both before and after Christ's death?

Notice how the women, who had been with Christ, “rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (*Luke 23:56, NKJV*). Obviously, the commandment was the fourth commandment, written in stone at Sinai. There is no indication that they had learned in their time with Him anything other than the keeping of the commandments of God, which included the Sabbath commandment. In fact, Christ told His disciples, “ ‘If you love Me, keep My commandments’ ” (*John 14:15, NKJV*), which He Himself kept, and which included the seventh-day Sabbath. If Sunday were to be a replacement for the Sabbath, these women knew nothing about it.

Read Acts 13:14, 42–44 and Acts 16:12, 13. What evidence do these verses give for the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath? What evidence do they give for the keeping of the first day of the week?

We find in these texts no evidence of a change of the Sabbath day to Sunday. Instead they point clearly to the practice among early believers in Jesus of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

Acts 16:13 is especially interesting because it occurs outside of the context of the synagogue. The believers were meeting by the side of a river where some “customarily” (*NKJV*) went to pray. And they did so on the seventh-day Sabbath, many years after the death of Jesus, too. If a change to Sunday had occurred, nothing in these texts indicates it.

What are some gentle and noncondemnatory ways you can witness to Sunday keepers about the seventh-day Sabbath?

The Attempted Change of the Sabbath

God's law, the Ten Commandments, is still binding (*see James 2:10–12*), and that law includes the seventh-day Sabbath. Why, then, do so many Christians keep Sunday when there is no biblical justification for it?

Daniel 7 talks about the rise of four great empires: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and then Rome, the fourth and final earthly empire. In a latter stage of the Roman Empire, a little horn power is depicted as coming up out of this empire (*Dan. 7:8*). *It is still a part of the Roman Empire*, just a later phase of it. What else could this power be but the papacy, which arose directly out of Rome and, to this day, is still part of it? Wrote Thomas Hobbes in the 1600s: “If a man consider the original of this great ecclesiastical dominion, he will easily perceive, that the Papacy, is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof.”—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 463.

Read Daniel 7:23–25. What do these verses teach that can help us to understand the origins of Sunday keeping?

Aramaic, the original language, shows in verse 25 that the little horn power “intend[ed]” (*NKJV*) to change the law. What earthly power can, indeed, actually change God's law?

Although exact details are blurred in history, we do know that under papal Rome the seventh-day Sabbath was replaced by the tradition of Sunday keeping, a tradition so firmly entrenched that the Protestant Reformation kept that tradition alive, even into the twenty-first century. Today most Protestants still keep the first day of the week, rather than following the biblical command for the seventh day.

Read Revelation 13:1–17 and compare with Daniel 7:1–8, 21, 24, 25. What similar imagery is being used in these texts that help us to understand last-day events?

Using imagery directly from Daniel, which included imagery about the latter (papal) phase of Rome, the book of Revelation points to end-time persecution that will be unleashed on those who refuse to “worship” according to the dictates of the powers seen in the book of Revelation.

How does Revelation 14:6, 7—especially verse 7, which reflects language taken from the fourth commandment (*Exod. 20:11*)—help to show that the Sabbath will be crucial in this final end-time crisis over worship?

Further Thought: The same dragon, Satan, who made war against God in heaven (*Rev. 12:7*), is the one who makes war with God's people on earth, those who "keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17*; see also *13:2, 4*). In fact, Satan himself becomes an object of worship, too (*Rev. 13:4*). So, Satan started the war against God in heaven, and he seeks to continue it here on earth. And central to his attack on God is his attack on God's law.

"In the fourth commandment, God is revealed as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and is thereby distinguished from all false gods. It was as a memorial of the work of creation that the seventh day was sanctified as a rest day for man. It was designed to keep the living God ever before the minds of men as the source of being and the object of reverence and worship. Satan strives to turn men from their allegiance to God, and from rendering obedience to His law; therefore he directs his efforts especially against that commandment which points to God as the Creator."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 53, 54.

We worship the Lord because He is the Creator of "the heavens and the earth," and the seventh-day Sabbath is the foundational sign of His creatorship, a sign that goes back to the Creation week itself (see *Gen. 2:1–3*). No wonder that in his attack on God's authority Satan goes after the premier, fundamental sign of that authority: the seventh-day Sabbath.

In the last days, God will have upon the earth people who will stay firm and steadfast in their allegiance to Him, an allegiance manifested in their obedience to His commandments—all of them, including the only one that specifically points to the Lord as the Creator, who alone is worthy of our worship.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is the problem with those who talk about the reality of sin and yet argue that God's law has been done away with? What great inconsistency can you point out in that line of reasoning?
- ❷ What has been your own experience with those who argue for Sunday instead of Sabbath? What arguments did you use, and how effective were they? How can you deal with the common argument that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is an attempt at salvation by works?
- ❸ As we talk to others about the Sabbath and as we prepare for end-time events, why is it important to make it clear that the challenges regarding the "mark of the beast" have not yet happened?

Full Circle

by BRITTANY FLETCHER

A young man came up to me as I was taking out the trash on New Year's Eve at my home in the U.S. state of Kentucky.

"I have a survey here that might help the community," he said. "Would you take it?"

The friendly stranger turned out to be a Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC) volunteer attending the Seventh-day Adventist youth organization's annual convention in Louisville. Little did I know that I would be going door-to-door at the next GYC convention a year later.

Outside my home, I looked at the survey that the GYC volunteer had handed me. I circled my interest in Bible studies and visitation. Then I heard nothing for five months.

In May, my mother told me that someone had come to the house for Bible studies. The man visited six times. I missed him every time because of my university classes. In June, the man, a Bible worker named Romone, came when I was at home, and we arranged to study the Bible at a local café every Friday.

I knew nothing about Adventism. I was active in another denomination, where I taught the children and went on mission trips. But I was not getting the connection with Jesus that I desired. I prayed constantly to grow closer to Him.

My prayers were answered with Romone.

Soon I texted Romone that I wanted to meet twice a week. I accepted everything that I learned. As my diet and lifestyle changed, my life began to improve. I love Romans 12:2, which says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (NKJV).

This heavenly mind-set broadened my mind-set. Now when I study, I am not hoping for a good grade but I am learning for God. I want the knowledge to provide healing to people as a speech therapist one day.

At Romone's church, I learned about the GYC convention in Houston, Texas, in December 2016. I joined the Adventist Church shortly before the convention began.

Going door-to-door with GYC volunteers was exciting. Several people signed up for Bible studies. I saw the same passion that I had had a year earlier in one young man. I am praying that the story will come full circle with him, just as it did with me. I know the power of one survey.



Brittany Fletcher, 22, is taking graduate classes in speech therapy in Louisville, Kentucky.

BOOT CAMP

FOR THE LAST DAYS

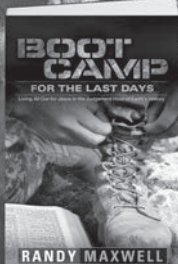
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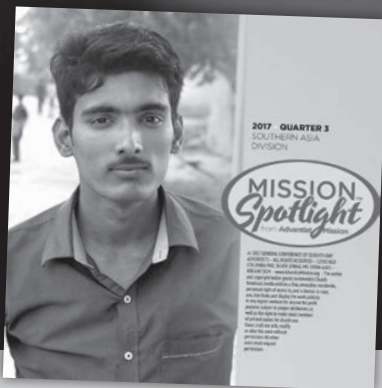
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Matthew 24 and 25



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:1–25, Rev. 13:11–17, Matt. 7:24–27, Luke 21:20, Matt. 25:1–30.*

Memory Text: “‘For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (*Matthew 24:24, NIV*).

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus reveals important truths about end times and about how to be prepared. In a sense, these chapters were Christ's teaching on last-day events. At the same time, He looks to the more immediate future and sees the impending destruction of Jerusalem, a tragedy of catastrophic proportions for His people.

But in Christ's words to His disciples, He speaks also to His followers in the generations to come, including and especially the last one—the one that will be alive when He returns. Jesus doesn't paint a pretty picture either. Wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, false Christs, and persecution—this will be the lot of the world, and the lot of His church. Amazingly enough, looking back through time, we can see just how accurate His predictions were. Therefore, we can trust Him for the predictions not yet fulfilled in our lifetime.

But Jesus didn't just warn about what was coming. In Matthew 25 He also told parables that, if heeded, will prepare His people for when He, the “‘Son of man,’” returns. Yes, hard times will come, but He will prepare a people to meet Him when He does come back.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 19.*

A Powerful Confirmation of Prophecy

In the final days before the Cross, the disciples spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Imagine them hearing Jesus say that the temple will be destroyed. Who knows exactly what went on in their minds, but the questions that the disciples asked afterward indicate that they linked the destruction of the temple with “ ‘the end of the world’ ” (*Matt. 24:3*).

Read Matthew 24:1–25. What overall message did Jesus give to His followers about the last days?

Matthew 24:1–25 makes it clear that, among other things, Christ is concerned with deceptions that will confuse His people through the ages and into the end time. Among those deceptions will be false prophets and false christs. Some will come claiming to represent Christ (false prophets), and some will come claiming *to be* Christ. And the terrible thing is, people will believe them, too.

We have seen a sad but powerful confirmation of the Word of God. All through history, and even in our day, deceivers have indeed come, saying, “I am the Christ.” What a remarkable prophecy! Living in the time that we do, we can survey the long centuries of history and see (in ways those who lived in Christ’s time couldn’t) just how accurate that prediction was. We shouldn’t be surprised, either, if deceptions like these only increase as we near the final crisis.

Also, in the context of affirmation of faith, look at how Jesus depicted the state of the world. At various times in earth’s history since Christ, people placed their hope in things they believed would eliminate or at least greatly reduce the sufferings and woe of humanity. Be it political movements or technology or science or reason—at one time or another people have placed great hope that these things would usher in a utopia here on earth. As the painful witness of history has shown again and again, these hopes always have proven ill-founded. The world today is just as Jesus said it would be. Christ’s words, spoken almost two thousand years ago, show just how misguided those hopes really have been.

Read Matthew 24:25. What can we take away from this that should help to affirm us in our faith?

Enduring to the End

Read Matthew 24:9 and Revelation 13:11–17. What parallels exist between what Jesus said here in Matthew and what He inspired John to write about in Revelation?

Christ's concern for His people in the end time includes a global deception that causes nations to oppose the true faith and to impose a false worship on the world. Those who stand firm will face hatred, tribulation, and even death.

Read Matthew 24:13. What is the key to being saved, to being faithful, even amid worldwide opposition?

“None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 593. This statement means that all who fortify their minds with biblical truths will not be swept away in any of the end-time deceptions. They have to be grounded in what truth is for this time; otherwise, the deceptions will overwhelm them.

Read Matthew 7:24–27. What else is crucial for staying faithful to God?

As important as it is to be grounded intellectually in the Word of God, according to Jesus that is still not enough to be able to stand amid the trials that we will face. We have to do what we have learned; that is, we have to obey the truth as it is in Jesus. In the parable above, both builders heard the sayings of Jesus. The difference between them, between enduring and not enduring, was obeying what Jesus had taught.

Why does the one who obeys stand and the one who doesn't obey fall? What difference does obedience make in keeping a person steady in the faith?

The “Abomination of Desolation”

In His great discourse on the end time, Christ points to “the abomination of desolation” (*Matt. 24:15*), an image from the book of Daniel (*Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11*).

God declared something an “abomination” when it was a serious violation of His law, such as idolatry (*Deut. 27:15*) or immoral sexual practices (*Lev. 18:22*). Hence, this “abomination of desolation” involved some sort of religious apostasy.

Read Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20. How do these texts help us to understand better what Jesus was talking about in regard to the “abomination of desolation”?

These two texts make it clear that Jesus’ prediction includes, in a more immediate sense, the terrible destruction that would come upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when pagan Rome would destroy not only the city but the sacred temple, as well.

However, there is a second fulfillment of this prophecy in which the more immediate events, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, stood as a type of future, end-time events. “Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 22.

In Daniel 12:11 and Daniel 11:31, the “abomination of desolation” appears in connection with the latter phase of Rome, the papal phase, in which an alternative system of mediation and salvation has been set up—one which seeks to usurp what Christ had done for us, and indeed continues to do for us now in the heavenly sanctuary.

Daniel 8, particularly verses 9–12, helps to place these events in their historical context, with a two-phased Roman power. The first phase, seen in the little horn’s rapid horizontal expansion (*Dan. 8:9*), shows the vast empire of pagan Rome. In the second phase (*Dan. 8:10–12*) the little horn grows vertically, casting down some of the stars (persecuting God’s people) and magnifying itself to the “prince of the host” (*Dan. 8:11*), Jesus. This represents the papal phase, which rose out of the collapse of the pagan Roman Empire but still remains Rome. (That’s why one symbol, the little horn, represents both phases of the same power.) The judgment in Daniel 7:9, 10, the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14, and the signs in the heavens of Matthew 24:29 all signal God’s intervention for His people in the last days.

The Ten Virgins

After His discourse in Matthew 24 about the signs of His coming, in Matthew 25 Jesus talks about how to be prepared for it.

Read Matthew 25:1–13, the parable of the ten virgins. What is Jesus saying here that should help us to understand how we can be prepared for His return?

Jesus starts this phase of His discourse by talking about ten virgins. The fact that they are called “ ‘virgins’ ” suggests they represent those who profess to be Christians. They are not on Satan’s side of the controversy. Instead, they are likened to “the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 25:1*). But in the end time, they all sleep (*Matt. 25:5*), even though Christ already has warned about keeping watch (*Matt. 24:42*), or staying awake so they will be ready when He returns.

All ten virgins have lamps, and all go out to meet the bridegroom, which means that they all are looking forward to His coming. There is a delay, and all of these believers in His coming fall asleep. Suddenly, in the dead of night, they all are awakened: the bridegroom is coming (*Matt. 25:1–6*).

The foolish virgins are startled, unprepared. Why? One version says “ ‘our lamps are gone out’ ” (*Matt. 25:8*). Other versions, true to the Greek original, say the lamps are “ ‘going out.’ ” There is still a flickering flame. The women still have a little oil, but not enough to be prepared to meet Christ.

What, then, is the problem?

These virgins represent Christians who are waiting for Christ to return but who have a superficial experience with Him. They have some oil, some working of the Spirit in their lives, but it is merely flickering; they are satisfied with little when they needed much.

“The Spirit works upon man’s heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 411.

What are ways we can look at ourselves and make sure we aren’t making the same mistakes as these people did? If we see ourselves in this role, how can we change?

Using Your Talents

Read Matthew 25:13–30. What role does using our gifts have in preparing us for the return of Christ?

Although Jesus told a different parable here than the one just before, both talk about being ready for the return of Christ. Both deal with those who were ready and those who weren't. And both show the fate of those who, through their own spiritual neglect, faced eternal loss.

Just as the oil represents the Holy Spirit for the ten virgins, so the “‘bag’ ” or “‘bags of gold’ ” (*Matt. 25:15, NIV*) represent talents, which is the Greek word (*talanta*) in the original language. “The talents represent special gifts of the Spirit, together with all natural endowments.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 510.

All the servants in the parable had received goods from their master. Notice, too, that they were the master's goods (*Matt. 25:14*), which were entrusted to them “‘each according to his own ability’ ” (*Matt. 25:15, NKJV*). The gifts given to the servants were given in trust; in a real sense, these servants were stewards of what they didn't own but were responsible for. That's why, when the master came back, he “‘settled accounts with them’ ” (*Matt. 25:19, NKJV*).

Spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit (*see 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 28–31; Eph. 4:11*). There is good news, therefore, for those who think they have the least gift. Gifts are never received without the Giver. So these people receive their gifts by receiving the greatest gift—the Holy Spirit.

The gifts are already ours in Christ, but our actual possession depends upon our reception of the Holy Spirit and surrender to Him. Here is where the unprofitable servant made his mistake. He had been given a gift but did nothing with it. He left his gift unimproved. He didn't make an effort to take what he had been graciously given and do something with it. As a result Jesus called him “‘wicked and lazy’ ” (*Matt. 25:26, NKJV*), a powerful condemnation.

Jesus told this parable in the context of the last days and His return. What does it teach us, then, about how the use of our talents is crucial to being prepared for the last days?

Further Thought: “The man who received the one talent ‘went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.’

“It was the one with the smallest gift who left his talent unimproved. In this is given a warning to all who feel that the smallness of their endowments excuses them from service for Christ. If they could do some great thing, how gladly would they undertake it; but because they can serve only in little things, they think themselves justified in doing nothing. In this they err. The Lord in His distribution of gifts is testing character. The man who neglected to improve his talent proved himself an unfaithful servant. Had he received five talents, he would have buried them as he buried the one. His misuse of the one talent showed that he despised the gifts of heaven.

“ ‘He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.’ Luke 16:10. The importance of the little things is often underrated because they are small; but they supply much of the actual discipline of life. There are really no nonessentials in the Christian’s life. Our character building will be full of peril while we underrate the importance of the little things.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 355, 356.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** What have been some ideologies and ideals that people have believed would bring about a utopia on earth? What were those ideas, and why, without exception, have they all failed?
- ②** What is it about obedience to what God tells us to do that strengthens our faith? That is, why is faith without the corresponding works “dead” (*James 2:26*)? Considering the kind of trials awaiting those who “keep the commandments of God” (*Rev. 14:12*), why is it so important for us to be preparing now for what will come when we least expect it?
- ③** Think more about the ten virgins. Why should their story be a warning to us that, on the surface and in so many different ways, they all looked and acted alike? How can we make sure we are not as self-deceived as the foolish ones were?
- ④** What does it mean that, if possible, even “the elect” could be deceived? What is our understanding of “the elect”? (*See Matt. 24:31, Rom. 8:33, Col. 3:12.*) What does this tell us about how great the deceptions will be?

Holy Spirit Moment

by CHRISTOPHER HOLLAND

I stopped going to the Roman Catholic Church when I was 16. The primary reason was that my parents, who taught marriage enrichment classes at the church, were going through a divorce. The priest, who had eaten at our house many times, never visited when my parents parted ways.

I decided that if this was what God and His church were all about, then this wasn't for me.

Four years passed. I moved from the Chicago area to northern Indiana, where I worked the late shift at a gas station. It was there that I met my future wife, Debbie, who worked up the street at a nursing home.

Debbie and I talked whenever she bought gas. She understood my interest in spiritual matters. My questions reawakened her own interest in her Seventh-day Adventist upbringing.

One night, we visited the Pioneer Memorial Church at nearby Andrews University. We had heard that something interesting was happening, and we walked in on the NET '95 satellite evangelistic series led by Mark Finley.

After the meetings ended, I began to study the Bible. I nearly joined another Protestant church, but Debbie stopped me with a Bible study on the secret rapture.

Debbie asked me whether I sincerely believed that Christians would be quietly whisked away to heaven. When I shrugged, she gave me a powerful Bible study about how every eye will see Jesus at His second coming. It was a Holy Spirit moment.

I was baptized in September 1995, and Debbie was rebaptized a month later. We were married the next spring.

I began to sense a real burden to share the gospel. But how?

The answer came when Andrews University hired me to run the Gazebo restaurant on campus. A perk of the job was a free class every semester. I signed up for a religion class and became convicted that God was calling me to be a minister.

My first evangelistic series took place in the Chicago area where I had grown up. It was like the Lord gave me the opportunity to make good. Several years later, Mark Finley, the evangelist whose NET '95 meetings introduced me to the Adventist message, teamed up with me to lead evangelistic meetings at 34 sites in the Chicago area. More than 500 people were baptized.



Today I am broadcasting across Canada as director and speaker for *It Is Written Canada*. If you had told me my future when I was 17, I would have blown the froth off my beer and laughed. God leads in an amazing way.

Worship *the* Creator



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:6, 7; Matt. 24:14; Gal. 3:22; Luke 23:32–43; Gen. 22:12; Rev. 14:8–12.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Revelation 14:6, NKJV*).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe in the biblical concept of “present truth” (*2 Pet. 1:12*). It’s basically the idea that God unfolds truth to humanity at the time it is needed, with more and more light being given by the Lord over the ages. The first gospel promise, in Genesis 3:15, revealed to the fallen pair that hope would come through the seed of the woman. The promise to Abraham, that he “ ‘shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him’ ” (*Gen. 18:18, NKJV*) is a fuller revelation of the gospel promise. The coming of Jesus, who proclaimed that “ ‘the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*), is, of course, an even greater revelation of the gospel truth.

Today we believe that the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 is “present truth” for those living in the last days prior to Christ’s return and the fulfillment of all our hopes as Christians.

This week, we will focus particularly on the first angel’s message, for it contains truths crucial for those who seek to stay faithful amid end-time perils.

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 26.*

The Universality of the Gospel

Read Revelation 14:6, Matthew 24:14, and 28:19. What is the similar theme found in these texts? How do these texts work together to help us understand how important outreach and witness are to our purpose as a church?

In a sense, one can say that the first angel's message is the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19*) given now in the context of the last days. It is, indeed, "present truth."

Notice that all three texts place an emphasis on outreach to all the world, to "all the nations," and to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." In other words, this message is universal in scope. Every person needs to hear it.

Read Galatians 3:22. What does this text say that helps us to understand why all the world needs to hear the gospel?

The universality of sin explains the universality of our mission and calling. "Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" have done wrong, have violated God's law, and have been "confined . . . under sin" (*NKJV*). Adam's fall in Eden has impacted every human being; no nation or tribe or people has been immune. We all face the immediate consequences of sin, and without a remedy, we all would face the ultimate consequence: eternal death.

That remedy, of course, has been provided: the life, death, resurrection, and heavenly sanctuary ministry of Jesus, who is the only solution to the sin problem. Everyone needs to know the great hope of what God has offered them in Jesus Christ. This is why Seventh-day Adventists have gone throughout all the world, seeking to bring the message of Jesus to those who have not yet heard it.

Why is spreading the gospel message to others so spiritually beneficial for those doing it? That is, why is reaching out to others one of the best ways to be prepared for the coming of Jesus?

The Thief on the Cross and the “Everlasting Gospel”

In Revelation 14:6, the message to be proclaimed to the world is “the everlasting gospel.” It’s a message of hope for people in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all.

Read Luke 23:32–43. How does this story reveal the great hope of the “everlasting gospel” for all sinners?

Writing about the thief, Ellen G. White said that although not a hardened criminal, he had been “seeking to stifle conviction” about Jesus, and so “had plunged deeper and deeper into sin, until he was arrested, tried as a criminal, and condemned to die on the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 749.

Yet, what happened to him? As he hung on the cross, the thief got a glimpse of who Jesus was, and so he cried out: “ ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’ ” (*Luke 23:42, NKJV*).

And how did Jesus respond? Did He say: *Well, friend, I’d like to help you, but you should not have stifled your convictions by plunging deeper and deeper into sin?* Did Jesus quote one of His earlier sermons: “ ‘Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ ” (*Matt. 5:20, NKJV*)? Did Jesus, in any way, bring up the thief’s past mistakes?

No. Instead, Jesus turned to this criminal, this thief with a faulty character who had nothing to offer in the way of righteousness and who earlier had been cursing him (*Matt. 27:44*). Seeing him as a new man, Jesus said (essentially): *I am telling you, right now, I am giving you the assurance, right now, that your sin, your crimes, your faults, are forgiven*, and thus “ ‘you will be with Me in Paradise’ ” (*Luke 23:43, NKJV*).

Here is the “everlasting gospel,” the foundation of the first angel’s message. Without this truth, nothing else we teach about the law, the Sabbath, or the state of the dead matters. What good are these teachings without the “everlasting gospel” at the heart of them all?

What hope can you take for yourself from this story?

Fear God and Give Glory to Him

After talking about the proclamation of the “everlasting gospel” to all the world in Revelation 14:6, the first angel expands on this message. Therefore, as we proclaim the “everlasting gospel,” we must include the truths that are part of this gospel message for this time. In other words, “present truth” for the last days also includes Revelation 14:7.

Read Revelation 14:7. What does it mean when the angel says, “Fear God, and give glory to [H]im”? How are we to do that? How do these concepts fit in with the gospel?

To fear God and to give Him glory are not unrelated concepts. If we truly fear God in the biblical sense, we will give glory to Him. One should lead directly to the other.

Read the following texts. How do they help us to understand what it means to “[f]ear God” and how that relates to giving glory to Him? *Gen. 22:12, Exod. 20:20, Job 1:9, Eccles. 12:13, Matt. 5:16.*

In the verses above, the idea of fearing God is linked to obeying Him, and when we obey God, when we do what is right, we bring glory to Him. Although it is often said that to fear God is to be in awe of God and to reverence Him, it should go deeper than that. We are fallen. We are sinners. We are beings who deserve death. Who hasn’t at moments faced the startling realization of the evil of their deeds and what they would deserve at the hands of a just and righteous God for those deeds? This is *the fear of God*. And it is the fear that drives us, first, to the Cross for forgiveness and, second, to claim the power of God to cleanse us from the evil that, if it were not for the Cross, would cause us to lose our souls (*see Matt. 10:28*).

What has been your own experience with fearing God? How could a good dose of this fear be good for us spiritually and help us to take our faith and what God asks of us more seriously?

The Hour of His Judgment Has Come

In the first angel's message, the idea of fearing God and giving glory to Him is linked to judgment (*Rev. 14:7*). If the Bible is clear about any teaching, it is clear that God is a God of justice and of judgment. One day the judgment and justice so lacking in this world will indeed come.

No wonder people need to fear God.

And that's why the "everlasting gospel" also includes the reality of judgment. What is the relationship between these two elements? The gospel means "good news." This means in turn that although we are all sinners and have broken God's law, when Judgment Day comes, like the thief on the cross, we will not face the penalty and punishment that we deserve for our sin and lawbreaking.

Read the following texts and then ask yourself: **How well would I do standing on my own merits?** *Matt. 12:36, Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 2:6, 1 Cor. 4:5.*

The God who knows the number of hairs on our heads is going to judge the world. But that is precisely why the "everlasting gospel" is such good news. Judgment comes, but there is "no condemnation" (*Rom. 8:1*) for the faithful followers of Jesus, those "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (*see 1 Cor. 6:11*), because Jesus Christ is their righteousness and His righteousness is what gets them through that judgment.

"Man cannot meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims of His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 471.

What does the reality of judgment teach us about our utter need for forgiveness? How can you learn to give to others who have wronged you the kind of grace and forgiveness God offers us through Jesus?

Worship the One Who Made the Heavens and Earth

Read again Revelation 14:6, 7. What are the specific elements found in the first angel's message, and how do they relate to one another?

Along with the gospel, the call to witness to the world, and the call to “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him’ ” (*NKJV*) comes the call to worship God as the Creator. And no wonder. All these other aspects of “present truth”—the everlasting gospel, the call to witness, the judgment—what do they mean apart from God as our Creator? These truths, and all other truths, arise from the foundational truth of the Lord as the One who has made all things. By worshiping the Lord as Creator, we are getting back to basics. We are getting back to the foundation of what it means to be human and alive and unlike any other earthly creatures—to be made in the image of God. By worshiping the Lord as Creator, we acknowledge our dependence upon Him for existence and for our future hope. This is why the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is so important. It's a special acknowledgment that God alone is our Creator, and we worship only Him. That is, along with the gospel, along with the judgment, the call to worship the Lord as Creator is given prominence here.

Read Revelation 14:8–11. What do these verses say that could help us to understand the importance of worshiping the Lord as Creator?

As final events unfold, pressure to worship the beast and his image rather than the Creator will come upon all the world. If we consider the fearsome warning about the fate of those who worship the beast and his image, we can better understand the emphasis on worshiping God as Creator, as the only One worthy of human worship. In the final crisis, this truth will become more crucial than ever.

Take time to dwell on the incredible marvels of the created world. What can and do they teach us about the One who created it all, and why He alone is worthy of our worship?

Further Thought: Bible students have long seen a link between the call in Revelation 14:7 to “ ‘worship [H]im who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water’ ” (*RSV*), and the fourth commandment, in Exodus 20:11, when the Sabbath points back to the fact that “ ‘in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them’ ” (*NKJV*). However closely related the language, there is a change in which the text in Revelation points to the Lord as the One who made “the fountains of water.”

Author John Baldwin argues, “Assuming divine intentionality behind the phrase ‘fountains of water,’ why does Jesus have the messenger break the parallel listing of things mentioned in Exodus 20:11? Why does the angel mention ‘fountains of water’ and not some other class of created thing, such as trees, birds, fish, or mountains?”

“Perhaps the reference to ‘fountains of water’ in the context of a divine announcement of the arrival of a unique time of divine judgment seeks to direct the reader’s attention to a previous period of divine judgment. . . . Perhaps God intends that the possible allusion to the flood by the words ‘fountains of water’ should underscore the truth that He is indeed a God of judgment, as well as a God of everlasting faithfulness and graciousness (both evidenced in the narrative of the Genesis flood). If so, the personal and spiritual implications of the flood connotation triggered by the phrase ‘fountains of water’ might be to encourage the reader to take seriously the momentous arrival of a new end-time process of individual divine judgment now announced by the first messenger of Revelation 14.”—John Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Isaiah 53:6 reads: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” The word in Hebrew used in this text for “all of us” is *cullanu*. In the same text, Isaiah says that the Lord laid upon Jesus “the iniquity of us all.” The word for “us all” here, too, is *cullanu*. How does this show us that no matter how great the sin problem is, the solution to it is more than sufficient to solve it?
- ② What other lessons can we learn from the story of the thief on the cross? Suppose the thief received a pardon and was brought down from the cross and survived. How different a life do you think he would have lived? What does that answer tell us about the power of Christ to change our lives?

“House on Fire”

by Andrew McChesney, Adventist Mission

Dan Frein, a utilities company manager in the U.S. state of Michigan, stopped attending the Protestant church of his youth for about 20 years. His wife, raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home, also wasn't an active church member.

But the day came that Dan wanted to return to church, so he walked into his former church on a Sunday morning. What he saw and heard surprised him. This was not the church that he had left. He found that the church now endorsed homosexuality and other nonbiblical practices that it had preached against two decades earlier.

Disappointed, Dan told his wife that he longed to find a church that followed the Bible. His wife remembered the Adventist church in the nearby town of Muskegon, where her parents were members.

The couple began to attend worship services with her parents. At the same time, Dan read every Ellen White book that he could find.

On a Tuesday night after prayer meeting, he stopped the pastor in the parking lot.

“I want to let you know that I am ready,” he said.

“Ready for what?” asked the pastor.

“I am ready to be baptized,” Dan said. “I’ve been reading Ellen White’s books. I am ready, and I am on board.”

The pastor went through baptismal studies and found that Dan did know and agree with the church’s teachings. Dan was baptized, his wife was rebaptized, and their son also was baptized.

“I praise the Lord that Dan came in despite our lack of personal outreach,” said the pastor, Kameron DeVasher. “I know that personal ministries work and evangelism are absolutely not dead, but I have a feeling that there are a lot more Dans out there, just waiting to be gathered in.”

He said Dan’s experience also speaks of the importance of Ellen White’s books. “I think that there is power in the Spirit of Prophecy, so we should feel no shame in sharing those books,” he said.

As for Dan, he has led multiple evangelistic campaigns at the church, served as a deacon, and participated in prison ministries. Members describe him as “a house on fire.”

“This is a person who has been in the church less than five years, and he is preaching the Word and winning souls,” Pastor DeVasher said. “He reminds us that the work of the local church is first and foremost evangelism, winning souls, and discipleship, and every member should have a part in that work.”



Pastor KAMERON DEVASHER

End-Time Deceptions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 2:13, 24; 2 Cor. 11:13–15; Ps. 146:4; Gen. 1:1–2:3; Rev. 13:1–17.*

Memory Text: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (*Revelation 12:9, NKJV*).

Even in heaven, before his expulsion, Satan worked to deceive the angels. “Leaving his place in the immediate presence of God, Lucifer went forth to diffuse the spirit of discontent among the angels. Working with mysterious secrecy, and for a time concealing his real purpose under an appearance of reverence for God, he endeavored to excite dissatisfaction concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that they imposed an unnecessary restraint.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 495.

In Eden, Satan disguised himself as a serpent and used trickery against Eve. As he has done all through history, even up through today, Satan also will use deception at the end of the millennium (*Rev. 20:8*) in an attempt to gain his ends.

Unfortunately, he's much smarter, more powerful, and craftier than any of us, which is why we need to cling to Jesus and to His Word in order to protect ourselves from his wiles. “‘But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today, every one of you’ ” (*Deut. 4:4, NKJV*). The principle espoused here, indeed, still holds true today, as well.

This week, we will look at some of the devil's most effective deceptions and how we can be protected from them.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 2.

The Grandest Deception

The first lesson of this quarter talked about the “cosmic controversy,” which, unfortunately, has reached beyond the cosmos to our earth itself.

The problem, though, is that many people, Christians included, don’t believe in this great controversy because they don’t believe in Satan. For them, Bible texts talking about Satan or the devil are merely the expressions of a prescientific culture trying to explain evil and suffering in the world. For way too many people the idea of a literal, supernatural entity who has malevolent designs on humanity is the stuff of science fiction, akin to Darth Vader of *Star Wars* fame or the like.

Read the following texts, all from Revelation. What do they teach us about the reality of Satan and particularly about his role in last-day events? *Rev. 2:13, 24; 12:3, 7–9, 12, 17; 13:2; 20:2, 7, 10.*

Revelation shows us just how much power Satan will have over so many inhabitants of the world in the final days, leading them not only away from salvation but toward persecuting those who stay faithful to Jesus.

Of all Satan’s “devices” (*2 Cor. 2:11*)—a translation of the Greek word for “mind” (*noemata*)—perhaps his greatest deception is his ability to cause people to believe that he does not exist. After all, who’s going to seek shelter from an overpowering enemy who you don’t believe is real? It’s astonishing how many claim to be Christians and yet don’t take the idea of a literal devil seriously. They hold such a position, however, only by ignoring or radically reinterpreting the many texts in the Word of God that reveal Satan’s workings and ploys in this world, especially as we near the end of time. That so many people would reject the literal existence of Satan, even in the face of such overwhelming biblical evidence, should be a powerful reminder to us of just how crucial it is that we understand what the Bible really teaches.

Although Revelation talks about the machinations of Satan, particularly in the last days, what great hope can we find from Revelation 12:11? What is our source of power against the devil?

The Two Great Errors

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about Satan's power to deceive?

2 Cor. 11:13–15 _____

2 Thess. 2:9, 10 _____

Rev. 12:9 _____

Rev. 20:10 _____

As we noted in an earlier lesson, Jesus had warned His followers about end-time deceptions. Among those He specifically warned about were the rise of false christs and false prophets who would “ ‘deceive many’ ” (*Matt. 24:5*).

False christs and false prophets, however, are not the only end-time deception of which we have to be aware. Our enemy in the great controversy has many ploys designed to deceive all whom he can. As Christians, we need to be aware of those ploys, and we can do that only through knowing the Bible and obeying what it teaches.

Ellen G. White explains what two of those grand deceptions are: “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

How incredible for us, even many years after Ellen White wrote those words, to see just how prevalent “the two great errors” continue to be in the Christian world.

Why are knowledge of Bible truths and a willingness to *obey* those truths the most powerful weapons we have against the deceptions of the devil, especially in the last days?

The Immortality of the Soul

What do the following texts teach us about the “state of the dead”? What great protection can these texts give us against one of “the two great errors”? *Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10; Ps. 115:17; Ps. 146:4; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; Dan. 12:2.*

In recent decades much attention has been given to stories about people who have “died”—in that their hearts have stopped beating and they have stopped breathing—only to be revived and brought back to consciousness. In numerous cases, many of these people have told of incredible experiences of a conscious existence after they had supposedly died. Some talked about how they floated in the air and saw, from above, their own bodies below. Others reported floating out of their bodies and meeting a wonderful being filled with light and warmth and who espoused truths about kindness and love. Others recounted meeting and talking to dead relatives.

This phenomenon has become so common that it even has a scientific name, near-death experiences (NDEs). Although NDEs remain controversial, many Christians have used them as evidence for the immortality of the soul and the idea that at death the soul goes off to another realm of conscious existence.

But NDEs are, of course, another manifestation of one of “the two great errors.” As long as anyone believes that at death the soul goes on living in one form or another, that person is wide open to most occult or spiritualistic deceptions, deceptions that can easily promote the idea, either openly or by implication, that you don’t need Jesus. In fact, most of the people who have had NDEs have said the spiritual beings whom they met, or even their dead relatives, gave them comforting words about love, peace, and goodness but nothing about salvation in Christ, nothing about sin, and nothing about judgment to come—the most basic biblical views. One would think that, while supposedly getting a taste of the Christian afterlife, they should have gotten a taste of the most basic Christian teachings, as well. Yet, often what they’re told sounds much like New Age dogma, which could explain why many of these people come away less inclined toward Christianity than they were before having “died.”

As Christians, why must we stick to the Word of God, even when our senses tell us something different?

Sabbath and the Theory of Evolution

As much success as Satan has had deceiving the world in regard to the immortality of the soul, he's been just as successful, if not more so, in usurping the biblical Sabbath for Sunday (see weeks 6 and 8) and has done so for most of Christian history.

In recent years, the devil has come up with another deception that lessens the hold of the seventh-day Sabbath in the minds of people: the theory of evolution.

Read Genesis 1:1–2:3. What does this passage teach us about how the Lord created our world and how long it took to do so?

Even the broadest reading of these verses reveals two points about the biblical account of Creation. First, everything was planned and calculated; nothing was random, arbitrary, or by chance. Scripture leaves no room whatsoever for chance in the process of Creation.

Second, the texts reveal unambiguously that each creature was made after its own kind; that is, each one was made separately and distinctly from the others. The Bible teaches nothing about a common natural ancestry (such as from a primeval simple cell) for all life on earth.

Even from a nonliteralist interpretation of Genesis, these two points are obvious: nothing was random in the act of Creation, and there was no common natural ancestry for all species.

Then along comes Darwinian evolution, which, in its various forms, teaches two things: randomness and a common natural ancestry for all species.

Why, then, do so many people interpret Genesis through the lens of a theory that, at its most basic level, contradicts Genesis at its most basic level? Indeed, not only has the error of evolution swept up millions of secular people, but many professed Christians believe that they can harmonize it with their Christian faith, despite the blatant contradictions just mentioned.

However, the implications of evolution in the context of final events make the danger of the deception even more apparent. Why take seriously a day, the seventh-day Sabbath, as a memorial—not for a six-day creation, but for a creation that took about 3 billion years (the latest date that life supposedly first started on earth)? Evolution denudes the seventh day of any real importance because it turns the six days of Creation into nothing but a myth, similar to the one that says Romulus and Remus were nursed by wolves. Also, who, believing that creation required billions of years instead of six days, would actually risk persecution or death by standing for the Sabbath as opposed to for Sunday?

The Counterfeit Trinity

The concept of the triune nature of God is found all through the Bible. However, in the context of end-time deceptions and persecution, the book of Revelation reveals a counterfeit trinity composed of the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast of Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 12:17; 13:1, 2. What is described here?

The dragon here has been seen as the counterfeit of the Father in that he is the one clearly in control. He also gives power and authority and a throne to the sea beast, the one counterfeiting Christ. Why is this second power seen as a counterfeit Christ?

Read Revelation 13:2–5. What are the characteristics of this sea beast?

Besides receiving its authority from the dragon, reminiscent of what Jesus said about receiving His authority from the Father (*see Matt. 28:18*), this sea beast also faced, like Jesus, a death and then a resurrection (*see Rev. 13:3*). Also, this beast is described as exerting his authority for “forty-two months,” or three-and-a-half years—a prophetic counterfeit of Christ’s literal three-and-a-half-year ministry, based on the day-for-year principle.

Read Revelation 13:11–17. How is the land beast described here?

This land beast promotes the interests of the sea beast, just as the Holy Spirit glorified not Himself but Jesus (*John 16:13, 14*). Also, just as the Holy Spirit performed a powerful act in bringing down “fire” from heaven (*Acts 2:3*), the land beast performs something similar (*see Rev. 13:13*). “At the end, the land beast performs a counterfeit of Pentecost! For what purpose? To prove to the world that the counterfeit trinity is the true God.”—Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1998), p. 111.

What are other end-time deceptions of which we need to be aware, and how can we help others recognize them as deceptions, as well?

Further Thought: Let's dwell more on the implications of the theory of evolution in the context of last-day events, especially in regard to the role of the Sabbath. One reason that Charles Darwin, the originator of the theory, promoted evolution was that—not understanding the great controversy—he had a difficult time reconciling evil and suffering with the idea of a benevolent and loving Creator. Because of this error, he looked in another direction for answers. It wasn't a coincidence, either, that during the mid-to-late 1800s as Darwin was revising and reworking his theory of evolution, God raised up a movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which countered everything for which Darwin's theory stood. How interesting that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, whose creationist underpinnings are revealed in its very name, started growing and expanding at about the same time that Darwin's theory did.

Perhaps if Darwin had read and believed these few short lines from Ellen G. White, the world might have been spared one of the grandest blunders of human thought since geocentrism and spontaneous generation: "Although the earth was blighted with the curse, nature was still to be man's lesson book. It could not now represent goodness only; for evil was everywhere present, marring earth and sea and air with its defiling touch. Where once was written only the character of God, the knowledge of good, was now written also the character of Satan, the knowledge of evil. From nature, which now revealed the knowledge of good and evil, man was continually to receive warning as to the results of sin."—*Education*, p. 26.

Yet, Darwin did devise his evolutionary speculations, which are all based on a false understanding of the nature and character of God and the fallen world in which we live. Unfortunately, the implications of his theory will make people prey to Satan's deceptions, especially in the final crisis.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why do so many Christians reject the idea of a literal Satan? What does this view teach us about how dangerous it is to reject the clear teaching of the Bible?
- ② What can you say to a person who claims that his or her near-death experience shows that we go on living after death?
- ③ What other reason could there be for why those who believe in evolution would be so much more susceptible to deceptions in the last days?

Jailed for Manslaughter

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

A 2:00 A.M. bar brawl in the U.S. state of Alaska turned violent when 28-year-old Tony Pouesi struck a man with a single punch.

The man fell and hit his head on the ground. He died the next day.

Tony was charged with felony manslaughter, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 20 years.

"I was devastated," Tony said. "I was scared. My whole life flashed before my eyes."

From his jail cell, Tony remembered his upbringing in faraway Shelton, a small town in Washington state. His family never had read the Bible or attended church. He had used alcohol and illegal drugs as a teen and quit high school before completing 11th grade. As an adult, he had moved to Alaska to work as a commercial fisherman.

In jail, Tony began to pray desperately.

"I said, 'If there is a God, I want to know that He is real,' " Tony, now 30, said in an interview. "I was crying on my knees for hours a day for help."

Tony borrowed a Bible from the jail library and, to his astonishment, felt an overwhelming sense of peace and joy as he read it. He found special hope in Deuteronomy 31:6, one of the first Bible verses that he memorized. It reads, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (NKJV).

"As I prayed and read the Bible, God did miracles in my life," Tony said.

After some time, Tony's publicly appointed lawyer announced that she had good news: the potential prison sentence had been reduced to two to four years. Then the sentence was cut to one to three years on a reduced charge of negligent homicide.

One day, Tony found a small card on a bookshelf in the jail library: an invitation for Discover Bible lessons from the *Voice of Prophecy*, a Seventh-day Adventist ministry. He sent away for the lessons and eagerly studied them.

"What's amazing is that I drank, I did drugs, and I didn't graduate from high school, but I understood the Bible," he said. "That's amazing, right? You don't have to be a scholar to understand the Bible."

Shortly after completing the Bible studies, Tony's case came up in court. There, Tony said, God worked a miracle. The judge handed down a three-year suspended sentence. Tony was free.

"God delivered me from jail," Tony said. "The whole time I was in there was nine months."



Read more about TONY POUESI, left, next week.

America *and* Babylon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 13:1–12; 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; Jer. 51:6, 7, 53, 57; Rev. 18:1–4.*

Memory Text: “‘At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book’ ” (*Daniel 12:1, NKJV*).

Last week we looked at the counterfeit trinity, Satan (the dragon) and two earthly powers that together will bring persecution against God's people.

One of these powers, the sea beast (*Rev. 13:1–10*), is described as a composite of a leopard, a bear, and a lion (*Rev. 13:2*)—images taken directly from Daniel 7:4–6. We saw in week 6 that in Daniel 7—after the rise of Babylon (lion), Media-Persia (bear), and Greece (leopard)—came the final earthly power, Rome. It started out as pagan Rome and then turned into papal Rome, the little horn power of Daniel 7:7, 8; 19–21; and 23–25 that rose directly out of the fourth beast. We saw, too, that many of the characteristics of papal Rome, as depicted in these verses in Daniel 7, reappear in the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–10. Hence, Bible scholars have seen Rome as one of the key antagonists in the end-time scenario of Revelation 13.

However, Rome is not alone. Another power is depicted. This week we will focus mostly on Revelation 13 and the events and powers portrayed in it, and as always asking the questions: What do these events mean, and how can we be prepared for them?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.

Deadly Wound Healed

Read Revelation 13:1–10 and go over the reasons why these texts are referring to the papacy, with regard to its role in the past and in the future. Notice specifically just how prominent a role it is given. What does this mean in terms of last-day events?

Although God has faithful people in all churches, Scripture does point to a specific role that this institution has played in history and will play in last-day events.

Read Revelation 13:3. What is happening here, and what does this teach about Rome's prominence?

For centuries the Roman church had been the central religion and, in many ways, the political center of the Western world. A telling example of her power is seen in the story of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who, upon angering Pope Gregory VII, came to the pope's castle to make peace. There, the Roman emperor was made to wait in an outer court for three days in the winter cold before the pope granted him entrance. Gregory VII, elated with his triumph, boasted that it was his duty to pull down the pride of kings.

Nevertheless, by the late eighteenth century through the influence of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, Rome's political and religious hegemony had been shattered. One of the popes, Pius VI, actually had been taken captive by the French army in 1798 and died in exile in 1799.

Revelation 13, however, speaks of a resurgence after the healing of its "deadly wound" (*Rev. 13:3*). And although Rome today doesn't have the kind of political power it wielded in the day of Gregory VII, it is an influential force, both religiously and politically, thanks to the popularity of recent popes (for instance, Pope Francis' speaking to both houses of the U.S. Congress in 2015 was a historical first). According to prophecy, this influence only will grow.

How can we be faithful to the message that we have been called to preach, but do so in a way that causes as little offense as possible? Why, though, must we not bow down to "political correctness" as we proclaim present truth?

The United States in Prophecy

People have asked, and understandably so: *How could Rome have the kind of influence today, or in the future, that is depicted in Revelation 13?* Long gone are the days when it could command armies such as it did in times past. The answer is found, too, in Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 13:11, 12. Which marks help us to identify who this power is?

The beast that precedes this one—long viewed as Rome by Protestants—was depicted as having been given power for forty-two months (*Rev. 13:5*). The forty-two months are the same as the “time and times and the dividing of time” of Daniel 7:25, or three and a half years (*Rev. 12:14*), or 1,260 prophetic days (*Rev. 12:6*)—the time during which the papal power oppressed its opponents. This prophetic time period (using the day-year principle) began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 38, and terminated in 1798, the year that the pope was taken captive. At this time the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled.

About this point in history, near the close of the “forty-two months” (1798), another power appears (*Rev. 13:11, Rev. 13:1*). It arises this time out of the earth—which is in contrast to many of the previous powers, which arose out of water (*see Dan. 7:2, 3*)—a symbol of masses of people. “‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues’” (*Rev. 17:15, NKJV*).

For these reasons, and others, this power must be the United States of America, which arose in a relatively uninhabited part of the world and didn’t need to overthrow any major empires in order to do so.

“What nation of the New World was in 1798 rising into power, giving promise of strength and greatness, and attracting the attention of the world? The application of the symbol admits of no question. One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 440.

Although this power is described first as having two horns like a lamb, symbolizing gentleness, it will speak “as a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11*), indicating a time of persecution such as took place under the previous power. Revelation 13:11–17, then, answers the question about how Rome could exert the influence that prophecy predicts. It will have the might of the United States behind it—that’s how.

An Issue of Worship

All through sacred history, the Lord constantly had to deal with those who fell into idolatry and other forms of false worship (*see Matt. 4:8–10*). In the final crisis, as depicted in Revelation 13, the issue of worship will again arise. Here, too, God’s people will have to make a choice about whom they will worship and serve (*see Josh. 24:15*).

In week 2, in the lesson titled “Daniel and the End Time,” we studied the story of three Hebrew boys who were ordered to “worship the golden image” (*Dan. 3:5*). We saw, too, how Revelation 13 uses language from that chapter in depicting the persecution that God’s people will face in the end times. That is, we may see what happened in Daniel 3 as a precursor to what will happen in the last days, as depicted in the immediate context of the beast powers in Revelation 13. All were commanded to worship the golden image, or they would be put to death in a fiery furnace. Similarly, in Revelation 13, whoever “would not worship the image of the beast [is] to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. What do these verses tell us about how crucial the issue of worship will become?

Babylon always has been the capital of false worship. The Tower of Babel testified to its builders’ desire, like Lucifer, to “ascend above the heights of the clouds” (*Isa. 14:14*), as well as to its builders’ efforts to save themselves in case of another global deluge. Thus, they refused to believe God’s promise never to bring another flood upon the earth (*Gen. 9:8–11*).

The Neo-Babylonian Empire likewise exalted the work of human hands. Nebuchadnezzar extolled “this great Babylon, that I have built” (*Dan. 4:30*). Later, King Belshazzar took the golden cups of Solomon’s temple for a feast, and “they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone” (*Dan. 5:3, 4, NKJV*). Notice that the true vessels of the temple were filled with intoxicating wine, which deadened the sensibility of all who drank from them. As a result, many in the city perished when Babylon fell. Thus, an outward appearance of truth can deceive us by disguising the deadly “wine of Babylon.” False worship and false ideas are the currency of Satan’s kingdom.

How can we make sure we aren’t involved in any false worship now?

“Babylon the Great”

Read the following texts. What do they teach us about Babylon? *Jer. 51:6, 7, 53, 57; Zech. 2:7; Rev. 17:5, 6; 18:2, 3.*

As we saw yesterday, Babylon has a long history as the capital of false worship; so it is a fitting symbol of an end-time power that deceives the nations.

Compare the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast (*Rev. 12:3, 13:1–3, 17:3*). What are the similarities and differences?

All three beasts have seven heads and ten horns, which represent the sum total of heads and horns of the beasts of Daniel 7. Each successive empire was built upon those that went before. Similarly, the scarlet beast combines elements of the dragon and the sea beast (symbolizing pagan and papal Rome, respectively), as well as of the land beast (*Rev. 13:11–14*), grouping “all three powers—all of God’s enemies—into a real coalition.”—Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 162. An additional element in Revelation 17 is the woman who rides on the scarlet beast, symbolizing an illicit union of religious and political powers. This woman contrasts sharply with the pure woman of Revelation 12:

Pure Woman (*Rev. 12*)

In heaven
Clothed with the sun
Crown of twelve stars
Attacked by the dragon
Mother of the remnant

Harlot (*Rev. 17*)

On the waters
Clothed in purple and scarlet
Adorned with gold, gems, pearls
Supported by the dragon
Mother of harlots

As “the mother of harlots,” Babylon has been busy reproducing itself. The apostate mother church has many apostate daughters. But God does not take ownership of the errors promulgated and atrocities committed by apostate Christianity. His true people, although attacked by Satan, survive through the centuries.

Revelation 14:8 has already warned people of Babylon’s fall or apostasy from the truth, which eventually leads to the final deception, the mark of the beast (*Rev. 14:9–11*). This warning will be repeated with much greater power, culminating in one last appeal for God’s people still in Babylon to come out of her and unite with God’s end-time, remnant church (*Rev. 18:1–4*).

Come Out of Her, My People

Over the years, students of Bible prophecy have been following world events with great interest, particularly as they seem to relate to the end time. Think, for instance, about the role of the United States. As far back as 1851, some Adventists were identifying America as the second beast power (*Rev. 13:11–15*), which was a very remarkable identification given the status of the United States then. In the mid-1800s, the big powers were still the Old World ones: Prussia, France, Austria-Hungary, and England. At that time America had a peacetime army of about twenty thousand men, about one-tenth the number of combatants at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) alone. In 1814, just forty years earlier, the British invaded and burned Washington, D.C. In 1876, Sitting Bull's braves wiped out General Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry Regiment. Thus, even after some commentators identified the United States as the power that would one day enforce the "mark of the beast" on the world, the nation was still fighting Native Americans on its own soil, and not always winning either!

No question, world events are following as we have believed they would. But still more things need to happen before we reach the end. That's why, for instance, when discussing the "mark of the beast," it's very important to emphasize that right now no one has it, regardless of whether or not they are keeping the fourth commandment.

Besides, more needs to unfold.

Read Revelation 18:1–4. What is happening here, and why is this important for us to remember now? What do these verses teach us about our mission to the world?

These verses paint a bleak political, moral, and spiritual picture of the world. They show the malevolent influence of false religious teaching in the world. At the same time, though, they offer great hope, because another angel from heaven lights the world with his glory. Further, God's faithful people, the ones who haven't learned yet what they need to know, are called out of Babylon. This means, then, that right up to the end, God's people who are already out of Babylon have a work to do for those who are still in it.

What should it mean to us that the Lord calls some of those still in Babylon "My people"? Why is this an important point for us to remember as we relate to others?

Further Thought: Satan's attack on God's law is an attack on God Himself, both on His authority and on His government. So in the last days, in the climactic events of the final crisis, Satan will be attacking those who keep "the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17, 14:12*), for they alone will be refusing to pay him homage through his proxies here on earth. The battle that he waged against God in heaven long ago will be continued here on earth, and just as he was defeated in heaven, he will be defeated here on earth. "From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God's law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends 'in one point,' manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes 'guilty of all.' James 2:10." —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In class, talk about world events. In what ways are they pointing to what we believe needs to happen in the last days? What events still need to unfold? How can we learn to keep vigilant about the signs of the times while avoiding fanaticism, date setting, and making bold predictions about things that the Bible and Ellen White's writings have not explicitly taught?
- ② Dwell more on the question of worship. What does it mean to worship something? How do we worship whatever it is we do worship?
- ③ Dwell more on the idea that God still has people in Babylon. What do we understand as the meaning of the term "Babylon" (which is obviously a symbol and not literal)? What does this teach us about our obligation to continue preaching our message to others, regardless of their political and/or religious beliefs?

“Trust Jesus” Hats

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Tony Pouesi, imprisoned for nine months after the death of a man in a bar fight, began a closer walk with God following his surprise release from jail in the U.S. state of Alaska.

With nowhere to go, he moved into a Seventh-day Adventist home for former inmates, the Greater Works Christian Living Center, in Anchorage. He began to have morning devotions. He attended prayer meetings on Wednesday and Friday evenings. He kept the Sabbath.

“It was the first time that I got to experience a real Christian family,” he said.

A desire swelled in his heart to share his newfound love for Jesus, and he decided to establish Alaska Street Ministry. Five days a week, he distributes GLOW tracts, Bible promise books, food, and clothing. He prays with strangers and talks about Jesus.

Tony has found that wearing a custom-made hat or shirt stamped with the words, “Trust Jesus,” is an excellent conversation starter.

“It is a great tool for witnessing,” he said. “A lot of people come up to me and just start talking about God. If they are responsive, I tell them how God changed my life.”

Tony’s biggest burden, however, is his own family. He called his single mother in Shelton, Washington, shortly after being freed from jail.

“There is only one thing in this world that I will ask of you,” he told her. “I want you to do these Discover Bible studies.”

As a result of the *Voice of Prophecy* studies, his mother has quit smoking and lost 30 pounds (14 kilograms). She keeps the Sabbath.

“I knew that she would never be the same after the Bible studies,” Tony said. “This is the power of God.”

Tony is now looking for new ways to share Jesus. One Sabbath as he left church, he encountered a man carrying a large white cross. The man explained that he had been carrying the cross around the world for six years and, after hearing Tony’s story, presented it to him.

It took Tony some time to gather the courage to drag the cross around the city block. But when he did, the reaction was astounding.



“People were honking their horns, and waving, and saying, ‘Praise the Lord!’” Tony said. “It was awesome.”

Tony isn’t convinced that the cross is the best way to witness. But he is confident that his “Trust Jesus” clothing is effective. He is looking to support his street ministry by selling the hats and shirts online.

“God gave me this fire to spread the gospel, and I still have that fire,” he said.

Read more about TONY POUESI, left, last week.

God's Seal *or the* Beast's Mark?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 17:9–11; Exod. 31:13, 17; Rev. 13:17; Eph. 1:13, 14; Heb. 4:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (*Revelation 15:3*).

The song of Moses and the Lamb begins with the words of our memory text this week. It is sung by “them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name” as they “stand on the sea of glass” in heaven (*Rev. 15:2*). How can we be among that number?

One of the most telling signs of God's true last-day people is their proclamation of the third angel's message, which warns against receiving the mark of the beast. However, despite there being no more serious warning in all the Bible, many confusing ideas as to what this mark is have been suggested over the years: a bar code in the forehead, a credit card number, or some biometric identification.

We should not be surprised at the proliferation of confusing ideas in Babylon. After all, its name means “confusion.” But God's remnant people need a clear understanding of this topic in order to proclaim the third angel's message with power. This week, we'll try to understand better what the mark of the beast is and how to avoid it—by receiving the seal of God.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 16.*

God's Sign Identifying His People

In Old Testament times there were two outward identifiers of God's true people. One of them was circumcision. To whom was this sign first given? *Gen. 17:9–11; Exod. 31:13, 17.*

God commanded Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant of salvation. Males were to be circumcised on the eighth day (*Lev. 12:3*). However, this ritual had a deeper significance. It was meant to symbolize the need for “circumcision,” or renewal, of the heart (*see Deut. 30:6*). That is why Paul writes, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (*Rom. 2:28, 29, NKJV*).

Texts such as 1 Corinthians 7:19, Galatians 5:6, and 6:15 show that in the New Testament, circumcision is replaced by baptism, which symbolizes conversion, a “new creation,” a dying to sin and a rising to a new life (*see Rom. 6:3, 4*). That is why Paul says circumcision is no longer important and that it is “faith working through love” and “keeping the commandments of God” that really matter.

What was the second outward sign that God gave to identify His people, and why was it given? (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20*).

Notice that the Sabbath as a sign goes all the way back to Creation (*see Gen. 2:2, 3*), whereas circumcision began only with Abraham. Thus Jesus said, in referring to Genesis, “The sabbath was made for humankind” (*Mark 2:27, NRSV*). It shows that we belong to God—by creation because He made us and by redemption because He justifies and sanctifies us. Thus, although Paul says that circumcision is no longer important, he argues that keeping God's commandments (which includes the Sabbath) still is important (*see Heb. 4:9*).

How do your thoughts and intentions reveal whether or not you truly have been circumcised in the heart?

The Beast and False Worship

Read the following texts. What do they teach us about the importance of avoiding “the mark of the beast”? *Rev. 13:17; 14:9, 10; 16:2.*

Receiving the undiluted wrath of God, being punished by the seven last plagues, and, in the end, being cast into the lake of fire—all of these things happen to those who bear the mark of the beast. What a contrast to those who refuse the mark of the beast and stand on the sea of glass triumphantly singing praise to God and the Lamb!

What is this mark that no one would want to receive? Clearly, the above verses connect it with false worship. Also, as we saw in a previous lesson, the fourth beast power of Daniel 7, in its latter phase (also depicted as the sea beast of Revelation 13), would “think to change times and laws” (*Dan. 7:25*). One law that it thought to change was the Sabbath, the fourth commandment—the only one of the ten that refers to time and points directly to God as the One who “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (*Exod. 20:11*).

Significantly, the first angel’s message points us back to this commandment that the beast power tried to change and makes it clear that we are to worship the Lord alone as the Creator. In fact, of the seven verses referring to worship in Revelation 12–14, this (*Rev. 14:7*) is the only one about true worship; the other six warn against falsely worshiping the beast and his image (*Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11*). Immediately after the third angel’s description of the fate of those who engage in this false worship, the true worshipers of God are described: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*).

In other words, proclamation of these three messages separates all of humanity into two groups: those who worship the Creator by keeping all of His commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath command, and those who worship the beast and his image. This false form of worship, then, offers an alternative to worshiping the Creator by keeping the Sabbath commandment.

Think more about the connection between worship and loyalty. What aspects of worship are essential in order to show our loyalty to God?

The Seal of God

Like a signature, a seal is used to validate a document. In ancient times it was a stamp pressed onto soft wax or clay to show authenticity or ownership, having the authority of its owner behind it.

What is the seal of God, and how and when is it given? *Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30; 2 Tim. 2:19; Rev. 7:1–4; 14:1.*

The seal of God is a sign of God's ownership and protection of His people. Paul describes a sealing in connection with conversion and reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He calls this gift a "deposit" or "down payment" given to all believers as an assurance of the complete redemption and future inheritance they will receive when Jesus comes.

The book of Revelation describes another sealing just prior to the Second Advent. This final seal is given to the 144,000 at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. They have God's name (or signature) written in their foreheads. Through the Holy Spirit's work in their lives, they come to reflect God's character.

Contrast the seal of God with the mark of the beast. What differences between them are mentioned? *Rev. 7:3, 14:9.*

The seal is given to true worshipers of God while the mark is given to worshipers of the beast. The seal is given only in the forehead, indicating a definite choice of the mind to worship God in the way that He has commanded. The mark, on the other hand, is given either in the forehead or in the hand. This means that people may worship the beast for one of two reasons. Either in their minds they agree with it, thinking that they are truly worshiping God, or they don't agree with it but they go along with it because they are afraid of the serious consequences of not conforming: being unable to buy or sell and eventually being killed (*Rev. 13:17, 15*).

"Those who are uniting with the world are receiving the worldly mold and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth—these are receiving the heavenly mold and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 216.

The Mark of the Beast

What is this mark that we need to avoid getting? As we saw in an earlier lesson, the fourth beast power of Daniel 7, in its latter phase (also depicted by the sea beast of Revelation 13), would “think to change times and laws” (*Dan. 7:25*). As we have seen already, one law that it thought to change was the Sabbath, or the fourth commandment—the only commandment that points directly to God as the One who “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (*Exod. 20:11*).

Meanwhile, the first angel’s message—pointing the reader back to this same commandment, one that the beast power tried to change—makes it clear that we are to worship the Lord alone as the Creator. Then, after a warning about the fate of those who instead worship the “beast and his image” (*Rev. 14:9*), God’s faithful people are depicted in verse 12.

Read Revelation 14:12. Given the immediate context, how does this depiction of God’s faithful people help us to understand why the Sabbath is so central to final events?

The text reads: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*). As we have seen, included in “the commandments of God” is the fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath, which points to God as the Creator and the One who alone should be worshiped. No wonder, then, that many see the issue of “the mark of the beast” as being directly tied to the question of Sunday worship, a counterfeit “sabbath” that is *not* commanded in the Bible, as opposed to keeping the fourth commandment, which is commanded in the Bible.

Does this mean that Christians who worship God on Sunday have the mark of the beast now? No. According to Revelation 13:15, those who refuse to join in this false worship of the beast will be killed. It will eventually become a life-or-death issue. Obviously, though, events have not yet reached that point, and the mark of the beast will not be given until this final test does come. Therefore, no one has yet received the mark of the beast.

Commandments of God. The faith of Jesus. Why are these traits, even now, crucial aspects of what it means to be a true Christian?

The Sabbath as the Seal

As we have seen, the seventh-day Sabbath has been a sign of God's true people throughout history, beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing during the time of Israel. We also see it perpetuated in the New Testament church with the practice of Jesus and the apostles, and as a distinguishing sign of God's last-day people, who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12*).

Why is the Sabbath so important, and what special significance does it have for Christians? *Exod. 20:8–11; Heb. 4:9, 10.*

The Sabbath appears in the heart of the Ten Commandments. It was given by the Creator as a sign or seal of His authority. It identifies Him by name, "the LORD your God." It identifies the realm over which He has jurisdiction—"the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them." It also identifies the basis of His authority, "for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, . . . and rested the seventh day."

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the One through whom God made all things (*John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1, 2*). Therefore, it is Jesus who created our world in six days and rested on the seventh day. As such, it is highly significant that as Jesus hung on the cross that Friday afternoon, He cried out, " 'It is finished!' " (*John 19:30, NKJV*). Just as He rested on the Sabbath after finishing His work of Creation, so Jesus rested in the tomb over the Sabbath after finishing His sacrificial work by dying in our place for our redemption. So the Sabbath is doubly blessed, first at Creation and then at the Cross. That is why, according to the book of Hebrews, in resting on the Sabbath the Christian shows that he "has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His" (*Heb. 4:10, NKJV*). The Sabbath is a perfect symbol of the fact that we cannot save ourselves, that from start to finish it is Christ's work made possible through faith (*compare Heb. 12:2*).

If the Sabbath symbolizes resting from our works, what does the keeping of Sunday represent, and how does this fit right in with the basic character of Babylon?

Further Thought: “Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, . . . that we may know what is coming.”—Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 285.

“The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are ways we can reveal to others the truth about the mark of the beast and the seal of God that don’t cause unnecessary controversy? For instance, why must we emphasize the fact that no one now has the mark of the beast?
- ❷ How are the Sabbath and the sealing of the Holy Spirit related?
- ❸ Reflect on the above idea of the seal as “a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually.” What does that mean?
- ❹ Discuss what characterizes spiritual Babylon, its values and methods. How do they differ from the values of God’s kingdom? How might some of Babylon’s values be creeping into our own church even now? How can we learn to recognize what they are and seek to deal with them in a Christian manner, one that reflects the values of God’s kingdom?

My Husband, My Field

by an Adventist wife in the U.S.

My husband and I always wanted to be Seventh-day Adventist missionaries. We both served as student missionaries in different parts of the world, and we returned overseas as volunteers after marriage.

It was an amazing 10 years. We served in three countries and planted many seeds that God could water later.

But I grew increasingly bothered with my husband. At first, it was small things like always having to adjust his shirt collar. He would make a meal but couldn't remember where to return the ingredients in the cupboard. We would agree on a schedule, but then he would cancel it at the last moment in favor of something that had caught his attention.

I expressed my frustration to my mother by phone. She called me hypercritical and urged me to be a better wife.

My mother changed her mind when we returned from the mission field and lived with her for a while. She saw that my husband would surprise us by washing the dishes, but then we couldn't find where he had put them in the cupboards.

My mother apologized to me, saying, "I'm sorry, honey, because I thought it was just you. But you still need to forgive and respect him."

My husband's heart is always so good. He wants to be helpful. However, when we live with him day in and day out, his efforts are not always helpful but tiring because he creates extra work for the rest of us.

It got to the point that I lost all respect for him. I couldn't trust his word. Not knowing where to turn, I sought the advice of a respected Seventh-day Adventist counselor. As I described my husband's behavior, the counselor stopped me.

"Do you think that it's possible that your husband has ADHD?" he said.

ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is a disorder related to the executive functions of the brain and is characterized by difficulty paying attention, impulsive behavior, and hyperactivity.

So, 18 years after getting married, I finally understood why my husband acts the way he does. I had to let go of my expectations and realize that God wanted to work on my heart.



I love my husband. We may never be overseas missionaries again, and that's fine with me. Ellen White says, "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . There is no missionary field more important than this" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 429).

I have found my mission field.

Babylon *and* Armageddon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:8; 16:19; Isa. 52:9; Rev. 18:1–10; 16:12–16; 1 Kings 18:1–40; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “On her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (*Revelation 17:5, NKJV*).

The book of Revelation, as we already have noted, comes filled with images and language taken directly from the Old Testament. For instance, the name Babylon appears six times in Revelation. But it is not talking about the ancient kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, which had passed from world history hundreds of years earlier. Instead, John is using Old Testament imagery to express a truth. In this case, Babylon—a massive political and religious power that had oppressed God's people—now describes the massive religious and political powers that will seek to do the same in the end times.

Something similar happens with the word *Armageddon*. The word occurs only in Revelation, but it is based on a Hebrew phrase that seems to mean “Mount of Megiddo,” a reference to a location in ancient Israel. A great deal of speculation exists about Armageddon, with many people looking for a massive military battle to take place there, in Megiddo, near the end of the world.

This week, we will look at Babylon and Armageddon and seek to learn what the Bible is telling us with these images.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 23.*

The Wine of Her Wrath

Read Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21, the six references to Babylon in the book of Revelation. Keeping in mind the story of Babylon as it appeared in the Old Testament, what do these texts teach us about Babylon as it appears in the context of last-day events?

It has been said that the Bible is a tale of two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon. While Jerusalem stood for the city of God and His covenant people all through the Bible (*Ps. 102:21, Isa. 52:9, 65:19, Rev. 3:12*), Babylon has stood for oppression, violence, false religion, and outright rebellion against God.

Think, for instance, of the tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:9*). The Hebrew word for “Babel” is the same word for the kingdom of “Babylon.” In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter sends greetings from the church in “Babylon,” which generally is understood not to mean from the ruins of the old kingdom located in today’s Iraq but from Rome itself, soon to be the church’s oppressor. This is an interesting appellation in light of the book of Revelation and the role of Rome as presented in it.

Read Revelation 14:8 and 18:3. What do these texts reveal about the malevolent influence of Babylon on the world and on God’s people?

There is no question that the power that Babylon represents, as depicted in the book of Revelation, is a greatly corruptive influence that extends across the whole world. The phrase “the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (*Rev. 14:8*) is clearly a reference to false doctrine, false teaching, and corrupt practices as well as the end results that come from them. Babylon is a force for evil that has spread to “all nations” (*Rev. 18:3*). Hence, everyone needs to take heed lest he or she be corrupted, as well.

Look around at the world today; see the corruption, the confusion, the oppression. What should these things teach us about our need to be anchored in Jesus and in His Word?

Babylon Is Fallen

However corrupt and far-reaching the influence of Babylon has been in the world, the book of Revelation teaches that one day it will all end.

Read Revelation 18:1–10. What do these verses tell us about “Babylon the great”?

The second angel’s message (*Rev. 14:8*) about the fall of Babylon is repeated here, in Revelation 18:2. It is an expression of just how corrupt this entity has become.

“The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord, Satan will work ‘with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;’ and they that ‘received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,’ will be left to receive ‘strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11. Not until this condition shall be reached, and the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete. The change is a progressive one, and the perfect fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 is yet future.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 389, 390.

Whether that “perfect fulfillment” now has come, only God knows. But what we do know is that, according to these texts, spiritual Babylon will one day face the judgment of God because of her great evil. “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (*Rev. 18:5*). This expression reflects language from the Old Testament about ancient Babylon, as well (*see Jer. 51:9*), and means that a time of judgment is sure to come.

Of course, this coming judgment shouldn’t be surprising. After all, Babylon of old faced judgment (*see Daniel 5*). Scripture in numerous places is very clear that one day everyone will have to answer for their deeds, including Babylon. How comforting to know that as Christians we have an Intercessor in that judgment who will stand for us (*1 John 2:1; Dan. 7:22*). Otherwise, our fate might not be much better than that of Babylon’s.

How can you take comfort in the promise that all the injustice and iniquity that seems to go unpunished now will face one day final retribution by God?

Armageddon

Although most people, including many Christians, don't know much about the book of Revelation, one image or word from it has reached popular culture: *Armageddon* (see *Rev. 16:16*). Even in secular culture the word has come to stand for a final struggle in which the fate of the earth hangs in the balance. Hollywood produced a movie called *Armageddon* about a giant asteroid poised to destroy the planet. To some degree, the idea of the world's end is in the minds of secular people, as well.

Many Christians who are familiar with the book of Revelation and believe in it see the battle of Armageddon as a literal military conflict in the Middle East near the end of the world. One version has a 200 million-man army from Asia sweeping into northern Israel. Others are fixated on the various military and political conflicts in that part of the world that will, in their understanding, set the stage for the final military battle of Armageddon in the area of Megiddo.

However, the Bible gives a totally different picture. Scripture presents Armageddon as the ultimate climax—not between squabbling nations, but between the two sides of the cosmic controversy. It's a religious struggle, not economic or political, however much economic and political factors might come into play.

Read Revelation 16:12–16. From these texts alone, what can we learn about Armageddon?

First, notice just how symbolic the language is here. Spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the mouth of the beast, and the mouth of the false prophet (references to the powers of Revelation 13; the “false prophet” here must be a reference to the land beast of Revelation 13:11). The great controversy is seen here, too, as the “spirits of demons” (*Rev. 16:14, NKJV*) go out to battle on the “great day of God Almighty” (*Rev. 16:14*). In whatever manner Armageddon will unfold, it's a worldwide conflict between the forces of Christ and Satan. It is not a local battle in the area of Megiddo any more than Babylon in Revelation is talking about events in a corner of modern-day Iraq.

Read Revelation 16:15. How fascinating that in the midst of these events, Jesus encourages us with the gospel message, with both the promise of His coming and the need to be covered in His righteousness. How does this help us to understand the spiritual nature of the battle that we are in?

Armageddon and Mount Carmel: Part 1

What, though, is this great battle of Armageddon? First, the name seems to mean “Mountain of Megiddo.” However, there is no mountain in the area known as Megiddo, but Mount Carmel was located in the vicinity. So, scholars have seen the phrase *Mountain of Megiddo* as a reference to Mount Carmel.

More to the point, Bible students have seen the story of Elijah and the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel as a symbol, a type to what is going to unfold in Revelation 13.

As seen yesterday, Revelation 16:13, with its reference to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, points back to events in Revelation 13, the counterfeit trinity that we saw in week 9.

Issues in Revelation 13 start to come to a climax in verses 13 and 14, when the second beast performs supernatural acts, even making “fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (*Rev. 13:13*). These events then lead to the direct confrontation between God and Satan, as well as between those worshiping the true God and those worshiping the “image to the beast” (*Rev. 13:14*).

Read 1 Kings 18:1–18. What is happening in this story that reflects some of the issues that will unfold in the final events, as seen in the book of Revelation?

In many ways, what we see here is a stark portrayal of the great controversy. Elijah states the issue very plainly in verse 18: *people have forsaken God’s law and are worshiping and following false gods*. Has not this always been the issue, regardless of the endless forms and ways in which this evil has been manifested throughout history? We are either worshiping “Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), or we are worshiping someone or something else. In Revelation 13, instead of worshiping the Lord, people are worshiping the beast and his image. There is no middle ground. We are either on the side of God or on the side of Satan. That’s how important the issues at stake are, now and especially in the battle of Armageddon, where, as we will see in the story on Mount Carmel, the distinction becomes very clear.

Armageddon and Mount Carmel: Part 2

Read 1 Kings 18:18–40. What happens, how does the story end, and (without pushing the parallels too far) how does this story reflect what will happen on a grander scale as the great controversy climaxes at the end of time?

The battle on Mount Carmel was between Elijah, prophet of God, and the hundreds of priests of Baal. (Notice how the evil outnumbered the good.) It was a test to demonstrate who is the true God—the God who created the heavens and the earth, or Baal, just another manifestation of “the dragon” and another means by which he seeks to deceive the world (*Rev. 12:9*).

The priests prayed to Baal to send fire to burn up their bull sacrifice. They shouted from morning to noon. “ ‘Cry aloud,’ ” taunted Elijah. “ ‘Perhaps he is sleeping’ ” (*1 Kings 18:27, NKJV*). The priests worked themselves up into a frenzy. They slashed themselves with swords until the blood flowed freely. Worn and weary, they gave up at the time of the evening sacrifice.

Elijah’s sacrifice was soaked three times, and water overflowed the trenches. Elijah prayed a simple prayer to God. God instantly burned up everything, including the stone altar and soil beneath. The power of the true God in contrast to Baal was now unmistakable.

Read Revelation 16:13; 19:20, 21, and compare these texts with the fate of the false prophets of Baal. What do we see here?

Whatever remains unknown about Armageddon, at least for now, we know the outcome: destruction of the enemies of God and vindication for God and His saints.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. Although the immediate context is different from Armageddon, what is the point that Paul is making, and why is that so relevant for us to remember, especially in light of what the future holds? See also Revelation 16:15, in which the context is definitely Armageddon. What, together, do these texts tell us?

Further Thought: “In several places in the battle of Armageddon narrative the hideous creatures and the ugly events take the back stage for a moment and a glimpse of more personal truth appears. As we have seen, one of them is Revelation 16:15: ‘Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed’ (NIV). This text, coming right in the middle of the one place in the Bible that actually names Armageddon, echoes many New Testament passages about personal preparation for the return of Jesus and the events of the end.

“Another such text is Revelation 17:14: ‘These will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, because [H]e is Lord of lords and King of kings—and those with [H]im are called and chosen and faithful’ (author’s translation). Here the great war at the end engages an army of people whose primary purpose is not to destroy others with weapons, but to be faithful to their divine calling and election. This is a very different kind of battle from the ones that nations and insurgent operations still fight today. As I have said repeatedly, the battle of Armageddon is a struggle for the mind. It is also a battle for the heart—a call to heartfelt allegiance to the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:9, 10, 12; 13:8).”—Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, Md.: Autumn House Publishing, a division of Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2008), p. 193.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How could you help someone who believes that many of the events depicted in the book of Revelation will take place in the literal places mentioned? What approaches could help him or her to see why this is a wrong way of interpreting the texts?
- ❷ As we have seen, the influence of Babylon extends all over the world. What are some of the teachings of Babylon, and how can we learn to discern what those teachings are and how to avoid them?
- ❸ In the Ellen G. White reference on Monday, she said, “Not until . . . the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete.” Think about the phrase “the union of the church with the world.” What powerful warning is here for us?

Miracle Book Sale

by KAMIL METZ

Helen Johnston abruptly realized as she walked down a street in Battle Creek, in the U.S. state of Michigan, that she had not prayed. So the student literature evangelist paused to seek God's guidance. It was summer 2015, and she was raising money for school.

As Helen (pictured below) headed to the next door, she heard a voice say, "A man will open the door, and he needs *The Great Controversy*."

Moments later, the house door opened. A man stood there.

Helen, following the practice of seeking to make friends first, offered a health book. Then she pulled out a copy of Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy*.

The man was intrigued by the book. He wanted his own copy, but he couldn't afford it.

Helen felt certain that God wanted him to have the book, so she offered it for free. The man shook his head. Helen asked whether he had any spare change lying around the house. The man came back with a handful of coins, but it still was not enough. He gave Helen the money but still refused to take the book.

Disappointed, Helen turned to leave. She took a few steps and tripped. The coins scattered on the ground.

Helen quickly asked the man to hold the book. After collecting the coins, she began to walk away.

The man called out after her. "Your book," he said. "You forgot your book."

Helen looked back and smiled. "It's yours to keep," she said.

He returned her smile. "You win," he said.

An hour later, Helen found herself going door-to-door in a more affluent neighborhood. As she introduced herself and was about to say her name, the woman at the door interrupted her. "It's Helen, right?" she said.

Helen was startled. She had never seen the woman before.

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist," the woman said. "This morning as I was reading my Bible I was impressed by God that Helen would come to my door.



I also was impressed that I needed to write a check for \$20 because Helen would meet a man who needs *The Great Controversy* but would not have the money to buy it."

The woman pulled out a signed check made out to the sum of \$20. She only needed to add the name of the recipient. "Who do I make this check out to?" she said.

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The Return *of* Our Lord Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 13:6, 9; Matt. 24:30, 31; Dan. 2:34, 35; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; 2 Thess. 1:7–10.*

Memory Text: “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (*Matthew 24:27*).

The poet T. S. Eliot began a poem with the line: “In my beginning is my end.” However succinct, his words carry a powerful truth. In origins exist endings. We see echoes of this reality in our name, Seventh-day Adventist, which carries two basic biblical teachings: “Seventh day,” for the Sabbath of the Ten commandments, a weekly memorial of the six-day Creation of life on earth; and “Adventist,” pointing to the second coming of Jesus, in which all the hopes and promises of Scripture, including the promise of eternal life, will find their fulfillment.

However distant in time the Creation of the world (our beginning) is from the second coming of Jesus (our end, or at least the end of this sinful existence), these events are linked. The God who created us (*John 1:1–3*) is the same God who will return and, in an instant, “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*), will bring about our ultimate redemption. In our beginning, indeed, we find our end.

This week, we will talk about the final of all final events, at least as far as our present world is concerned: the second coming of our Lord Jesus.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.

The Day of the Lord

However much we tend to think of the second coming of Jesus as a New Testament teaching alone, that's not true. Of course, only after the first coming of Jesus—after His death, resurrection, and ascension—were we given a fuller and richer revelation of the truth surrounding the Second Coming. But as with so much else in the New Testament, the Old Testament reveals hints and shadows of this crucial truth long before it will happen. With the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus, the New Testament authors didn't reveal a new truth; instead, they greatly enhanced a truth that already had been revealed in the Bible. Only now, in light of the crucified and risen Savior, can the promise of the Second Coming be understood and appreciated more fully.

Read the following texts. What do they teach us about the second coming of Jesus? *Isa. 13:6, 9; Zech. 14:9; Dan. 12:1.*

There is no question that the “day of the LORD” will be a day of destruction and sorrow and turmoil for the lost. But it is also a day of deliverance for all of God's people, those who are “found written in the book” (*see also Phil. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:8*). This theme—that of the “day of the LORD” as a time of judgment against the wicked but also a time when God's faithful are protected and rewarded—is found first in the Old Testament. For instance, although some will face the “LORD's fierce anger,” those who heed the call to “seek righteousness” and “seek humility” will “be hidden / In the day of the LORD's anger” (*Zeph. 2:1–3, NKJV*).

Read Matthew 24:30, 31. In what way do these verses show this same great dichotomy between the lost and the saved at the second coming of Jesus?

As final events unfold, the side we are on will only become more apparent. What choices can and must we make now to make sure we're on the right side?

Daniel and the Second Coming of Jesus

Although many Jews in the time of Jesus expected the Messiah to overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as the most powerful nation of all, that's not what the advents of Jesus, either the first or second, were to be about. Instead, God had something so much bigger in store for His faithful people than just a rearrangement of the old sinful and fallen world.

Perhaps nothing else in the Old Testament reveals as clearly as does Daniel 2 the truth that the new world does not grow out of the old one, but instead is a new and radically different creation.

Daniel 2 shows the rise and fall of four great world empires—Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and then finally Rome, which then breaks up into the nations of modern Europe. However, the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (symbolizing the succession of these four major world powers) ends in a spectacular way. It does so in order to show the great disconnect between this world and the one that will come after the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45. What do these verses teach about the fate of this world and the nature of the new one?

These verses leave little ambiguity about what happens when Jesus returns. In Luke 20:17, 18, Jesus identified Himself with this stone, which crushed to powder all that was left of this world. The Aramaic of Daniel 2:35 says that after the gold, silver, clay, iron, and bronze were crushed, they “became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them.” That is, nothing is left of this old world after Jesus returns.

Meanwhile, the stone that destroyed all trace of this old world “became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.” And this kingdom, which arises as a result of the Second Coming, is one that “‘shall never be destroyed,’ ” and “ ‘it shall stand forever’ ” (*Dan. 2:44, NRSV*).

In other words, only one of two endings awaits every human being who has ever lived on this planet. Either we will be with Jesus for eternity, or we will disappear into nothingness with the chaff of this old world. One way or another, eternity awaits us all.

Long-Term Prospects

Read Titus 2:13. What great hope do we have, and why?

Describing his beliefs about the origins of our universe, a lecturer explained that about 13 billion years ago “an infinitely dense tiny mass popped out of nothing, and that mass exploded, and from that explosion our universe came into existence.” Just how this “infinitely dense tiny mass” could just pop out of nothing, the lecturer didn’t say. He just assumed, by faith, that it did.

Now as we noted in the introduction to this week’s lesson, in our origins we find our endings. This is why, according to this lecturer, our endings aren’t too hopeful, at least in the long run. The universe, created from this “infinitely dense tiny mass,” is doomed to eventual extinction, along with all that is in it, which includes humanity, of course.

In contrast, the biblical concept of our origins is not only much more logical than this view but also much more hopeful. Thanks to the God of origins, our long-term prospects are very good. We have so much to be hopeful for in the future, and this hope rests on the promise of Jesus’ second coming.

Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8. What is Paul talking about here, and in what is he putting his hope?

Although Paul is soon to be executed, he lives in assurance of salvation and the hope of Christ’s return, which Paul calls “His appearing” (*2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV*). A “crown of righteousness” awaits him, certainly not his own righteousness (*1 Tim. 1:15*) but the righteousness of Jesus, upon which Paul knows his hope in the promise of the Second Coming rests. Regardless of his immediate circumstances, which are dismal at best (in jail, waiting to be executed), Paul knows his long-term prospects are very good. And that is because he is looking at the big picture, not focusing only on the immediate situation.

Regardless of your own immediate circumstances, how can you have the same hope as Paul did? How can we learn to look at the big picture and the hope it offers us?

In the Clouds of Heaven

However central and crucial the Second Coming is, according to the Bible, not all Christians see the event as a literal, personal return of Jesus Himself. Some argue, for instance, that the second coming of Jesus occurs not when Christ Himself returns to earth but when His Spirit is made manifest in His church on earth. In other words, Christ's second coming is accomplished when the moral principles of Christianity are revealed in His people.

How thankful we can be, however, that this teaching is false. If it were true, what long-term hope would we really have?

Read the following New Testament texts about the Second Coming. What do they reveal about the nature of Christ's return?

Matt. 24:30 _____

1 Thess. 4:16 _____

Matt. 26:64 _____

Rev. 1:7 _____

2Thess. 1:7–10 _____

“The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness are swallowed up by the angry waters. Babylon the great has come in remembrance before God, ‘to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.

The return of Jesus will be such a massive event that it literally will bring the world as we know it to an end. When it happens, everyone will know it, too. What Jesus accomplished for us at the first coming fully will be made manifest at the second.

How should living with the reality of the Second Coming impact how we live now? How should it help us to remember what the really important things in life are?

The Living and the Dead

Before raising His friend Lazarus from the tomb, Jesus uttered these words: “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*). But rather than just asking people to take His word about such an incredible claim, He then proceeded to raise Lazarus from death, who had been dead long enough for the corpse to start stinking (*John 11:39*).

Those who believe in Jesus do, indeed, die. However, as Jesus said, though they may die, they will live again. This is what the resurrection of the dead is all about. And this is what makes the second coming of Jesus so central to all our hopes.

According to these texts, what happens to the dead in Christ when Jesus returns? *Rom. 6:5; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:42–44, 53–55.*

The great hope of the Second Coming is that the resurrection from the dead that Jesus Himself experienced will be what His faithful followers of all the ages will experience, as well. In His resurrection they have the hope and assurance of their own.

What happens to those who are alive when Jesus returns? *Phil. 3:21, 1 Thess. 4:17.*

The faithful ones alive when Jesus returns will retain a physical body, but not in its present state. It will be supernaturally transformed into the same kind of incorruptible body that the ones raised from the dead will have, as well. “The living righteous are changed ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.’ At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

Make a list of all the things of this world that are so important to you that you would rather sacrifice eternal life in order to retain them. What’s on the list?

Further Thought: The second coming of Jesus isn't the epilogue, the appendix, or the afterword to the sad story of human sin and suffering in this fallen world. Instead, the Second Coming is the grand climax, the great hope of the Christian's faith. Without it, what would we have? The story of humanity just would go on and on, one miserable scene after another, one tragedy after another, until it all ends in death. Apart from the hope that Christ's return offers us, life is, as William Shakespeare wrote, "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing." And yet, we have this hope because the Word of God confirms it for us, again and again. We have this hope because Jesus ransomed us with His life (*Mark 10:45*), and Jesus is indeed coming back to get what He paid for. The stars in the heavens don't speak to us of the Second Coming. The birds chirping in the trees don't herald it. In and of themselves, these things might point to something good, something hopeful, about reality itself. But they don't teach us that one day, when Jesus returns, "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*). They don't teach us that one day we will look up and "see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*). No, we know these things because they have been told to us in the Word of God, and we trust in what the Word promises us.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Think about what it would mean if the second coming of Jesus really were nothing more than what some believe it is: the full expression of Christian principles in the lives of Christ's followers. However wonderful a display that would be, why, in the end, does it leave us without any hope?
- ② Why is the currently popular idea that the universe arose from nothing such a silly idea? Why would people promote such a notion, and why do some believe it? Why is belief in an eternally existing God, who created all things, so much more logical and rational an explanation for the universe?
- ③ Share with your class the things you put on a list of what you find so important in this life that you would sacrifice the hope of eternity in order to keep them. What can you learn from one another about the contents of the lists? If people have nothing on their lists, how can we make sure, then, that nothing in our lives is truly keeping us from salvation, as will be the case with many people?

“Hunter of Souls”

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Danny Whatley was on top of the world—and not just because he worked as a bush pilot in the U.S. state of Alaska.

Danny owned a thriving tour company that offered private hunting trips to the world’s movers and shakers. Clients included Citibank’s president and the Rockefeller family.

“I wanted to be in the elite,” Danny said. “I did not want to be a regular person. I loved those people.”

But then he received a copy of *The Great Controversy*. Danny had dated a former Seventh-day Adventist and through her started playing basketball and volleyball at the Adventist church in his hometown, Palmer. A church member gave him the book.

Danny took the book with him on his next bush trip and read how the seventh-day Sabbath was changed to Sunday. He never had heard of author Ellen G. White, but he instantly felt convicted that this was truth.

Back in Palmer, Danny was preparing for the hunting season when church members invited him to an evangelistic series. The opening presentation about the Daniel 2 prophecy captivated him.

“I was hooked right away,” he said. “People who say evangelism doesn’t work have never been on the receiving end of an evangelism series.”

The next night, Danny brought his father.

When the preacher, Vern Snow, spoke about baptism one night, a battle broke out in Danny’s mind. He didn’t want to lose clients because of the Sabbath.

“The battle went on for the whole meeting,” Danny said. “At the end, I had to make a decision. I went to Vern and said, ‘I want to be baptized.’ ”

At that moment, he surrendered everything, including his business, to Jesus.

“I was a hunting guy who could do it all on my own, and now I realized that I could not do it all on my own,” he said.

At the baptism, the pastor declared, “Here is a trophy hunter who is now a hunter of souls.”

Danny’s father and stepmother were baptized the following Sabbath. Other people also have joined the church through Danny’s influence.



At work, Danny told clients that they could no longer hunt on Saturdays. Instead, he said, they could enjoy the day in nature at no cost. With trips costing \$1,500 a day, clients happily embraced the new pricing plan.

Two years later, Danny sold his flourishing business. He also lost his desire to be in the elite.

“I had wanted to travel like them,” said Danny (pictured left), today a successful serial entrepreneur. “But now I go on mission trips, which are much better.”

Many historians believe the three most crucial decades in world history occurred when a small group of men, mostly Jews under the power of the Holy Spirit, took the gospel to the world. Acts is an account of those crucial decades, which spanned from Jesus' resurrection in A.D. 31 to the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 62. Acts deals with the formative period of the early church, in which there was considerable growth. This can be seen in the way the church dealt with questions concerning the time of Jesus' second coming, the status of the Gentiles, and the role of faith for salvation. What the early church accomplished in such a short period of time stands as a perpetual testimony of what God can do through those who humble their hearts in prayer, live beyond individual differences, and let themselves be used by the Spirit for God's honor and glory. This quarter's guide, *The Book of Acts* by Wilson Paroschi, examines the story of those called by God to start the work. We will reflect on what we, those who have been called by God to finish the work, can learn from their story.

Lesson 1—You Will Be My Witnesses

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Restoration of Israel** (*Acts 1:6, 7*)

MONDAY: **The Disciples' Mission** (*Acts 1:8*)

TUESDAY: **He Will Come Again** (*Acts 1:9–11*)

WEDNESDAY: **Preparing for Pentecost** (*Acts 1:12–14*)

THURSDAY: **The Twelfth Apostle** (*Acts 1:21, 22*)

Memory Text—*Acts 1:8, NRSV*

Sabbath Gem: The disciples are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower and lead them on a mission that would reach the ends of the earth.

Lesson 2—Pentecost

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Coming of the Spirit** (*Acts 2:1–3*)

MONDAY: **The Gift of Tongues** (*Acts 2:5–12*)

TUESDAY: **Peter's Sermon** (*Acts 2:22–32*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Exaltation of Jesus** (*Acts 2:33–36*)

THURSDAY: **The Firstfruits** (*Acts 2:38, 39*)

Memory Text—*Acts 2:32, 33, NRSV*

Sabbath Gem: Following Jesus' ascension and His exaltation in heaven, this outpouring of the Spirit was a supernatural event that transformed the apostles from simple and obscure Galileans into men of conviction and courage who changed the world.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.