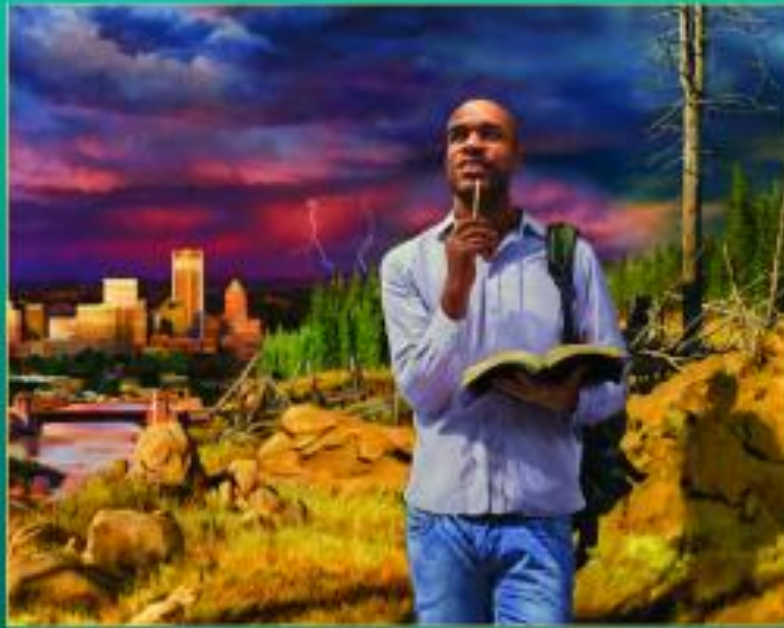


Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide  
April | May | June 2018

# PREPARATION FOR THE END TIME



  
SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

## 2nd Quarter 2018- Preparation for the End Time

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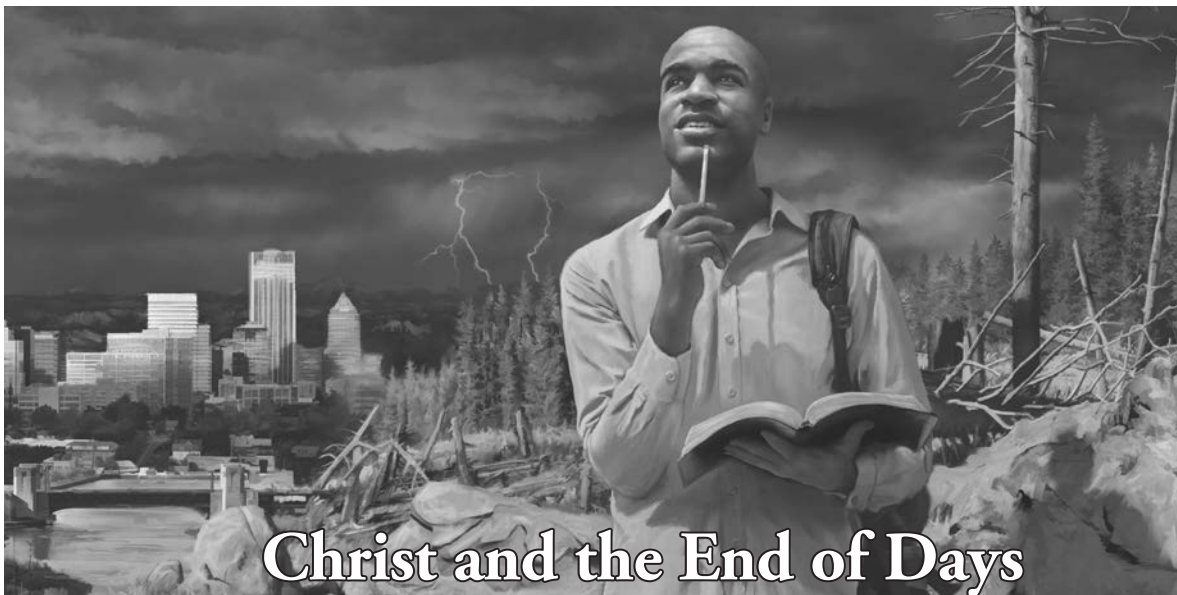
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In the final hours of Jesus' earthly sojourn in human flesh, He spoke these words of comfort to the disciples:

“ ‘Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know’ ” (*John 14:1–4, NKJV*).

Though they certainly didn't understand fully the meaning of what He said nor the time in which His promise would be fulfilled, the men surely drew comfort from Jesus' words. *A room in His Father's house? A place that Jesus Himself was preparing for them?* Surely this would be better than wherever they might find themselves in this world now.

Indeed, not too long before, as He sat with the disciples, Jesus gave them a quick survey of what would happen before He returned. It was kind of a history of the future, and it was not pretty. Wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, famines, and earthquakes were all, Jesus said, just “the beginning of sorrows” (*Matt. 24:8*). Persecutions, betrayals, deceptions, and trials were on the horizon, as well.

Today, from our vantage point in the flow of history, we can see that nearly all of what Jesus warned about has come to pass, and just as He predicted, too. We can see the fulfillment of two major time prophecies, as well. The first is the “time and times

and the dividing of time” of Daniel 7:25 (*see also Rev. 12:6, 14; 13:5; Num. 14:34*), which began in the sixth century A.D. (A.D. 538) and ended in the late eighteenth century (A.D. 1798). Then, too, the longest time prophecy, the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14, which reached its fulfillment in the year 1844.

Surely, then, we are now living in “the end of the days” (*Dan. 12:13*). But not only do we not know when the end—climaxing with the second coming of Jesus—will come, we don’t need to know. We need to know only that it will come and that when it does, we must be prepared.

How? Perhaps the best answer is found in this text: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (*Col. 2:6, NKJV*). In other words, with so many world events, so many headlines, and so many theories about end times, it’s easy to get diverted, focusing too much on the things that we think are leading to Christ’s coming instead of on Christ Himself, who alone is the key to our preparation.

*The more we focus  
on Jesus, the more  
we become like  
Him, and the more  
we obey Him, the  
more prepared we  
will be for all that  
awaits.*

This quarter the focus is on the end time, but not totally. The real focus is on Jesus, but in the context of the last days and how to be prepared for them. Yes, we need to look at historical dates, at world events, at history itself, because the Bible talks about them in relation to the end. But even in this context, the Bible talks about Jesus—about who He is, what He has done for us, what He does in us, and what He will do when He does return. Christ and Him crucified must be the center of our faith; or, as Paul said: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (*1 Cor. 2:2, NKJV*). The more that we focus on Him, the more we become like Him, the more we obey Him, and the more prepared we will be for all that awaits us, both in the immediate future and in the end, the day when we do enter “the place” that Jesus has prepared for those who love Him.

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

## Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.

# The Cosmic Controversy



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## 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*).

**T**he 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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?**

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## 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?**

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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?**

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## 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.*)**

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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?

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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 Thought:** 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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*Benjie Leach is a volunteer home health chaplain in Fort Worth, Texas.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** *Ezekiel 28:14, 15; Revelation 12:17*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Realize the scope of the conflict between God and Satan and the tragedy that involves humankind.

**Feel:** Trust in God's faithfulness to help him or her in the daily struggles against evil.

**Do:** Commit his or her life to God out of love and obey His commandments.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Cosmic Scope of the Great Controversy**

- A** What is the impact of evil in the world and in the universe?
- B** Where and why did evil start?
- C** What is God's strategy to save humankind from the tragedy of evil?

**II. Feel: God's Love in My Life**

- A** What promise did Jesus give to His disciples to maintain their hope until the end?
- B** What assurance did Jesus give to His disciples that their hearts might not be troubled?
- C** Do these promises imply that God's disciples will be spared from troubles? Why, or why not?

**III. Do: The Human Response**

- A** How should humans respond to God's love for them?
- B** Why is the attention to the law of God the only logical response to God's grace?
- C** How does our hope for eternity and our relationship with the infinite God relate to our limited faithfulness and obedience to God?

► **Summary:** Only the cosmic solution of another world is appropriate to solve the cosmic problem of this one. The way we conduct our lives should point to this other world.

## *Learning Cycle*

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *John 14:1–4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Waiting for the coming of Christ at the end of days is not just a doctrine or even a way to find comfort or hope in our miseries. While it is all these things, it is, first and foremost, the longing for meeting Christ face-to-face. This hope for His coming is at the heart of our spiritual life. But this hope contains a paradox. The more we live with Him, the closer our relationship with Him will become. Yet, the closer we are to Him, the more we will long for His physical and personal presence in His kingdom.

**Just for Teachers:** This week's lesson introduces the topic of the "great controversy," which affects the whole universe. The connection between heaven and earth should bring the hope of the future coming of the Christ's heavenly kingdom into our present lives. This belief is much more than simply getting a better life and enjoying a nicer house in the perfect kingdom of God. While those benefits are implied, the hope of Christ's coming kingdom is primarily about the Person of Jesus Christ, who loves us and whom we love and with whom we shall coexist for eternity. Jesus gives the reason He prepares a place for us—that "you also may be where I am" (*John 14:3, NIV*). The life of the Christian should, therefore, point to that kingdom and to that Person.

**Opening Discussion:** A rabbi of the fifteenth century, the Maharal of Prague, compared the believer to an upside-down tree, rooted in heaven but blossoming and bearing fruit on earth. So, the Christian should have his or her roots in heaven and bear fruit and flowers on earth that witness of heaven. The Christian's words, acts, and way of life should awaken in those around him or her the profound need and the intense desire for the kingdom of heaven. In a sense, as Christians and Seventh-day Adventists, we are responsible for kindling within those around us the hope in the "Advent."

**Questions for Discussion:** How is heaven related to earth? How can a Christian's way of life suggest the beauty and the atmosphere of heaven to others? What spiritual lessons can we learn from the contemplation of the stars and of the infinite dimension of the universe (*Ps. 8:3, 4*)? Why was it necessary for the great God of the universe to leave heaven to dwell on earth (*John 3:31–36*)?



## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s study confronts us with the drama of the great controversy, which began in heaven with the rebellion of Lucifer and then shifted to planet Earth with the Fall of our first parents. It begins to end with the incarnation of God, who came to live among us in order to prepare us for the heavenly kingdom of God at the end of time. Encourage your students to think over and wonder about the powerful significance of these events.

### Bible Commentary

**I. The Origin of Evil** (*Review Ezekiel 28:2, 11–17; Isaiah 14:12–14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:7 with your class.*)

The biblical texts that speak about the origin of evil are very few and brief. Ezekiel simply tells us that evil happened suddenly, but he does not give any explanation: “‘Iniquity was found in you [Lucifer, symbolized in Ezekiel’s passage by the King of Tyre]’ ” (*Ezek. 28:15, NKJV*). God had nothing to do with the creation of that iniquity. Nothing in this angelic being could have presaged his fall. In fact, God had “created” Lucifer “perfect” (*Ezek. 28:15*) and “full of wisdom” (*Ezek. 28:12*). God even had placed him in the heavenly “Eden the garden of God” (*Ezek. 28:13*), which means that God had “‘established’ ” Lucifer “‘on the holy mountain of God’ ” in the heavenly temple where he “‘walked back and forth’ ” (*Ezek. 28:14, NKJV*).

The absurd process of how evil originated is suggested by the biblical text. Evil started in the intimacy of Lucifer’s mind; his “heart was lifted up” (*Ezek. 28:17; compare with Ezek. 28:2*). He thought that he was a god (*Ezek. 28:2*). The prophet Isaiah describes the same thought process in Lucifer (*Isa. 14:13*); here also, Lucifer has the ambition to sit on the holy mountain, and even to become “like the most High” (*Isa. 14:13, 14*).

What happened in heaven became the blueprint for the inception of iniquity on earth among humans. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created perfect, as Lucifer was. They were made “in the image of God.” God put them in Eden. The argument employed by the serpent, i.e. Satan, to convince Eve to sin reminds us of the self-deception and temptation of pride that led to Satan’s own fall: “‘You will be like God’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*). Thus, humans fooled themselves and entertained the illusion that they would reach the divine status of wisdom (*Gen. 3:6*). In heaven and on earth, the coming of evil happened against God’s plans—an anomaly, which has no explanation whatsoever and cannot be understood. As Paul calls it, the existence of evil is “the mystery of iniquity” (*2 Thess. 2:7*).

**Consider This:** In what sense is the origin of iniquity a mystery? What examples in history can you think of that illustrate the “absurd” nature of evil? On a smaller scale, in what ways have you observed the irrational character of evil in your own behavior? Share an example of a time you were the victim of the irrational injustice of evil.

## II. The Product of Evil *(Review Revelation 12:1–17 and Genesis 3:15 with your class.)*

As soon as evil erupted, war broke out in heaven and then on earth. The book of Revelation reports briefly on the war in heaven between the angels of Satan and God’s angels (*Rev. 12:7*). The text does not elaborate on the nature and the scenario of this celestial war. We simply are told that the camp of Satan lost the battle and was cast out of heaven to the earth (*Rev. 12:13; compare with verse 4*). The war, also known as the great controversy, then shifts its main focus to earth, where the next conflict takes place between Satan (“the dragon”) and God’s people (“the woman”), who gives birth to the Messiah (*Rev. 12:13*). Then Satan attacks “the woman” again. She flees into the wilderness and suffers persecution for “a time, and times, and half a time” (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV; compare with Rev. 12:6, 14*). Satan then turns against “the rest” of God’s people and attacks them (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Why is the Bible so reticent on the scenario concerning the origin of evil in heaven? Why is church history the focus of the prophetic vision in Revelation 12?

## III. The Solution to Evil *(Review Genesis 3:15 and Philippians 2:6–8 with your class.)*

The continuation of the great controversy here on earth also involves the God of heaven. Evil started with the aberration of a being who wanted to take God’s place. Ironically, the solution by which God chose to confront evil was through a reversal of divine status. God, the Omnipotent and Everlasting, became human—a carpenter’s son—and died a criminal’s death to save humankind. The divine intention to save humanity is described in the first prophecy of the Bible in which God addresses the serpent in terms of a war (*Gen. 3:15*). The apostle Paul catches the gist of the whole plot: Christ, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (*Phil. 2:6–8, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Why, in the process of salvation, is the event of the Cross enough to save us? What is the relationship between the gospel of the cross, which shows God’s love and grace for us, and our hope for the future kingdom of God?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss with your students the complementary relationship between the Cross and the kingdom of God. Ask the question, “How do you know you are saved?” Challenge each of your students to think carefully about their answers. Why is it impossible without the Cross to have access to God’s kingdom? Further explore your answer to the penultimate question asked at the close of the commentary section: Why is the Cross enough for salvation?

#### Thought/Application Questions:

- ❶ Discuss this practical principle: knowing the end of the journey helps to orient us on that journey.
- ❷ What is the relationship between obedience to the commandments of God and “the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*), who saves us by grace?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following story:

“A man found a wonderful trumpet for sale in the local marketplace.

“The salesman boasted of its magical properties. ‘This trumpet,’ he said, ‘has wonderful power. It can extinguish any fire. Just blow into the trumpet, and immediately the fire will be mastered.’

“The man was intrigued and bought the trumpet. As soon as he arrived home, he immediately decided to test the power of the trumpet. He set his house on fire and then started to blow into the trumpet. Unfortunately, and to his bewilderment, the fire kept burning, and the trumpet had no effect on it.

“Desperate, he ran back to the market and caught the salesman who had sold him the trumpet. He exclaimed that the trumpet was not working. . . . The salesman then explained that the function of the trumpet was not to put fires out but to warn others that there was a fire so that they would come and control it.”—Adapted from Jacques B. Doukhan, *Proverbs* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2014), p. 25.

**Activity:** Turn this story into a dramatic sketch to be performed by some of your students. At the end of the performance, ask your students what relation it has to the coming of Christ and the end of the world. Have they ever behaved like this foolish trumpet player?

# Daniel *and the* End Time



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## 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*).

**T**he 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.**

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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?**

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## 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?

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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*.**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?**

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## 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.*

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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?**

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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?

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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.

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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?

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

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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?

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**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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## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 1:20*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize his or her responsibility as a witness to God in the world.

**Feel:** Foster love and respect toward others and inspire the same from them.

**Do:** Remain faithful to God and to himself or herself without compromise.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: You Shall Be Witnesses to the End of the Earth.**

- A** Why was Daniel a witness?
- B** In what ways was Daniel a witness?
- C** How did the chief of the eunuchs respond to Daniel's testimony?

**II. Feel: To Love God Is to Love Man.**

- A** Explain Jesus' call to hate one's parents (*Luke 14:26*).
- B** How can you show love to your parents or your friends who do not believe in God?
- C** Why is the witness for truth who loves, and is loved, more effective than the witness who is concerned only with the truth?

**III. Do: To Be Human and Holy**

- A** How can I keep the balance between the duty to be faithful to God's commandments and my relationship with my friends and family who do not share my values?
- B** Why is it not possible to truly love people without being holy?

► **Summary:** The example of Jesus, who became human without making any compromise, is a challenging model for the Christian and especially the Seventh-day Adventist who lives in the world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Daniel 1:15, 17*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God wants His people to share with the world the truth of His kingdom. The question that often confronts us in fulfilling that mandate concerns the methods we should use to communicate that truth. In the book of Daniel, we learn that the truth is related to the form that channels it. The literary forms of a given book often express its profoundest and richest message. Daniel himself embodied this principle. His personal relationship with people around him, the way he approached them, the way he ate and drank, even the way he presented himself, was not dissociated from the spiritual message he carried.

**Just for Teachers:** This week's lesson will teach us how to be witnesses in a world that is far from God and even hostile to Him. Like Daniel, we are in exile, testifying to a kingdom that is not visible and is not popular. We will learn from the examples of Daniel and his three friends, who stood faithful to their God while serving the king. We will learn about the challenges they met in their secular context and their methods of witnessing. We will also learn about their spiritual lives and the way they were able to bring their hope concretely into their daily lives.

**Opening Discussion:** The book of Daniel is particularly important for Seventh-day Adventists; and yet, this book contains some of the truths that make us different from most people (including other Christians) and, in some respects, make us unique in our society. Unfortunately, this book has attracted extremists on the religious fringe. The paradox is that the book of Daniel is one of the most universal books of the Bible. It brings the only hope that people need, especially in our day.

**Questions for Discussion:**

- ❶ Why is the book of Daniel often ignored?
- ❷ What is the message of hope that comes from the book of Daniel?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** As Seventh-day Adventists, we often assume we know the book of Daniel well. To avoid repeating old clichés, suggest to the students of this lesson that they approach the book of Daniel

as if for the first time. They should aim to refresh their reading of the book and discover new insights and new paths into its prophecies. Such discovery and rich insight are implicitly promised to those reading it in the last days, because the book is described as remaining sealed until the time of the end (*Dan. 12:9*).

## Bible Commentary

### I. To Be Loved by the Enemy (*Review Daniel 1:9 with your class.*)

When Daniel determined to remain faithful to God, a miracle took place: “God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs” (*Dan. 1:9, ESV*). It is interesting that God inspired love and respect in the heart of the enemy *immediately* after Daniel decided *not* to compromise.

This verse suggests two lessons. First, God did not make a miracle happen before Daniel and the three Hebrews risked their lives. Thus, Daniel did not suddenly find perfect meals on his table before the test of his loyalty to God. Although God may sometimes facilitate our walk with Him and “guideth [us] in straight paths” (*Ps. 23:3, JPS*), in many cases, the reality is that life, more often than not, confronts us with situations that oppose our principles.

Second, to be faithful to God does not mean treating unkindly the men and women of the world. Although Daniel decided to be different and to refuse the invitation of the king, he remained respectful and pleasant to the chief of the eunuchs, and he approached him with humility (*Dan. 1:8, 12*). It is also intriguing that the verse does not refer to Daniel’s love and respect toward his master. It is not enough to love our enemies; we should also inspire love in their hearts, which is evidence that our love is genuine.

**Consider This:** Why do our neighbors’ positive feelings toward us often provide the most fertile ground from which to witness to those same neighbors?

### II. The Silent Witness (*Review Daniel 3:26–28; 2:11, 21 with your class.*)

The most eloquent testimony of one’s faith in God is the life one leads. The three Hebrews’ only testimony was their survival from the fire of the furnace. Note that they did not draw attention to themselves. They did not even speak. The text simply tells us that they “came from the midst of the fire” (*Dan. 3:26, NKJV*). The focus was on God. This les-



son is the primary one that Nebuchadnezzar retained from that dramatic miracle: “ ‘Blessed be the God . . . who . . . delivered His servants’ ” (*Dan. 3:28, NKJV*). The reference to the witness was secondary: “ ‘who trusted in Him’ ” (*Dan. 3:28, NKJV*). And even then, the stress is on “Him.” This case illustrates the method of witnessing that is promoted in the book of Daniel. It is not about oneself but about God. The three Hebrews did not boast about themselves (“Look what God has done for me!”). God alone received the glory (*1 Cor. 1:31*).

**Consider This:** Think of a time that you felt frustrated that someone was rewarded for work you had done, or that his or her work, which was less important than yours, received recognition, while yours was ignored. How did that experience make you feel? Meditate and discuss with the class this issue within the framework of Ecclesiastes 9:11.

### III. Worship at Stake (*Review Daniel 3:7, 8:11 with your class.*)

Precisely because Daniel lives in exile (far from Jerusalem) and serves in a pagan court, the issue of “worship” is central to the book of Daniel. This issue already is obvious in the first test of faithfulness, which involves eating and drinking. It is highly significant that Daniel alludes to a verse of the biblical text of Creation when he is concerned with his food (*Dan. 1:12; compare with Gen. 1:29*).

The second test of faithfulness takes place when the Israelites are commanded to worship the golden statue that the king has erected. The golden statue that Nebuchadnezzar has “set up” refers back to the statue of his dream, which concluded with the divine promise that God will “set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed” (*Dan. 2:44*). In Nebuchadnezzar’s mind the kingdom of Babylon has thus replaced the kingdom of God. This ideology reminds us of the foolishness of the builders of the Tower of Babel, who wanted to take God’s place (*Gen. 11:4*). Further into the book of Daniel, the “little horn” (*Dan. 8:9*) and the “king of the North” (*Dan. 11:16, NKJV*) will display the same mentality (*Dan. 8:11, 11:31*). In counterpoint to these cases of false worship, the book of Daniel is punctuated with seven prayers by Daniel, the three Hebrews, and King Nebuchadnezzar. The book of Daniel ends with a blessing (*Dan. 12:12*), a feature that is specific to many biblical prayers (*Ps. 1:1, 119:1, Rev. 1:3*).

**Consider This:** On the basis of the text of Daniel 3, list the characteristics of false worship and true worship. How does music play a role in false worship? How is prayer related to the study of God’s Word (*Dan. 9:2, 3*)?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** It is troubling how our times of advanced knowledge and skepticism have been associated with naïve superstitions and all kinds of strange beliefs. On the other hand, the rise of religious fanaticism has produced violence and generated illusions and entertained false certitudes and hopes. Having rejected the true God of heaven, humans search in themselves for a solution to their tragic conditions.

#### Application Questions:

Apply the principles we've learned thus far from the book of Daniel to the situation of our times and discuss the following questions:

- ❶ Why is the book of Daniel relevant to our times? Why is the issue of eating and drinking an important issue?
- ❷ What is the prophetic significance of the little horn's claim for worship? How can we communicate this difficult denunciation from the book of Daniel without alienating people?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** There are many common points, as well as differences, between the time of Daniel and our time. In the time of Daniel, people were fundamentally religious; and yet, they were pagans. Today, people are not pagans, but they are not religious. How can we cope with this difference? Why are many people suspicious of churches and the Christian faith? What lessons could we learn from Daniel to help us to deal with these powerful movements?

#### Activities:

- ❶ Divide your class into seven groups, if possible, and assign one prayer of Daniel to each group. (Where classes are smaller in number, assign multiple prayers to each group.) Instruct each group to note what impressed them the most in that prayer. Then invite these groups to report on and compare reactions.
- ❷ Why is it often difficult to reach powerful, wealthy, or highly educated people? (Focus on the issue of our method of communication rather than on blaming them to justify our inabilities.) Why was Daniel able to reach the powerful and the highly educated? And what can you take away from his methods?

# Jesus and the Book of Revelation



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## 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?

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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?

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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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Rev. 1:18 \_\_\_\_\_

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Rev. 5:8 \_\_\_\_\_

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Rev. 19:11–15 \_\_\_\_\_

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Rev. 21:6 \_\_\_\_\_

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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.

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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*)?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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“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?




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## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Revelation 1:1*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Comprehend the purpose and the structure of the book of Revelation, and understand the central role of Jesus in the history of salvation.

**Feel:** Draw nearer to and relate to Jesus Christ, who reveals Himself in His Word, in history, and in the personal life of the believer.

**Do:** Listen to the Word of God and obey His instructions, and place God in the beginning and at the end of all his or her projects.

► **Learning Outline:**

### **I. Know: The Central Idea of the Book of Revelation**

- A** Why is the last book of the Bible entitled “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”?
- B** How is the book of Revelation related to the book of Daniel?
- C** What can the structure of the book of Revelation teach us?

### **II. Feel: Jesus in You**

- A** Why and how does Jesus help me to draw near to God?
- B** Why should my religion be related to my daily life?
- C** How does the Revelation of Jesus Christ help me to love God?

### **III. Do: To Hear Is to Obey.**

- A** What is the sign that you have understood the Revelation of Jesus Christ?
- B** How do you begin and end your days?
- C** What are your priorities in your projects?

► **Summary:** The book of Revelation is not only interesting and intriguing because it deals with the mysteries of God; it is also concrete and relevant because it concerns your life and the destiny of the world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

#### **Spotlight on Scripture:** *Revelation 1:3*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The key to the book of Revelation does not depend solely on your ability and your skills to unlock its symbols. It also lies in the way in which you respond to God's calling in this book to repent and serve the Lord. Conversely, your good intentions to be pious and to please the Lord should be enlightened and guided by your diligent and attentive study of the Word of God.

**Just for Teachers:** From the outset, the book of Revelation outlines the methodological principles that should characterize any approach to this book. We are urged to “read,” “hear,” and “keep.” Reading is the first and fundamental step. The truth is not found in ourselves; it has to be found in a text that has been inspired by God. It is defined as a “prophecy” to be “heard.”

In Hebrew, the verb “hear” has a double meaning; it first means “understand” (*1 Kings 3:9, Neh. 8:3, Rev. 2:7*), which implies that our intelligence, our intellectual effort, is required. But “hear” also means “obey,” which implies that we should be willing to turn our understanding into actions and respond to God positively. The third verb “keep” reminds us that spiritual life is a continuous and repetitive process: we must maintain, fresh in our minds and hearts, what we have read and heard. Hence, the repetition of this principle at the end of the book (*Rev. 22:7*).

**Opening Discussion:** Note that the first verb, “read,” is in the singular, while the other two verbs are in the plural: implicit in the grammar is the idea that there is one reader and several listeners. The multiplicity of listeners, included without question in the plural form, suggests that the book of Revelation belongs to a worship context. Thus, we should not read it alone. Discuss with your students what principles and truths this worship, and collective, setting implies.

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- ❶ Why is it important to read the book of Revelation in the company of like-minded seekers of the truth?
- ❷ What skills and emotions does this group reading imply?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Three fundamental requirements should prepare the students of your class to engage and stay on the right track in deciphering the book of Revelation: (1) the important connection of the book of Revelation with the Old Testament, and in particular, with the book of Daniel; (2) the general structure of the book; and (3) the focus on the Person of Jesus Christ.

### Bible Commentary

#### I. The Most Hebrew Book of the New Testament (*Review Revelation 1:4 and Exodus 3:14 with your class.*)

The book of Revelation could be considered the book of the New Testament closest to the Old Testament. We may count 2,000 allusions to the Old Testament, including 400 explicit references and 90 quotations of the Pentateuch and the Prophets. This book is so anchored in Hebrew that it has been said that it can “barely be understood by anyone who isn’t proficient in Hebrew.” John opens his message to the seven churches with a greeting originating in the God of the Old Testament. The *shalom* comes from “Him who is,” a phrase that defines the God Yahweh, who reveals Himself to Moses at the burning bush (*Exod. 3:14, NKJV*).

But the book that is by far the most present in Revelation is the book of Daniel. The first word of the book, “revelation,” is a keyword of the book of Daniel, where it also introduces his prophetic visions (*Dan. 2:19, 28, 29, 30, 47; 10:1*). The book of Revelation begins the way that Daniel ends, with a blessing, as if Revelation were understood by John to be Daniel’s continuation. The book of Daniel ends with a blessing that is rooted in the waiting that points to “the end of the days” (*Dan. 12:12, 13, NKJV*), and the book of Revelation begins with a blessing that has the same horizon, “for the time is near” (*Rev. 1:3, NKJV*). Even the way John refers to himself to introduce his vision, “I, John” (*Rev. 1:9, NKJV*), echoes Daniel’s technical expression “I, Daniel” that is used in the context of his visions (*Dan. 7:15; 8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5, NKJV*). All these observations in the first verses of the book of Revelation should encourage us to study the book in close connection to the Old Testament and to the book of Daniel.

**Consider This:** What are the dangers of reading and studying the New Testament without taking into consideration its relationship to the Old Testament? How did the Christian church fail in this area? Why was the book

of Daniel the most popular book of the early Christians? What greeting did the early Christians create from their reading of the book of Daniel?

## II. The Illuminating Structure *(Review Revelation 11:19–14:5 with your class.)*

Like the book of Daniel, the book of Revelation is divided into two sections, and like the book of Daniel, the book of Revelation places at its center God's judgment in the end times and the coming of the Son of man (*Revelation 14; compare with Daniel 7*). The first part of the book of Revelation focuses on the history on earth from the time of John to the coming of Christ, while the second part of the book focuses on the history in heaven from the time of the coming of Christ to the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem.

In addition to this division into two parts, the structure of the book of Revelation relates also to the space and the times of the sanctuary. The space of the sanctuary is suggested by the progression of the apocalyptic vision from the sacrifice of Christ, which evokes the altar (*Rev. 1:5*); to the candlestick, which evokes the first apartment of the sanctuary, the "holy place" (*Rev. 1:10–18*); and then to the ark of the covenant, which evokes the second apartment of the sanctuary, the "most holy place" (*Rev. 11:19*). The times of the sanctuary are suggested by the allusions to the seven Jewish festivals that mark the rhythm of the progression of the vision, from Passover (*Rev. 1:12–20*) to the Feast of Tabernacles (*Rev. 21:1–8*). This multifold structure of the book of Revelation accounts for the rich and meaningful message that is conveyed there.

**Consider This:** What lessons may we infer from the connection between the sanctuary and the various parts of the book of Revelation? Why is the event of God's judgment located at the center of the books of Revelation and of Daniel? (Compare with the function of Leviticus 16 at the center of the Pentateuch.)

## III. Christ at the Center *(Review Revelation 1:5, 18; 3:21 with your class.)*

Jesus is present everywhere in the book of Revelation. He appears in the beginning to identify the essence of the book, "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" (*Rev. 1:1*), and to trace its very origin "from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead" (*Rev. 1:5, NKJV*). And He appears at the end of the book in the concluding grace (*Rev. 22:20*), in which we hear Him, again, as a witness speaking of His coming and in which we receive His grace in the meantime (*Rev. 22:20, 21*). Inside the book, the various aspects of Jesus Christ's ministry are referred to, namely, His role

as the Passover lamb, which provides salvation; His survival from death; His role as the One who walks within His church; and His final victory on the white horse as a glorious king (*Rev. 19:11–16*).

**Consider This:** Why is Jesus Christ central to the book of Revelation? What is the most important symbol that is used in the book of Revelation to represent Jesus Christ?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The book of Revelation is full of blood and seems to present God as a vengeful God. How can we reconcile these cruel descriptions with the notion of a good and loving God? Luther rejected the book of Revelation. How might such perceptions of violence have contributed toward his rejection? What important ethical lesson can we learn from the book of Revelation? Why is it important to know that God will judge humankind?

**Application Question:** Why, and how, should the book of Revelation affect your life?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The book of Revelation has often inspired fanaticism, perhaps, because it is read too often in isolation from other parts of the Bible. Why is it not wise to read the book of Revelation by itself? What other books of the Bible should be read along with the book of Revelation?

#### Activities:

① Ask members of your class to search out the various symbols in the book of Revelation.

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② Discuss with them their meaning and their relation to the symbols of the Old Testament.

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# Salvation *and the* End Time




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## 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?

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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?**

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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?**

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## 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*), and 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.*

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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?**

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## 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* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Joel 2:31, 32* \_\_\_\_\_

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*John 10:28* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Rom. 10:9–13* \_\_\_\_\_

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*1 John 5:11–13* \_\_\_\_\_

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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”?

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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?

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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 fishermen 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.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Daniel 12:13*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Rediscover God's love for humans and His plan to save them from death and evil.

**Feel:** Appreciate God's love, even though he or she does not deserve it.

**Do:** Trust and love God and love his or her neighbor in turn even if he or she does not see an immediate response.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: God's Salvation Is Beyond Me.**

- Ⓐ Why does God love you?
- Ⓑ Is it possible to understand God's love? Explain. What is God's love?
- Ⓒ What is the historical evidence of God's love for you?

**II. Feel: God's Love Is Real.**

- Ⓐ Why can I be sure of God's love?
- Ⓑ What did God do to make His love a reality?
- Ⓒ Is feeling the love of God enough to convince you that He loves you?

**III. Do: God's Love Is Contagious.**

- Ⓐ Why is loving your neighbor a sign that God has saved you?
- Ⓑ Why are you responsible for the salvation of your neighbor?
- Ⓒ Why does your faith in God help you to love your enemy?

► **Summary:** The reality of God's love is made manifest in His design to save humans in spite of themselves, and even though they do not deserve it.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 John 4:10*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The love of God is the only reason He saved humankind. The love of God is not made up of just emotions and nice words. What makes the biblical revelation of divine love unique and yet universal is that God did not reveal Himself through an emotional and mystical experience or through beautiful and insightful wisdom. God revealed Himself in the reality of history. It is because the good news of God's salvation is for everyone and because salvation is real that the crowning event of salvation can take place only at the end of human history.

**Just for Teachers:** The purpose of this lesson is to make God's love and His plan of salvation real to your students. Salvation cannot reach its ultimate fulfillment in this broken world, limited as it is by sinful human flesh. Therefore, salvation can happen only at the end of time. Although we are sure of salvation, all salvation depends on God, and so only the coming of Christ, at the end of days, will make the reality of salvation possible. Although we may experience miracles and blessings, these gifts are just sparks that suggest the reality of fire but are not the fire.

**Opening Discussion:** How does our experience of God's love in this present life help us to understand and imagine the ultimate fulfillment of God's salvation at the end of time? What in this life is evidence of the future kingdom of God?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ① Discuss with your class why having hope in the kingdom of God is important at the end of time.
- ② Why is salvation through Christ at the end of time the only possible salvation?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** In our secular societies, it is difficult to speak of the kingdom of God. This language sounds utopian. People are concerned with this earth and with this present life; they are largely materialists, interested only in the reality they can see and enjoy now. They are not interested in a vague kingdom, located in heaven, that will take place in a faraway future.

The challenge is to shake this group of people up—to awaken them to the need to be saved. This lesson will propose a strategy in three steps to reach this group. First and foremost, this group will need to discover God's love for them. Only then will they long for His kingdom, where they will live with Him; and only then will they be ready to believe in Him.

## Bible Commentary

### I. God Is Love (Review 1 John 4:8–10 and Exodus 34:5–7 with your class.)

God's salvation begins in His love. To speak of a kingdom of God and of the salvation of God to people who do not believe in God and have not experienced a loving relationship with Him is vain. A knowledge and experience of the love of God is, therefore, essential. And for that knowledge of God, we turn to His Word.

The whole Bible defines God as love. In the Old Testament, God's first action is Creation. God's love is not a response to what we could have done. God loved us even before we existed. This precedence of God's love over our love, which is simply our response to His love, is an affirmation of the way He saves us. God does not save us because of what we do but because of who He is. This belief is a part of Daniel's plea to God: " 'Do not delay for Your own sake' " (*Dan. 9:19, NKJV*). God does not save us because we love Him or because we obey Him. Salvation is not based on our merits, but "for His own sake." For this reason, God's proclamation of His love precedes and founds the gift of the law: " 'The LORD, the LORD God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth' " (*Exod. 34:6, NKJV*). And even in the law, God's action of salvation precedes the commandments: " 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' " (*Exod. 20:2, NKJV*).

We find this same quality of divine love in the New Testament: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). Christ died for us and loved us even when we were not lovable. He loved us, despite us. Love is also the characteristic of the Holy Spirit, who is called the "Comforter" (*John 14:16*)—that is, the One who consoles and embraces us when we grieve and when we suffer. The Greek word *parakletos*, "Comforter," is used in the Greek Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *nakhama*, meaning "console" (*Jer. 16:7, Hos. 13:14, Isa. 57:18*).

**Consider This:** What lesson can we learn about the process of salvation from the fact that God loved us first? Why did God give the Sabbath to humans, despite their not working with Him during the Creation week? In what ways is the Sabbath a sign of God's salvation by grace?

## II. Jesus Is Surety (*Review Hebrews 7:22 and Romans 10:13 with your class.*)

The reason one can be sure of salvation is that salvation depends on God. In a sense, our future salvation is related to the experience of our salvation in our present life. This double application of the kingdom of God is found in Jesus' address to the Pharisees and to His disciples. To the Pharisees, Jesus emphasizes the present and personal dimension of salvation: " 'the kingdom of God is within you' " (*Luke 17:21, NKJV*). But when Jesus speaks to His disciples, He refers to salvation as a future and universal event: " 'as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day' " (*Luke 17:24, NKJV*). The reason for this paradox is that the disciples, who already have Jesus in their hearts, look forward to His future coming. On the other hand, the Pharisees, who have not yet experienced the kingdom within themselves, simply feel they do not need the future kingdom of God. In fact, the closer Jesus is to us in our present life, the more we will be sure of His coming and the more we will long for it.

**Consider This:** Why is it impossible to be a good Christian who loves Jesus and not wait for the Second Coming? Why and how should the hope of the future kingdom of God affect our present life?

## III. God, From Everlasting to Everlasting (*Review Psalm 90:2 and Revelation 14:6, 7 with your class.*)

John sees an angel flying in the midst of heaven, preaching "the everlasting gospel" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). The gospel is qualified as "everlasting" precisely because it derives from "our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who alone has immortality" (*1 Tim. 6:14–16, NKJV*). To speak of an "everlasting gospel" is to speak about God, a way of affirming the gospel as the highest spiritual goal we can embrace. The apostle Paul employs this same reasoning when he urges his followers to compete "for an imperishable crown" (*1 Cor. 9:25, NKJV*), the only award that is worth fighting for (*1 Cor. 9:26*). This everlasting gospel, spoken of by John in Revelation, points to the two divine actions that frame human history—the judgment, at the end, and the Creation, in the beginning (*Rev. 14:7*). Human history, which seems to run at random toward the abyss, now has a sense of purpose and direction: this purpose comes from the God of eternity and is oriented toward Him.

**Consider This:** Why is the hope of eternal life the only response to our human experience of life's absurdity? Discuss with the class their experiences of death. What thoughts crossed their minds when they were confronted with death? Why is death not a normal ending?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The temptation of Seventh-day Adventist believers regarding identity is twofold. We may put too much emphasis on the “Seventh-day” aspect of our name, which assigns too much consequence to our temporality and to our world here and now, or we may overemphasize the “Adventist” aspect of our identity, which disconnects us from the world and turns us into fanatics or dreamers. Underscore for your class how vital it is that we keep in balance the tension between the two components of our identity.

#### Discussion Activities:

- ❶ Discuss the difference between God’s promises of His kingdom and a politician’s promises.
- ❷ Address any doubts that members of the class may have about the reality and importance of the kingdom of God. How can we proclaim the reality of God’s kingdom and still stay in touch with the reality of this world? What is the effect of our hope on our daily life?
- ❸ Discuss the connection between the two kingdoms of God, which have been called the “already” (the good news of present assurance of salvation) and the “not yet” (the good news of the Second Coming).

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** What are some concrete ways your class can make God’s love real among the members of your church community and in the world at large? Choose to do one or more of the activities below as a witness of God’s love.

#### Activities:

- ❶ Visit someone who is elderly or a single parent, burdened with the demands of caring for a family. Does he or she need help preparing meals, buying groceries, doing yard work, finding childcare, etc.? Offer your services once or twice a week as a demonstration of God’s love.
- ❷ Write an encouraging note to someone who is going through a difficult time. Share your favorite Bible text in the note and what hope it has given you.
- ❸ Make a care package for someone in another state or country or for one serving overseas in the military. Let this person know how much you care.
- ❹ Invite a non-Sabbath keeper to share a Sabbath meal with you in your home. Introduce him or her to the God of the Sabbath through fellowship with your family and friends.

# Christ *in the* Heavenly Sanctuary



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## 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?

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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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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

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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?**

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## 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?

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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 Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 9:12*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Examine and understand the function and meaning of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

**Feel:** Appreciate the proximity of Christ as his or her Intecessor, and appreciate the message of the close connection between heaven and earth.

**Do:** Determine why and how the heavenly ministry of Christ has relevance for us, especially in the last days.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Priest in Heaven**

- A** What role does Jesus play in the heavenly sanctuary?
- B** What is the meaning of His intercession?
- C** Why is this heavenly service necessary for the salvation of the world?

**II. Feel: The Priest in My Heart**

- A** Why is Christ's heavenly ministry important?
- B** What does Christ's priestly ministry teach about God's care for us?
- C** What does this truth teach me about God's intimate presence in my heart?

**III. Do: The Priest in My Life**

- A** Why should I live a holy life?
- B** How is Christ's heavenly ministry relevant to my life today?
- C** How does Christ's heavenly ministry help me in my struggle with sin?

► **Summary:** Christ is still at work to ensure the process of judgment and to help us prepare for the kingdom of God in our hearts.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Hebrews 9:11–14*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The great model of Christ, praying for the salvation of the world, obliges me to join Him in prayer to implore God's kingdom to come.

**Just for Teachers:** The contemplation of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary will increase our sensitivity to the atrocity of sin and awaken our responsibility for our neighbors. Salvation is a process that concerns the world; the salvation of the individual is related to the salvation of the world.

**Opening Discussion:** Christ's intercessory ministry in behalf of sinners is one of our most challenging doctrines, not only because it concerns the heavenly realm, but also because our understanding of it makes us almost unique among Christians and other believers. It is not enough to repeat that this topic is important. We should learn to think about the meaning and the significance of this process that takes place in heaven and concerns our personal destiny and the destiny of the world. Engage with your class in a frank discussion of Christ's high-priestly work, searching for ways to make this topic clear, convincing, and relevant.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why is Jesus' ministry in heaven important? Find biblical stories or passages that underscore the connection between heaven and earth (for example, the ladder of Bethel, in Genesis 28:12).
- ❷ According to Daniel, what is the difference between the God of Israel and the gods of the Chaldeans? (*See Dan. 2:10, 11, 28.*)
- ❸ Why is Christ's intercessory ministry in heaven so crucial—not only for us as Seventh-day Adventists, but also for the destiny of the world? Why are other Christians largely inattentive to this aspect of Christ's ministry? How can we translate and communicate this message to postmodern minds?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** This lesson will cover the three main phases of Christ's ministry: (1) His sacrifice as the Passover Lamb, (2) His high-priestly ministry in heaven, and (3) the eschatological Day of

**Atonement.** Be sure to avoid merely enunciating this point of doctrine; instead, approach it with creativity and the urgent sense of its existential and historical relevance. Relate your presentation and discussion to the crises of our church, concerning the sanctuary doctrine (the Great Disappointment of our pioneers, false teachers, and the havoc wrecked by their theories within our ranks, etc.). Discuss and address their mistakes. Although our views are not accepted by many Christians, show that Adventists are not alone in holding this apocalyptic reading; other religious traditions (Jewish and Muslim) attest to the same emphasis.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Lamb of God *(Review John 1:29 with your class.)*

The sacrifice of the lamb at Passover was a “type,” pointing to the sacrifice of Christ. It is thanks to the blood of this lamb that the angel of death “passed over” the doors of the Israelite houses, thus preparing for the Exodus salvation (*Exod. 12:13, 14*). Along the same lines, Isaiah compares the atoning “lamb” to the Suffering Servant, who will save the world by taking their sins on Himself (*Isa. 53:7; compare with Acts 8:32*).

The same association of thoughts is found in the New Testament. Luke uses the word “decease,” or *exodus* in Greek, to refer to Jesus’ death (*Luke 9:31*), thus alluding to the spiritually liberating and redemptive effect of His death. Yet, when John the Baptist identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” he added to the Passover lamb another surprising dimension: divinity. For this Lamb was of a divine character. The phrase “lamb of God” means in Hebrew grammar “the divine lamb.” For John, God had become this Lamb that was sacrificed at Passover. Significantly, the “lamb” is the most important and most frequent symbol in the book of Revelation, where it appears from the beginning to the end (*Rev. 5:6, 22:3, etc.*). To save humankind, the great God of the universe identified Himself with the most vulnerable victim.

**Consider This:** In light of Jesus’ statement in Luke 9:22, discuss the following questions:

1. Why was it necessary for God to die for our sins?
2. Couldn’t it have been possible for God to forgive our sins without having to die on the cross? Explain.
3. What is the logical explanation for the sacrifice of Christ?

### II. The Priest Forever *(Review Psalm 110 and Hebrews 7:20–28 with your class.)*



Paradoxically, Jesus is identified not only as the “lamb” that is sacrificed; He is also identified as the priest who slaughters the lamb. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, following Psalm 110, compares Jesus to Melchizedek “a priest forever” (*Heb. 7:21, NKJV; compare with Ps. 110:4*), a way of affirming the everlasting and universal scope of the priesthood of Christ (*Heb. 7:24*). The author of Hebrews refers here to the priestly function of Christ in heaven. According to this new covenant, salvation and forgiveness are no longer limited in time and in space; they are available now to everyone and have a permanent effect.

That the divine priesthood, located in heaven, is in the hands of the eternal Son of God has tremendous significance. It means that we have now direct access to God and do not need to offer sacrifices. But more important, it means that Jesus’ priesthood has an effect on the history of the whole world: Jesus’ priesthood in heaven concerns the preparation for the heavenly kingdom of God. Jesus’ sacrifice has, at the cross, replaced the old Levitical sacrifices and thus moved the process of forgiveness and salvation to heaven. Now, the new horizon is cosmic and aims at the future kingdom of God in heaven.

**Consider This:** Why did the priestly intercession move from earth to heaven? Explain why the event of the Cross does not complete the process of salvation. Why did Stephen see Jesus “‘at the right hand of God’” in heaven (*Acts 7:56, NKJV; compare with Ps. 110:1*)? What does this vision mean in regard to the new covenant (*Dan. 9:27*)?

### III. The Day of Atonement in Heaven (*Review Hebrews 9:26–28 and Daniel 8:14 with your class.*)

The last phase of the process of salvation is represented by the author of Hebrews and by biblical prophecy as a day of judgment/Atonement (in Hebrew *kippur*). After referring to the sacrifice of Christ, whose function was to “put away sin” (*Heb. 9:26, NKJV; compare with Dan. 9:24*), the author of Hebrews clearly refers to that event of “judgment,” which he parallels to the Second Coming: “As it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. . . . He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (*Heb. 9:27, 28, NKJV*).

For the author of Hebrews, just as human death parallels Christ’s death, the judgment parallels Jesus’ second coming. The book of Daniel projects the same historical trajectory. While the 70-weeks prophecy leads to the sacrifice of Christ (*Dan. 9:26*), the 2,300-evenings-and-mornings prophecy leads to the day of judgment or the Day of Atonement at the end of time, just before the coming of the Son of man (*Dan. 8:14; compare with Dan. 7:9–14*). God’s plan of salvation did not stop at the cross. The prophecy refers also to the Day of Atonement/judgment in heaven that should mark

the time of the end, just before Jesus' coming.

The additional event of the pre-Advent judgment may come as a surprise to many Christians. Yet, this event is a very important and crucial step in the process of salvation. For it is this event that finally opens to the kingdom of God, the ultimate historical manifestation of salvation. It is particularly significant that biblical prophecy describes this special moment in terms of the Day of Atonement. Just as the Levitical Day of Atonement was needed by "all the people" (*Lev. 16:33; compare with verse 17*), in order that "all their sins" might be atoned (*Lev. 16:34, NKJV*), this final Day of Atonement is made necessary for the salvation of the world. The message of the Day of Atonement is that salvation is essentially a cosmic event. Salvation cannot take place unless there is a "new heaven and a new earth" (*Rev. 21:1, NKJV; compare with Isa. 65:17*).

**Discussion Question:** Why are the Cross and the judgment two complementary events?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Why is the biblical truth of the judgment often difficult to understand and teach? Compare it with other important truths, such as scientific truths (physics, medicine, etc.). Why is it necessary that some of these truths be difficult to grasp?

**Application Question:** How could we communicate the important and profound truth of the judgment to people of today?

### ►STEP 4—Create

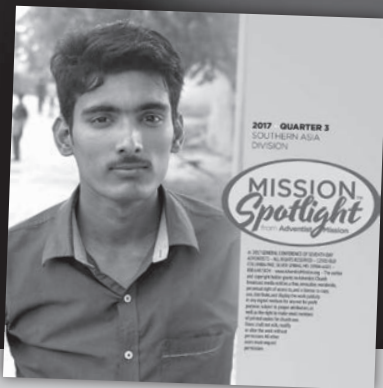
**Just for Teachers:** An important lesson we learned this week is the sophistication and beauty of God's work in the salvation of the world. The complexity of this lesson suggests just how serious God's work and attention are in this matter.

**Activities:** Expose various ideologies that have been put forth to save the world (socialism, liberalism, absolutism, anarchism, etc.). Why did all these propositions fail? Why is the creation of a new world the only solution to the problem of the world? Why, and how, does the biblical truth of the eschatological Day of Atonement respond to that question?



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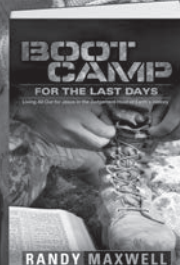
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# The “Change” of the Law




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## 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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?

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**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.*

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**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?

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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?

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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?

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Exodus 20:8–11*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize the importance of the law of God and examine the central role of the Sabbath in the law of God.

**Feel:** Experience God's love in His law and learn to enjoy the law of God.

**Do:** Find ways to obey the law of God without falling into legalism.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Sabbath in the Law**

- Ⓐ Why did God give the law?
- Ⓑ What is the place of the Sabbath in the Decalogue?
- Ⓒ How is the grace of God related to His law?

**II. Feel: Law Is Love.**

- Ⓐ Why should we enjoy God's law?
- Ⓑ Why is to love God to obey His commandments?
- Ⓒ Why is the Sabbath the commandment that expresses the most of His love to humankind?

**III. Do: The Practice of Grace**

- Ⓐ Why does the Christian desire to obey God?
- Ⓑ Why should I begin the Sabbath on time?
- Ⓒ Why did many Jews and Christians die rather than disobey God?

► **Summary:** The law of God is the most visible and the most concrete element of biblical religion. And yet, it is the aspect most controversial and controverted. Thus, it is on the law, and more specifically, on the Sabbath, that religious fidelity has been, and will be, tested.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Daniel 7:25, Revelation 14:9*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The law of God is to our spiritual life what physical exercise is to our blood. The Sabbath is to the law what the blood is to the body. The law is the only way that God has found to make our religion real and alive.

**Just for Teachers:** Many Christians have rejected the law. They mistake keeping the law with legalism. And yet, in reality the law cannot be separated from the gospel. Why?

**Opening Discussion:** Many Christians think that the law of the Sabbath could apply to any day. They believe that God who is eternal does not care about a specific day; or they argue that, for them, Sabbath takes place every day, because we should worship God on every day of the week.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why would keeping the Sabbath on another day than the one prescribed by the law of God—the “seventh day”—affect the spiritual content of the Sabbath?
- ❷ What spiritual lessons of the Sabbath will be missed if we observe Sabbath on a day other than the “seventh day”?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Do we observe God’s commandments only because we think that they are wise and rational, or because we believe they will make us happier? Contrary to either of these motives, the only rationale for keeping the law that is given in the law itself is “‘I am the LORD your God’ ” (*Exod. 20:2, NKJV*). It is our personal and historical relationship with the God of grace, the God who saved us and loved us, and the God whom we love in return that explains why we should keep these commandments. It is because He is “your God.” To change the law would shift that reason from God to ourselves. The change of the law for another reason, our human reason, would signify that we have replaced God by our own fabrication. The Bible calls this maneuver “idolatry” (*Isa. 40:19*).

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Grace of the Law *(Review Genesis 2:16 and Psalm 119:29 with your class.)*

It is striking that God's first word to humankind (Adam and Eve) was a commandment: "The LORD God commanded the man" (*Gen. 2:16, NKJV*). This verb "commanded" concerns more than moral duties or ritual observances. For, as we see, God "commanded" the creation of the world (*Ps. 33:9, Isa. 45:12*). In the same way, God's law is not just made of requests, imperative orders, things we should do, or prohibitions: rather, it is a gift. God Himself refers to His law as His gift to humans (*Exod. 24:12, Neh. 9:13*) for their own happiness and wisdom (*Ps. 19:8; Deut. 4:5, 6*). Moreover, the law of God is understood in the Bible as the expression of His grace. As the psalmist sings, "Grant me the grace of your Law" (*Ps. 119:29, NJB*).

Grace, as is suggested by this psalm, is not incompatible with the law. Indeed, grace is identified with the law. God's first commandment is a good example. Significantly, His first command involves a gift of all the trees: of "every tree . . . you may freely eat" (*Gen. 2:16, NKJV*). But it also contains a prohibition, or law, which ensures life, for the eating of the fruit will provoke death. Thus, as is evinced by Scripture, God's laws are a gift from God to us, an expression of His grace and His love for humankind.

**Consider This:** The law is a gift from God, an expression of His love for us. Why, and how, should we, then, obey the law? In what ways is the Sabbath an expression of God's love for us? Why do the psalmist and Paul himself call the law of God a "delight" (*Ps. 119:92, Rom. 7:22, NKJV*)? Why is the law of the Sabbath called a "delight" (*Isa. 58:13, NKJV*)?

### II. The Change of the Law *(Review Daniel 7:25 with your class.)*

The biblical text of Creation reports that God is the One who determined the times (*Gen. 1:14, 17*). This act was His prerogative alone as the Creator of the universe.

The prophet Daniel affirms this same truth of Creation when he emphasizes that it is God who "changes the times and the seasons" (*Dan. 2:21, NKJV*). Yet, Daniel sees in his prophetic vision of human history the coming of a power, represented by a "little horn" with human features, that "shall intend to change times and law" (*Dan. 7:25, NKJV*). The reference to "times," in association with the "law" of God,

points, in fact, to specific time: the Sabbath; for the Sabbath is the only law that concerns the domain of times. Thus, we can infer from the text that the little-horn power will intend to change the Sabbath. The human characteristic of this power, which symbolizes its religious-spiritual identity (*compare with Dan. 7:4, 13*) and its place in the sequence of the kingdoms (after pagan Rome), suggests that it is the Roman Catholic Church. The prophecy of Daniel has thus predicted the claim of the church to take God's place as the Creator.

The Roman Catholic Church did exactly as the prophecy predicted, replacing the sacredness of the Sabbath with Sunday worship. The main historical reason that motivated the Roman emperors, along with the Catholic authorities, in the direction of Sunday observance was that this change would facilitate the integration of most people in the Roman Empire. They were worshipping the sun and were thus keeping Sunday, the day of the sun. This "evangelistic" strategy and compromise greatly helped the political success of the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet, in order to justify, *a posteriori*, this change, the church fathers used the theological argument that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. This theological defense was, in fact, expressing the old Greek dualistic philosophy that separated the low physical world of Creation from the high spiritual world.

**Consider This:** Why is the Sabbath the most vulnerable commandment and the easiest commandment to be changed? What are the misconceptions that are revealed through the historical and theological reasons for that change?

**Activity:** Discuss and dismantle the spurious reasoning behind the main proof texts used by many Christians to support the change from Saturday to Sunday observance.

### III. A Sign of the Times (*Review Revelation 12:17; 14:9, 12 with your class.*)

The book of Revelation informs us that beyond the tentative change of the Sabbath by the "little horn," the Sabbath will serve at the end times as the test for faithfulness. Already in the Old Testament the Sabbath was given as a sign between God and His people, a visible sign that God is the One who sanctifies them (*Exod. 31:13, Ezek. 20:12*). The place of the Sabbath in the center of the Decalogue—which was the very place of the seal in ancient covenant treaties—testifies to that function of the Sabbath.

The book of Revelation uses the Old Testament symbol of faithfulness to the law of God, a sign on the forehead and on the hand (*Deut. 6:8*), to



describe the one who joins the camp of the enemy of God and “worships the Beast” (*Rev. 14:9, NKJV*). This symbol suggests that the person in question has submitted to a spurious law that has replaced the law of God. The fact that the worship of the beast is set in contrast to the worship of the Creator (*Rev. 14:7*) suggests that it is the Sabbath that is at stake here, for the Sabbath expresses faith in the Creator (*Exod. 20:11*). Indeed, the next verse explains that this comment applies to the “saints” who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12; compare with Rev. 12:17*).

**Consider This:** If you were to ask a Seventh-day Adventist what Sabbath means to him or her, he or she might answer, “It is not Sunday.” While this answer contains an important element of truth, it is not the whole truth. Why?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss the reasons the church fathers did not want to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Show the relationship between the genesis of anti-Semitism and the rejection of the Sabbath.

#### Application Questions:

- ❶ How should we keep the Sabbath to make this day truly the sign of God?
- ❷ Discuss this comparison by a rabbi: you Seventh-day Adventists *keep* Sabbath while we Jews *celebrate* Sabbath.

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Show the members of the class the unique nature of the Sabbath commandment in comparison to the other commandments. Help your class to understand why it makes sense that the Sabbath (and not another commandment) will be the last test of faith.

#### Activities:

- ❶ Share with the members of your class stories of people who were persecuted because of their Sabbath observance.
- ❷ Consider the following paradoxical question: Why is it sometimes more difficult to keep the Sabbath in a free society than it is to do so in an oppressive one? Discuss.

# Matthew 24 and 25



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## 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?

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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?

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## 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?

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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?

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“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?

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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”?

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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?

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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?

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Although Jesus told a different parable here from 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?**

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**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.



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Matthew 25:13*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the times in which humankind now lives and identify the symptoms of the end in the light of Jesus' warnings.

**Feel:** Sense the urgency of the moment and intensify his or her hope.

**Do:** Prepare to meet his or her Lord. Change his or her priorities. Do not believe in false messiahs.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Symptoms of the End**

**A** How should we inform ourselves in order to properly situate ourselves in the prophetic calendar?

**B** What are the signs of the end? How do we discern the false doctrines of the end and the false messiahs?

**C** Why is it not possible to know the exact time of the end?

**II. Feel: The Urgency of the Moment**

**A** Why are the events of the end so frightening? How should we cope with these sentiments?

**B** Why should we not be afraid of these troubles?

**C** Why do these events inspire our longing for the kingdom of God?

**III. Do: Prepare the Way of the Lord.**

**A** What should you do in your personal life to prepare for His coming?

**B** What should you do to help other people to prepare for His coming?

**C** What should you do to bring this news of His coming to the world?

► **Summary:** The last words of Jesus before His crucifixion are serious warnings of judgment that concern the end time and the destiny of the whole world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Matthew 24:42–44*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The news of the coming of the Son of man is not just about the sensational events that precede His coming; the event itself has an immediate effect on our spiritual lives. Now is the time to refresh our connection with the Lord. The future event of Christ's coming imbues our present religious and spiritual journey with intention and significance. The closer we come to our Lord in our prayers and in our worship services, the more we will long to see Him face-to-face.

**Just for Teachers:** This lesson will focus on Jesus' prophecies and teachings of His last discourse on the Mount of Olives. Jesus' warning applies to His disciples of all generations, but especially to His disciples of the last days. Human history is going to end. Jesus warns us that this end time will be troubling and shaking, and He urges us to prepare accordingly. The accent should not be on scaring people, but on stimulating them to strengthen their faith and hope and to readjust priorities. Insofar as we have realized that the time of the end has arrived, Jesus' recommendation to " 'seek first the kingdom of God' " (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*) is more relevant than ever.

**Opening Discussion:** Why, and how, could we refresh the sense of our "Adventist" identity and mission that precisely concerns the time of the end and the very soon coming of Christ? As we consider our history, we may feel frustrated and discouraged and turn then to other points of emphasis. The Seventh-day Adventist movement has known disappointments; and now, after such a long time of proclaiming the same message, we have become a sophisticated and well-organized institution, and, at times, it may seem as though we have settled for good in this world.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ How can we combine the need for wise action on earth with the passion for the heavenly kingdom?
- ❷ How can we combine the need to feel comfortable in our lives with the sense of urgency to prepare for His coming?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The way Jesus engages in the proclamation of the end times and of His coming should inspire us. Jesus does not begin His sermon with an affirmation or theological message or with a PowerPoint presentation of an important point of doctrine. He begins with a direct question that concerns the contemporary situation: “Do you not see all these things?” (Matt. 24:2, NKJV). Then He shocks His disciples with the disturbing news that concerns their present reality, the temple. And only when the disciples ask their question, “Tell us, when . . . and what . . . ?” (Matt. 24:3), does Jesus, then, speak to their present situation from which He will infer His message: “Therefore . . .” (Matt. 24:15).

Note that Jesus’ first argument is taken from the Scriptures, a well-known line from the book of Daniel “the ‘abomination of desolation’” (Matt. 24:15, NKJV), and then He encourages His disciples to “‘read . . . [and] understand’” (Matt. 24:15, NKJV). His first message is a prophecy about the “‘great tribulation’” (Matt. 24:21, NKJV). It is on the basis of this prophecy of the end times that He will then proceed and teach about “the kingdom of heaven” through parables (Matt. 24:22–25:30).

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Great Tribulation (Review Matthew 24:15–28 with your class.)

From the most ancient times, the sanctuary, and later the temple, represented the cosmos. When Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he described the process of the building of the sanctuary (*Exodus 25–40*) in parallel to the Creation story (*Gen. 1:1–2:4*). Both stories occur in seven stages and both end with the same technical phrase: “finished the work” (*Gen. 2:2, Exod. 40:33, NIV*).

Likewise, the construction of the temple by Solomon develops in seven stages and ends with the phrase: “finished all the work” (*1 Kings 7:40, 51, RSV*). This particular phrase appears only in these three passages. The parallel between the construction of the sanctuary/temple and the Creation of the world indicates clearly that, for Moses, there was a relationship between the world and the sanctuary/temple (see also *Ps. 78:69; compare with 134:3; 150:1, 6*). So, when Jesus spoke about the end of the temple, the disciples understood immediately that He was referring to the end of the world.

The phrase “abomination of desolation” is a very rare expression that Daniel uses to predict the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in

A.D. 70 (*Dan. 9:27, Dan. 12:11*). And indeed, Jesus applies this expression to that event. But Jesus applies it also to the final destruction of the world, of which the temple was considered a figure. Thus, Jesus speaks to both audiences—His disciples who will be contemporary to the destruction of Jerusalem, and His disciples of the end times who will be contemporary to the events taking place at the time of the end.

Like Jesus' disciples and the Jews of that time, we need to understand first that there will be an end. Jesus simply states the fact without indicating any time for it. This message is, therefore, relevant in a general manner for any generation of Christians. But Jesus specifically has in mind the generation of Christians who will actually live through these events. These disciples are the only ones who will be able to recognize and “see” those final events (*Matt. 24:15*). They will be able to “see” and recognize Jesus as their Messiah because He warned them beforehand about false messiahs (*Matt. 24:25*).

**Consider This:** Discuss Jesus' pedagogical method. How could we apply His method to our evangelistic strategies? What is Jesus' first focus? What can we learn about Jesus' approach to Scriptures? How do Scriptures relate to our lives and to history? How can we prevent ourselves from falling into the traps of false messiahs and false interpretations of prophecies?

## II. The Kingdom of Heaven (*Review Matthew 25:1–30 with your class.*)

Although Jesus announces that He will speak about the “kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 25:1, 14*), He does not intend to describe it. The kingdom of heaven is suggested through a comparison; it is “likened to.” Then Jesus focuses on the situation on earth in our daily life. The first parable, the “virgins,” belongs to the personal domain. The second parable, the “talents,” belongs to the business domain. When we compare the two parables, we can find similar, but also different, lessons that should help us in our preparation for “the kingdom of heaven.”

One common lesson: the oil, like the talents, symbolizes the gifts of God—the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. The idea is that we cannot produce light by ourselves. We need the light from the external divine source. We should learn to take these precious gifts seriously. We should be careful to preserve the oil. The foolish virgins despised their old oil just as the bad servant despised his talent.

To the lesson that urges for faithfulness and encourages us to care about our heritage, the parable of the talents adds the lesson of being creative. We should not just preserve what we have received; we should also find new ways to multiply our gifts. This holds true also for the searching of the Scriptures. It is not enough to keep repeating the same old truths; we should study the

biblical text to find new gems. This lesson also applies to the life of the church. It is not enough to maintain our members. We need to help them grow, and we need to gather in new members.

**Discussion Questions:** Why did Jesus not describe the kingdom of heaven? How do the common lessons of the two parables apply to our preparation for the kingdom of God? Why are not all the virgins and all the servants accepted? How do we reconcile the biblical idea of a loving and gracious God with the picture of the harsh bridegroom or master?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** One of the reasons Jesus taught in parables about the heavenly kingdom is that He did not want His disciples just to understand and appreciate the profound and rich truths; He wanted them also to incorporate these truths into their daily lives.

**Application Questions:** How does the parable of the virgins and the parable of the talents apply to our daily lives? Find examples in your job or in your personal life that illustrate the lessons of these two parables.

**Activity:** Invite your class to compare the two parables and list the lessons between the two that are similar or different. How do the different lessons complement each other?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Just as Jesus used parables to teach some of the most difficult truths, we should be able to do the same. Note that some of the parables were found in the cultural folklore of the people of that time. What could we learn from Jesus about His familiarity with surrounding culture and also about His capacity to bring forth from it something new?

#### Activities:

- ① How true are these two parables in ordinary life? Find concrete cases in your daily life that show the truths of these two parables of Jesus.
- ② Challenge the members of your class to find stories or parables within their cultural folklore that could illustrate spiritual lessons.

# Worship *the* Creator



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## 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?

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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?

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The universality of sin explains the universality of our mission and calling. "Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" has done wrong, has violated God's law, and has 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?

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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?

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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.*

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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?**

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## 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.*

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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?**

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## 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?

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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?

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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?**

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**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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:6*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the message of the first angel and relate it to the “present truth” of the end times.

**Feel:** Awaken the sense of the fear of God, in order to deepen and intensify a sense of awe and reverence.

**Do:** Proclaim this message to the world, and worship God as Judge and Creator.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Present Truth of the First Angel**

**A** What is the present truth of the first angel?

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**B** Why is the first angel’s message the “present truth” for the end times?

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**II. Feel: The Fear of God**

**A** What does it mean to fear God? And why should we fear Him?

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**B** How does the fact that God created the world and is the Judge of the world inspire awe and reverence?

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**III. Do: The Proclamation of the Message**

**A** How should we proclaim the message of judgment?

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**B** How should we proclaim the message of Creation?

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► **Summary:** The first angel’s message is relevant and universal because it concerns the fate of the world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Revelation 14:7; Daniel 7:9–11, 26*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** If worship is the heart of spiritual life, it should inspire and nurture our spiritual lives daily—when we pray, study the Scriptures, and are engaged in corporate worship.

**Just for Teachers:** The first angel's message enjoins us to “fear God.” A component of the fear of God involves an acute awareness of God's presence. Impress upon the hearts of your students how this awareness should affect our daily lives at any moment and place.

**Opening Discussion:** How does the message of judgment apply to human history?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The first angel's message is made of two exhortations followed by an explanation. The first exhortation is to “fear God and give glory to Him” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) because of the impending judgment. And the second exhortation is to “worship” because of God's act of Creation. Analyze what this reference to judgment and Creation really means. What lessons are implied by each of these two notions in the context of this passage? Explore also the existential components of the truths of judgment and Creation and what each of these two notions should mean in daily life. Place the message of the first angel within the context of Daniel 7 in order to be able to apprehend the direct apocalyptic intention of the message. What does the association of “judgment and Creation” mean?

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Message of Judgment (*Review Revelation 14:7 with your class.*)

Both statements to “fear God” and to “give glory to Him” convey the same message. We have to take God seriously. The biblical concept of “fear of God” has nothing to do with superstitious feelings or with the absurd idea that we should serve God by being afraid of Him. The expression “fear God” is often used in the wisdom texts to encourage the disciple to be aware of the presence of God in all his or her dealings in the marketplace



(*Prov. 3:7*). It is the idea that we cannot hide anything from God because He sees everything. In fact, the two verbs “see” and “fear” seem to come from the same root (*yra/raah*). The two notions are related: “Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him” (*Ps. 33:18, NKJV*). It is because God can see everything, even what is hidden, that He is qualified to judge: “Fear God. . . . For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (*Eccles. 12:13, 14, NKJV*).

The biblical concept of “give glory” refers to the Hebrew word *kabod*, which means “heavy.” The first angel’s message is thus an appeal to give “weight” to our religion. The reason given to justify this appeal is the day of judgment. Yet, the first angel’s message is not just about the announcement of the event—“the hour of His judgment.” Rather, the message is a pressing call for righteousness. Later in the same passage, the text refers to the “saints,” who are characterized by their obedience to the commandments of God (*Rev. 14:12; compare with Eccles. 12:13*).

**Consider This:** Why is the event of judgment good news?

## II. The Message of Creation (*Review Revelation 4:11; Psalm 95:6, 7; and Psalm 100:3 with your class.*)

According to the Bible, Creation is the reason we worship. In the book of Nehemiah, worship is justified on the basis of Creation: “You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host. . . . The host of heaven worships You” (*Neh. 9:6, NKJV*). Likewise in the book of Revelation. Within the context of a heavenly scene of worship, the 24 elders give the same reason for worship: “ ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created’ ” (*Rev. 4:11, NKJV*). It is no accident that the Psalms—which reflect the spiritual life of Israel and express their sentiments in Israel’s act of worship—place Creation at the core of worship. The Hebrew verb for worship (*hishtakhaweh*), which appears 25 times in the Psalms, is always found in the context of worship. For the psalmist, only God can be worshiped, because “it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3, NKJV*).

The first biblical report of worship is a direct response to the divine act of Creation. Worship was not only the first human act; worship was the first human response to Creation (*Gen. 2:3*). For this reason, the first angel’s message alludes to the Sabbath commandment, using exactly the same words as the commandment itself (*Exod. 20:8–11*). Henceforth, from Sabbath to Sabbath, humans would remember that Creation was the funda-

mental reason for worship. As Ellen G. White puts it: “ ‘The importance of the Sabbath as the memorial of creation is that it keeps ever present the true reason why worship is due to God.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 437.

**Consider This:** Why is worship related to Creation? Because worship is the human expression of our faith in Creation, how should that knowledge govern the way in which we worship? In what ways is the seventh-day Sabbath a response to Creation? How does this relation between Sabbath and worship affect the Sabbath?

### III. The Message of Judgment and Creation (Review *Ecclesiastes 11:1, 6; 12:13, 14; and Revelation 14:6–13 with your class.*)

The association of judgment and Creation refers to the Day of Atonement, which is the only festival that associates the two notions and places us in the context of Daniel 7. For the Israelites, the Day of Atonement symbolized the purification of the world, the true re-creation. In the text of Leviticus 16, the key text of the Day of Atonement, the expression “all their sins” runs as a leitmotif, or dominant recurring theme (*Lev. 16:21, 22, 30, etc., NKJV*). The Day of Atonement is the moment the sins of “all” Israel receive forgiveness. The Day of Atonement was the only time the totality of the people of Israel and the whole space of the sanctuary were completely purified (*Lev. 16:17, 33, 34, NKJV*).

With this sense of re-creation in mind, Daniel uses the expression “evenings and mornings” to designate the final Day of Atonement at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (*Dan. 8:14*). This technical phrase occurs only in the context of Creation (*Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31*). Yet, our passage alludes to more than just Creation. The unexpected mention of the springs of water against the regular pattern with the three traditional components of Creation (heavens, earth, the sea) is particularly meaningful. The springs of water designate the New Jerusalem, where the Lamb leads His people (*Rev. 7:17, 22:17*). Likewise, the book of Ezekiel describes the New Jerusalem abounding with springs of water (*Ezek. 47:1–12*).

Another interesting feature of the apocalyptic text that carries the three angels’ messages is that its placement in the book of Revelation parallels that of the apocalyptic text in Daniel 7. How striking that the vision of the three angels’ messages in the book of Revelation parallels the vision of the judgment in Daniel. Specifically, the vision of the three angels’ messages is located in the same place in the sequence of vision as the judgment is located in Daniel, following the same earthly vision of the four animals (*Rev. 13:2–18; compare with Dan. 7:1–8*) and preceding the coming of the Son of man (*Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 14:14*). This placement means that the proclamation of the three angels’ messages on earth parallels the Day of Atonement in heaven.

**Discussion Questions:**

- ❶ What lessons are implied by the fact that the human proclamation of the three angels' messages on the earth parallels the divine Day of Atonement in heaven?
- ❷ What does the message mean that the end time is a Day of Atonement?
- ❸ Why does John add the unusual expression "sources of water"?

**►STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** To say that we live today in the time of the Day of Atonement will not be an easy task. Explain the characteristics of the Day of Atonement. Show the rich lessons of this truth. Emphasize the existential and practical aspects of this message. Analyze Daniel 12:12 and discuss the happiness dimension of the Day of Atonement message.

**Application Questions:**

- ❶ How does the Day of Atonement message apply to the daily life of the Christian?
- ❷ Does the message mean that we are required to live an ascetic life of deprivation? Explain.

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The doctrines of the sanctuary and of the Day of Atonement are two of the most difficult and abstract beliefs to teach. Be aware of the fact that many young people and pastors shy away from attempting to teach them. Do not teach these subjects dogmatically. Find ways to make them insightful and surprising.

**Activities:**

- ❶ Bring a picture or, if possible, have some class members build a sanctuary.
- ❷ Organize a visit to a synagogue on the Day of Atonement. Discuss later with the class the elements that struck them most forcibly about the service.

# End-Time Deceptions



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## 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.*

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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?**

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## 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.*

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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?**

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## 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?

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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 to 4 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?

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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?

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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?

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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?**

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**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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ What can you say to a person who claims that his or her near-death experience shows that we go on living after death?
- ❸ 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.*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *2 Corinthians 11:14*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Become informed about the warnings of Satan's masterful deceptions.

**Feel:** Keep all his or her senses alert to protect against the traps of false emotions.

**Do:** Protect himself or herself against Satan's deceptions.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Satan's Deceptions**

- Ⓐ What is Satan's most effective deception about himself?
- Ⓑ What are the two main errors about human nature that support Satan's false claims?
- Ⓒ How will Satan promote false worship?

**II. Feel: The Emotional Trap**

- Ⓐ Why are we more vulnerable to Satan through our feelings?
- Ⓑ What kinds of feelings would be most vulnerable to Satan's attacks?
- Ⓒ How can we control our feelings?

**III. Do: Self-Defense Against Satan**

- Ⓐ What is the best defense against Satan?
- Ⓑ What are the best weapons against Satan?
- Ⓒ How can one overcome Satan's deceptions?

► **Summary:** Satan's deceptions about himself, God, and humans are lies to be unveiled and denounced in order to permit God's efficient protection.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Revelation 12:9*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Satan's greatest deception is the illusion that we do not need God and are not dependent on Him. The ideas of evolution and of the immortality of the soul illustrate this deception, and they may lead to worship of the creature instead of worshipping the Creator. Our best defense against these illusions of our independence is to be dependent only on the Lord and to keep Him before us continually, placing our everyday decisions under His full control and implementing them according to His will. Then we must listen and wait for His direction and help.

**Just for Teachers:** This week we will identify Satan's deceptions in order to prevent falling prey to them and to defend ourselves against his attempts to control us. Show how the most dangerous deceptions seem to come from ourselves, thus promoting self-centered ideals. Explain how this self-centeredness is the genesis for the ideas of evolution and of the immortality of the soul.

**Opening Discussion:** How do the two false beliefs—the immortality of the soul and evolution—affect other sets of values? Why is it important to be aware of Satan's "theological" strategies? What are other errors that Satan has used to deceive Christians and the world in general?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Satan has developed his tactics of deception to wage a three-pronged attack. First, he wants you to relax and to feel comfortable about his threat against you; he will make you believe that he is harmless and even that he does not exist. Second, he wants you to feel great and powerful; he will give you the illusion that you do not need God to survive and be happy. And third, once Satan has created the void meant to be filled by God alone, he will fill that empty space with himself.

## Bible Commentary

**I. The Most Treacherous Trap of the Devil** (*Review Revelation 12:9, 20:10 with your class.*)

Many people in our secular culture dismiss the reality of Satan. Either they associate Satan with fairy tales, or simply, and more efficiently, they joke about the existence of the devil. French poet Baudelaire spoke with skeptical humor on the question of the devil's existence: "His majesty the devil told Baudelaire that he had feared but once for his power, the day that he heard a preacher, slightly more subtle than the others, preach: 'My dear brothers, never forget, in hearing of the progress of this enlightened century, that the most treacherous trap of the devil is to dupe you into believing in his non-existence.'"—Charles Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris, oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961), p. 101.

In Revelation, John clearly and unambiguously exposes the evil of Satan and his reality; he explicitly identifies "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (*Rev. 12:9, NKJV*). For John, Satan is not a funny, horned and tailed, unthreatening mythical figure. He is real and evil, and he is the master of disguise. He likes to clothe badness with goodness and, conversely, to turn truths into errors. He used this strategy against Eve when he presented disobedience as a virtue (*Gen. 3:5*). For the book of Revelation, Satan is a real and dangerous person.

**Consider This:** Identify some dangerous misconceptions that are presented as truth (for example, eating meat will give you strength; red wine is good for your heart; smoking cigarettes is cool, etc.). Why are these ideas so popular and/or mixed with error?

## II. Evolution and Immortality (*Review Ecclesiastes 9:5 and Hebrews 11:1 with your class.*)

From the very beginning of the Bible, in the Creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2, we are presented with the truth about our origins and human nature that serve as warnings against the two great errors that trap many people: the ideas of evolution and the immortality of the soul.

In opposition to the idea of evolution, the biblical text tells us that God created the universe and created the first humans in His image. Furthermore, He blessed the Sabbath and gave it to humans as a sign to remind them of what He did for them when they did not yet exist (*Gen. 2:1–3, Exod. 20:8–11*). The idea of evolution is very old, having tempted the ancient pagan Egyptians to observe that the baby beetle seemed to have emerged from the dung by itself, and thus, all life was believed to have emerged by itself. The beetle was thus called *kheper*, meaning "evolving," which became the name of the creator god Khepri, whose name captures the evolutionist concept. Khepri means "he who is coming into being by himself, the self-evolver." The psalmist warns us

against this self-deception when he says, “It is [God] who has made us, and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3, NKJV*).

In opposition to the idea of immortality, God indicates to the first humans that they are not immortal by nature. Their lives depend on the divine Creator, and if they disconnect from Him and disobey, they will “ ‘surely die’ ” (*Gen. 2:17, NKJV*). Since that time, Satan has done all he can to persuade humans that they are immortal: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). The ancient Egyptians imagined that their spiritual beings could survive their bodies and go into the heavens where they would become gods. Later, Greek philosopher Plato elaborated on the philosophy of the immortality of the soul, which, for him, existed apart from the body. This spurious thinking has influenced traditional Judaism and Christianity. Today, even nonreligious people believe in the idea of the immortality of the soul and promote all kinds of “spiritual” theories and so-called experiments to support their wishful thinking.

Evolution and immortality are the two most popular and prevailing ideas prevalent in cultures worldwide. In fact, they are rooted in the same fallacy that humans are gods and have produced themselves through the process of evolution, leading them to the stage of divinity. They are premised on the lies of Satan himself, hearkening back to Eden: “ ‘You will be like God’ ” (*Gen. 3:5, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Why are these two ideas—evolution and the immortality of the soul—so important in the great controversy? What are the biblical texts that deny the idea of the immortality of the soul? Why does the practice of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath imply faith in a historical six-day Creation?

### III. The Other Trinity (*Review Revelation 12:17–13:18 with your class.*)

The book of Revelation almost satirically presents Satan as a caricature of God. Like God, Satan presents himself as a trinity: the dragon, the beast of the sea, and the beast of the land. These beasts are described in connection with each other and in connection to the dragon. The beast of the sea is strikingly similar to the dragon. Like the dragon, the beast has seven heads and ten horns (*Rev. 13:1*). This beast has received power from the dragon (*Rev. 13:4*). This beast represents a religious power (see next lesson). Likewise, the beast of the land, which follows the beast of the sea, is described as promoting the worship of the beast of the sea (*Rev. 13:12–14*) and supporting the dragon (*Rev. 13:4*). The beast of the land, which allies itself to the beast of the sea, represents a political power (see next lesson).

These three beasts belong to the same camp and are committed to the same project. Furthermore, these three monstrous animals contrast with the

three well-defined creatures that represent divinity: the lamb, the lion, and the man. This distortion of God should alert us. When Satan imitates God, the result is not only deceptive and disfiguring; it is dangerous and leads to the abyss.

**Discussion Questions:** Why does Satan choose to imitate? What is the meaning of these three symbolic representations: the dragon, the beast of the sea, and the beast of the land? How does the dragon imitate God the Father? How does the beast of the sea imitate Jesus? How does the beast of the land imitate the Holy Spirit? What cosmic element does each of these three beasts evoke? How does their respective representation express their function?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** According to the testimony of Greek historian Herodotus, it was a custom of the ancient Egyptians to sit in a banquet and pass around a mummy-like statuette that represented a deceased person so as to remind themselves of death and encourage people to rethink the value of life. Morbid though it might be, what lessons could we learn from this custom?

**Application Questions:** The experience of the death of a loved one is often the right opportunity to testify about your faith. Discuss Ecclesiastes 7:1–4.

1. Why might the prospect of death bring wisdom?
2. How would you denounce the deception of the immortality of the soul and still bring comfort to those who mourn?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Identify the common thread of these three deceptions: evolution, the immortality of the soul, and Satan's false trinity. In what way do they touch on the nature of God, the nature of man, and the destiny of the world? Why does Satan identify himself in three persons? Identify the parallels between these three beasts and the divine Trinity. What is the biblical evidence of the Trinity in the Old Testament?

**Activity:** If possible, bring a representation (drawings or statuettes) of the three satanic beasts to class. Compare the three satanic beasts with the three representations of God. What lessons do you learn about the nature of God from this comparison?



# 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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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 entire 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.*

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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?

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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?

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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?**

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**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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ Dwell more on the question of worship. What does it mean to worship something? How do we worship whatever it is we do worship?
- ❸ 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.



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Texts:** *Revelation 13:1–18*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Identify the historical powers represented by the two beasts, and recognize the events associated with them.

**Feel:** Evaluate the gravity of the issues at stake, and control his or her feelings in the worship experience.

**Do:** Document the evidence supporting the fulfilment of prophecy, and find more reasons to trust the God who controls history.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Babylon and America**

**A** What clues suggest that the beast of the sea is the Roman Catholic Church?

**B** What clues suggest that the beast of the land is the United States of America?

**II. Feel: Emotional Control**

**A** Why is the experience of feeling good not a trustworthy indication of having God's presence?

**B** How can you make sure that your worship feelings are in tune with the true God?

**C** Why should you love people despite the fact that they may belong to the camp of the beast?

**III. Do: Stick to Your God.**

**A** What is the most common temptation of false worship?

**B** How do you come out of Babylon?

**C** Why is coming out of Babylon not enough to avoid its influence?

► **Summary:** The ambition of Babylon is to be worshiped by the whole world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Revelation 13:10*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Spiritual life is not self-centered but implies a God-centered worship experience and a life founded on trust in God. True worship is not just fellowship and spending good times together. Nor is belonging to the right camp of believers enough to constitute true worship. Rather, true worship must lead to heartfelt devotion to God.

**Just for Teachers:** The identification of the powers represented by the two beasts of Revelation 13 should help us to situate the prophetic period in which we live, and instruct us to conduct our lives accordingly. Examine the historical evidence supporting the identification of the beasts. As much as possible, select well-known sources, even historical textbooks, to ensure objectivity and credibility. The main goal of this lesson is to inspire commitment to, and worship of, the true God.

**Opening Discussion:** There have never been so many religions and denominations that claim to be God's true church. Discuss how the response to this proliferation of sects is to take refuge in the traditional church in which we grew up because of its historical legitimacy.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ How can we explain this proliferation of sects?
- ❷ Consider further the fallacy of taking refuge in traditional churches simply because they have historical legitimacy. How can we denounce this fallacy without falling into the trap of pride and self-sufficiency that characterizes the Laodicean church (*Rev. 3:17*)?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** It is important to be as sensitive as possible in your presentation of this lesson's material. First, unveil the identity of the two beasts in light of contemporary events. Second, identify the main issue at stake, and discuss why denouncing the fallacy of falling back on a traditional church is important for our spiritual lives. Be creative and relevant in your presentation. Strengthen the foundation of your approach; use the best evidence and arguments to present this lesson.

## Bible Commentary

### I. Babylon and Her Allies (*Review Revelation 13:12 with your class.*)

The features of the beast of the sea evoke the four animals of Daniel 7—the first three being the lion, the bear, and the leopard (*Rev. 13:2; compare with Dan. 7:2–6*). But the focus here is particularly on the fourth beast (*Rev. 13:1; compare with Dan. 7:7*). The characteristic element of this fourth animal that rivets the attention of John is the little horn. Like the little horn, the beast of the sea usurps God's power, and it claims to be worshiped. The phrase “‘Who is like the beast’” that is pronounced by her worshipers (*Rev. 13:4, NKJV*) is modeled on the traditional phrase that characterizes the worship of God in ancient Israel: “‘Who is like You, O LORD?’” (*Exod. 15:11, NKJV; Ps. 35:10*). In addition, like the little horn, this beast persecutes God's people for the same length of time, 42 months, which corresponds to the time, times, and half a time of the little horn (*Rev. 13:5, Dan. 7:25*), beginning in A.D. 538 and ending in A.D. 1798. The beast of the sea represents, then, the same power as the little horn: that is, the Roman Catholic Church as an institution.

The vision of the book of Revelation adds one more identifying mark to our understanding of the little horn: the beast of the sea (little horn) will be wounded and will lose for a while its prestige, after which it will recover and will receive praise again (*Rev. 13:3, 8*). The wound refers to the pressure of the French Revolution and, more specifically, to Napoleon's blow against the church when he captured the pope in 1798 and imprisoned him. The healing of the wound refers to the recovery of the church, starting in the nineteenth century, when, among many other things, the dogma of the infallibility of the pope was pronounced (1870). The popularity and the political influence of the papacy have never been greater in modern times than they are now.

**Consider This:** According to Revelation, what are the characteristics that make the fourth beast a persecuting power?

### II. Worship Is at Stake (*Review Revelation 13:16, 17 with your class.*)

After the vision of the beast of the sea, John sees a beast rise up from the land. This beast of the land will support the beast of the sea and will even encourage people to worship it (*Rev. 13:12*), just as the dragon had already promoted the worship of the beast (*Rev. 13:4*).

Now, with the coming of the beast of the land, this claim of the beast

of the sea to be worshiped is reaffirmed. The beast of the land does everything within its political power to foster the worship of the beast of the sea. The language of the vision of John recalls the story of Daniel 3, in which Nebuchadnezzar erected a statue that was the replica of the one in his dream, in Daniel 2, and then he ordered all peoples to worship this image. Those who refused would be killed (*Dan. 3:4, 7*). Likewise, the beast of the land will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

The biblical text of Revelation specifies how this worship of the beast of the sea will manifest itself: the worshiper of the beast receives the mark on the hand and the forehead (*Rev. 13:16*). For the faithful Jew, this language evokes the old custom (*Deut. 6:8*) of binding the *tefillin* on the hand and the forehead to symbolize one’s total submission to God’s commandments (see *Prov. 3:3, 6:21, 7:3*), involving both one’s actions (the hand) and one’s thinking (the forehead). The same symbol appears in Revelation 14:9, where it was associated with Creation, thus suggesting a more specific reference to the Sabbath (see lesson 6). A number of clues suggest that the beast of the land refers to the United States of America. This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled completely. The following clues will help to confirm the identity of the beast of the land:

1. This power is different from the beast of the sea: it is not religious; it is not worshiped (*Rev. 13:12, 15*). It is only political; it can kill (*Rev. 13:15*) and functions as an economic power; it determines who can buy or sell (*Rev. 13:17*).

2. This power comes into prominence after the beast of the sea, and it begins to act immediately after the beast of the sea receives its wound (*Rev. 13:12*); hence, by the end of the eighteenth century.

3. This power has a reassuring character. It looks like the lamb (*Rev. 13:11*) that is the symbol of Jesus Christ in His vulnerability. Yet, it speaks like a dragon; it has tremendous power. Also, it comes from the “land”—a sparsely populated part of the earth, unlike the beast from the sea (see *Rev. 17:15*).

4. This power exercises an important political and cultural influence on the world; it is a superpower.

The biblical prophet does not just accuse the evil powers. The spiritual intention behind the revelation of the motions of history is not to play the judge and point the finger against people.

Instead, the intention is to urge us to come out of Babylon (*Rev. 18:2*) and strengthen our faith and hope (*Rev. 13:10*). It is to build trust in God’s Word and control of history and to exhort us to worship the only true God.

**Discussion Questions:** What features of the beast of the land match the characteristics of the United States of America? What contemporary events point in the direction of America fulfilling its prophetic role as outlined in

Revelation? What makes the Sabbath the ideal test of worship? What does it mean to come out of Babylon? What is the effect of the fulfillment of prophecy on your spiritual life? How does the paradoxical association of the lamb and the dragon fit the character of the United States in prophecy? How does this paradoxical association recall the little horn with human features?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The Internet is full of lessons about prophecy. Paradoxically, people do not believe in God, because they think it is a naïve faith; but they dig into horoscopes and avidly consult fortune-tellers. Why?

#### Application Questions:

❶ How can we protect ourselves from far-fetched interpretations of the book of Revelation?

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❷ Why do we have so many diverse and even contradictory interpretations of the book of Revelation nowadays?

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### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss the following document reporting Pope Francis' trip to the United States:

“He came as a shepherd and was everywhere tending his flock, with the human touch that has enthralled even skeptics. . . . We’ve seen elements of this pageant before: Paul VI was the first Pope to visit the U.S., back in 1965, when Vatican II had just begun. . . . John Paul II made seven U.S. visits during his 27-year tenure. . . . But none of that occurred in the age of Instagram, when every one of the millions who came out to see him could share the experience with millions more. . . . He’s the first Pope to do a Google Hangout and the first to amass over 20 million Twitter followers.”—*Time*, Oct. 5, 2015, pp. 36, 40.

**Activities:** Collect from popular magazines recent documents that support the prophecy of Revelation 13.

# 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*).

**T**he 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.*

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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*).

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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?**

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## 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.*

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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?**

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## 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.*

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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.*

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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 worshipping 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?

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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.*

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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?**

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**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.

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:9*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Learn about the meaning of the seal of God and of the mark of the beast that will characterize, respectively, God's people and those who worship the beast in the last days of human history.

**Feel:** Appreciate the spiritual significance of the seal as the sign of a personal and loving relationship with the God he or she worships.

**Do:** Recommit to the Creator and Savior in order to make sure that he or she will belong to God's camp instead of the devil's camp.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Meaning of the Seal**

- Ⓐ What does the image of the "seal" represent?
- Ⓑ Why is the "mark" put on the forehead or the hand?
- Ⓒ What is the difference between the seal of God and the mark of the beast?

**II. Feel: The Essence of Worship**

- Ⓐ Why do we worship?
- Ⓑ Why is faith in Creation an expression of dependence on God?
- Ⓒ Why is Sabbath the sign of true worship?

**III. Do: Worship Is Life.**

- Ⓐ How should we observe the Sabbath to make it the sign of true worship?
- Ⓑ Why is worship more than just keeping the Sabbath on the right day?
- Ⓒ How does the keeping of the Sabbath affect our daily life?

► **Summary:** The seal of God indicates our belonging to God as our Creator and Savior and is thus a sign of life and hope. The mark of the beast, on the other hand, indicates apostasy and is therefore a sign of loss and death.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Ephesians 1:12–14*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The seal of God is a whole process that involves the work of the Holy Spirit confirming that we “trusted . . . the word of truth” (*Eph. 1:13, NKJV*). This means that the seal is not a magical and arbitrary badge. As with circumcision or baptism, the seal of God is a sign of the covenant between God and His people. This sign reflects an internal state of holiness and relates to the life of faith. The sign is seen in the hearts of God’s people, in the intimacy of their thoughts and sentiments; it speaks about their love for God. It is also seen in the dynamic of their actions, which express the genuineness of their responses to God.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson is a part of our preparation for the final struggles that will distinguish between two camps: the righteous and the wicked. The challenge is, therefore, to inform and explain the meaning and the significance of the sign that will identify the righteous (the seal of God), and the sign that will reveal the wicked (the mark of the beast). Examine the role of the Sabbath in that process.

**Opening Discussion:** Some Christians interpret the mark of the beast literally, for instance, as a bar code, a credit card number, or as some biometric identification. Find a representative of each of these three literal interpretations, and identify the arguments supporting them.

**Questions for Discussion:** Why do these literal applications of the mark of the beast contradict the spiritual and symbolical perspective of the book of Revelation? What are the clues in the biblical text that suggest a spiritual application of the mark of the beast instead?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** John, the prophet of the book of Revelation, uses a series of images and notions that he borrows from the Old Testament to suggest a striking contrast between those who receive the seal of God as a sign of their belonging to Him and those who receive the mark of the beast as a sign of their allegiance

to the beast. Decode the symbolic language, and discuss the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of receiving the mark “on the forehead or the hand”?
2. What does this procedure imply in regard to the relationship with the beast?
3. What lessons do these images suggest about the crucial issue of worship?
4. What is the place of the Sabbath in this drama that will take place at the end of time?
5. How is the Sabbath related to the seal of God and the mark of the beast?

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Seal of God (*Review Revelation 7:1–4, 9:4 with your class.*)

In the context of the vision of the seven seals (*Rev. 6:1–8:1*)—immediately after the sixth seal, which opens with the wrath of God (*Rev. 6:17*)—the prophet John sees the “seal of God,” which marks those who will survive the wrath of God (*Rev. 7:3*). This particular seal contrasts with the other seven seals. While the seven seals bring a message of destruction and death, this seal carries the promise of salvation and life. Also, while the other seals signify the idea of confidentiality, this one indicates ownership.

The ancients often placed a seal on merchandise to attest that it belonged to them. This seal consisted of a piece of metal or a precious stone (*Exod. 28:11, Esther 8:8*) wherein the name of the owner or a symbol representing him was engraved. The seal was designed to be pressed on the clay that closed the document or the merchandise. In John’s prophetic vision, the seal is put on the foreheads to save God’s people from the forthcoming disasters (*Rev. 7:3, 9:4*). The prophet Ezekiel refers to the same protective function of the mark on the forehead (*Ezek. 9:4–6; compare with Gen. 4:15*). In this passage in Ezekiel, the seal marks only those who worship the living God, the Creator, to distinguish from those who “were worshipping the sun toward the east” (*Ezek. 8:16, NKJV*).

The vision of Revelation 7 conveys the same meaning. It contains a sequence that hearkens back to the Creation account. In fact, the sequence “the earth, the sea, or the trees” (*Rev. 7:3, NKJV*) is the same as in the Creation story itself (*compare with Gen. 1:9–13*). Thus, the mention of this sequence points to the fact that the seal marks those who recognize God as their Creator, those who belong to Him (*Ps. 24:1, 2; 89:12, 13; 100:3*). To be sealed by God means that we, and everything we have and



are, belongs to Him, the One who created everything.

**Consider This:** What is the visible evidence that God’s people have received the “seal of God”?

## II. The Mark of the Beast *(Review Revelation 13:15, 16; 14:9 with your class.)*

To compete with God and confuse humans, the enemy of God, represented by “the beast,” has also produced his own mark as a sign of allegiance. The book of Revelation describes this mark as being stamped on the right hand or on the forehead (*Rev. 13:16*). This symbol has been borrowed from the book of Deuteronomy, in which it symbolizes faithfulness to the law of God. To ensure that the children of Israel do not forget to keep the words of God and His commandments in their hearts, God resorts to an image: “ ‘You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes’ ” (*Deut. 6:8, NKJV; compare with Exod. 13:9*). Still, today, Jews apply this mnemonic device literally and bind the *tefillin* (“phylacteries”) on the hand and on the forehead to remind themselves of their total submission to the law of God, involving both action (the hand) and thinking (forehead).

Just as the “seal of God” on the forehead is a sign that reminds God’s people to submit themselves to His commandments, the “mark of the beast” on the hand or on the forehead is a sign of commitment that characterizes the beast’s followers. In fact, as the third angel specifies, it is the issue of worship that is at stake here. The warning “ ‘if anyone worships the beast’ ” is explained in the parallel statement “ ‘and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand’ ” (*Rev. 14:9, NKJV*). The Greek conjunction *kai*, “and,” that introduces this statement corresponds to the Hebrew *waw* of explanation (*epexegetical*), signifying the direct connection between worshipping the beast and receiving its mark.

**Consider This:** Why is the “mark of the beast” a sign of worship? Compare the “mark of the beast” and the “seal of God.” Why is worship the crucial issue of the final phase of the great controversy?

## III. The Sabbath, Sign of Worship *(Review Genesis 2:1–3 and Exodus 20:8–11 with your class.)*

Human history began on Sabbath, a time of worship. The Sabbath marks, therefore, the first human worship in history—indeed, the first human response to God’s gift of Creation. It is also significant that the Sabbath, which refers to Creation, occupies the geographic center of the Decalogue. This occupation is also true thematically: the Sabbath refers to both our rela-

tionship with God (as do commandments 1 to 3) and our relationship with our fellow humans (as do commandments 5 to 10).

It is interesting that in ancient covenant documents, the seal was placed in the center to make sure that no one could manipulate or erase the agreement. The place of the Sabbath in the center of the Decalogue is an indication that it was intended to be the seal of the Creator. (See lesson 6, step 2, section III, entitled A Sign of the Times.)

### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ The Sabbath is one of the commandments of the Decalogue that has been challenged (and changed) in traditional Christianity. Why has the Sabbath commandment been, and still is being, challenged?
- ❷ How did the change of the Sabbath affect the relationship between Christians and Jews?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The seventh-day Sabbath refers to Creation, according to the fourth commandment, while the Sunday of Roman Catholic tradition refers to resurrection. Discuss with your class how these two different explanations for which day to observe have affected their respective ways of thinking.

### Application Questions:

- ❶ How should we keep the Sabbath in our families to make it meaningful and to reflect its function as the seal of God?
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- ❷ What is the difference between what is done on Sunday by other Christians and what is done by Seventh-day Adventists on the Sabbath?
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## ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Observe and analyze the worship services in your church and compare them with worship services in other churches or religions. Discuss the meaning of worship with your class.

**Activities:** Prepare a liturgical service for Sabbath that will express the Seventh-day Adventist theology of worship.

# Babylon and Armageddon



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## 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*).

**T**he 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?

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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?

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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”?

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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?**

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## 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?**

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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, some 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?

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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?

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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. Weary and worn, 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?

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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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KAMIL METZ is the international coordinator for the GLOW tracts ministry.

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:8*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Learn about the final battle that will oppose the camp of God to the camp of Babylon.

**Feel:** Appreciate the spiritual nature of the conflict and how it also concerns his or her personal life with God.

**Do:** Use God's equipment to resist and fight against the enemy and thus prepare for the ultimate conflict.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Battle of Armageddon**

- Ⓐ What is the meaning of the Hebrew word *Armageddon*?
- Ⓑ When and where will the battle take place?
- Ⓒ What are the identities of the opposing armies?

**II. Feel: The Spiritual Battle**

- Ⓐ Why is this battle spiritual?
- Ⓑ How will this battle affect your personal life?
- Ⓒ How different will this spiritual battle be from your present spiritual battles?

**III. Do: Prepare for the Battle.**

- Ⓐ What spiritual weapons will you need in order to survive the battle?
- Ⓑ How will the idea of a literal battle distract from the real action?
- Ⓒ How should you prepare today for the future Armageddon?

► **Summary:** The battle of Armageddon is spiritual and will oppose all the forces of evil to the camp of the kingdom of God.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Ephesians 6:10–18*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** That the battle of Armageddon is spiritual does not mean that it will be less tough and real than actual military battles: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). For the first time in history, all the forces of evil will gather and will reveal more fully their real faces and real intentions. The spiritual battle has a cosmic scope. Our present daily struggles will be intensified.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson is a part of our initiation to the final battle of Armageddon. The challenge is, therefore, to inform and explain the scenario of this battle, having it in mind, while relating it to our present spiritual battles. Discuss the theme of the spiritual battle, the “great controversy” as depicted in the Scriptures. Present key texts in the Old Testament and the New Testament that refer to the spiritual battle (*Numbers 24; Daniel 10–11; Matt. 26:36–42, etc.*).

**Opening Discussion:** Many evangelical Christians believe in a literal battle of Armageddon that will take place in Israel and involve real armies. Discuss the various evangelical interpretations that are popular today.

**Questions for Discussion:** Why does a literal interpretation of Armageddon, which fits the evangelical perspective, contradict the spiritual view of the great controversy? What are the arguments against the literal interpretation of Armageddon?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The story of the Tower of Babel has remained in the memory of the biblical prophets as a paradigm for the folly of human pride. Review that story (*Gen. 11:1–9*) with the class. Bring a picture of the ruins of the Great Ziggurat of Ur (near Ali Air Base in Iraq).

For John, Babel (or Babylon) represents the evil power that wants to take God’s place. The motif of Babylon, the Greek name for Babel, runs through the book of Revelation (it is used six times, the number

associated with Babylon) and reaches its climax in the prophecy of Armageddon. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, the evil forces gather as one to unite against the heavenly King. The great encounter ends, as in the story of the Tower of Babel, with the descent of the God of heaven and the fall of spiritual Babylon. Its fall is told in terms that recall the fall of the ancient historical Babylon.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Gathering of Babylon *(Review Revelation 16:16 and Daniel 11:43 with your class.)*

The book of Revelation refers to the last event of human history as a battle of gigantic proportions, one that “gathered . . . together” all the evil forces (Rev. 16:16), uniting the dragon and the two beasts (Rev. 16:13; compare with 12:17; 13:1, 11; see our preceding lesson). This triumvirate power drags behind them “the kings of the earth” (Rev. 16:14, NKJV). This camp is identified as “the great city” (Rev. 16:19, NKJV), a name that designates Babylon (Rev. 14:8).

The prophet Daniel had the same vision. In his prophecy of the kingdoms (represented by a human statue), he sees at the end a great gathering of the kings of the earth (Dan. 2:43, 44). The same scenario reappears in his prophecy of the “great war” (Dan. 10:1, NIV), which concludes here also with the gathering of all the forces of the north, united with the south (Dan. 11:40).

According to these prophecies, the last symptoms of human history will be characterized by movements of unity. It is not clear how these movements of unity will come about. It is interesting, however, that this scenario is beginning to be staged before our eyes: all the powers of the world strive for unity to make our world one on every level—one culture, religion, economy, political system, and military complex. More and more, we tend to speak the same language, dress the same way, sing the same songs, eat the same food, and even think and believe the same way. The world has never been so interrelated. It is becoming, more and more, “one global village.”

**Consider This:** What are the world institutions that suggest the trend of global unity? What world institutions are clearly indicative of the mentality of Babylon? What world institutions could receive our approval, and why? What is your personal experience of the “global village”?

### II. The Battle of Babylon *(Review Daniel 2:35, 45; 11:45 with your class.)*

In both of his prophecies, Daniel places the gathering of the forces of evil in opposition to the holy heavenly mountain. Likewise, the book of

Revelation positions this ultimate gathering in opposition to the “temple of heaven” (*Rev. 16:17, NKJV*); that is, also on the holy mountain, as indicated in the prefix *har* (“mountain”) of the name of Armageddon. The word *Mageddon*, the ancient name of Megiddo, conveys the memory of many conflicts (*Judges 7; 2 Kings 10:11; 2 Kings 23:29, 30*). The prophecy concerns the heavenly Jerusalem and not the earthly Jerusalem of the modern state of Israel. It does not refer to military conflicts opposing earthly armies, and it has nothing to do with the Middle East conflict, as a number of evangelical Christians believe.

The battle of Armageddon is spiritual by nature, opposing two spiritual enemies—Babylon and the heavenly Jerusalem. The camp of Babylon is represented by the three beasts: the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast. The latter power is now called with the new name “the false prophet,” a title that confirms his role as supporter of the earthly institution of the papacy (*Jer. 5:30, 31; 23:14*) and as deceiver (*Jer. 5:13, 23:16*). The prophecy specifies that these powers use paranormal methods, the “spirits of demons,” to seduce the “kings of the earth” (*Rev. 16:14, NKJV*).

**Consider This:** Look at a map to situate the city of Megiddo. How far is Mount Carmel from the city of Megiddo? How do you understand the fact that there is no Mount of Megiddo? What battles of Megiddo recorded in the Bible do you remember? Why, therefore, is it impossible to have the battle of Armageddon take place on the “mount,” or even in the valley of Megiddo?

### III. The Fall of Babylon (*Review Daniel 2:35, 45; 11:45; and Revelation 16:17–21 with your class.*)

In the visions of Daniel, just as in the vision of John, the denouement is the same: God comes down and destroys all the gathered forces of evil. The author of the book of Revelation describes this destruction as a division of Babylon, which is called “the great city” (*Rev. 16:19; compare with 14:8, NKJV*). The “great gathering” has, then, been crushed, just as the great gathering of the united forces of the builders of Babel was divided by language and crushed (*Gen. 11:7, 8*).

The ancient story of the fall of the historical Babylon serves as a blueprint for the future fall of the spiritual Babylon. The waters of the Euphrates are “dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (*Rev. 16:12, NKJV*). The Bible relates the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, in 539 B.C., to the drying up of the Euphrates: “Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’; who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure’ ” (*Isa. 44:27, 28, NKJV; Jer. 50:38*). Ancient historian Herodotus (484–425 B.C.) testifies to that strategy: “[Cyrus] posted his army at the place where the

river enters the city, and another part of it where the stream issues from the city, and bade his men enter the city by the channel of the Euphrates when they should see it to be fordable. . . . When this happened, the Persians who were posted with this intent made their way into Babylon by the channel of the Euphrates, which had now sunk about to the height of the middle of a man's thigh.”—*Herodotus I, Books I and II*, translated by A. D. Godley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 239.

**Opening Discussion:** Note the style of the past tense of the phrase “Babylon is fallen” to refer to the future event of the fall of the spiritual Babylon.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why was the fall of Babylon so important for the Jews of that time? Who is the only pagan king who was called a messiah, and why?
- ❷ What are the parallels between the fall of historic Babylon and spiritual Babylon?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The Bible often refers to a well-known past event to speak about an event that has yet to take place. Identify a few examples of that biblical practice in the Old Testament, as well as in the New.

#### Application Questions:

- ❶ What pedagogical lesson can be learned from this practice of referring to a well-known past event as a way to speak about an event that has not yet happened?
- ❷ Why does the biblical prophet use the past tense to speak about a future event? What other examples of this biblical practice do you know?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The media are full of references to Armageddon. List some of them in class.

**Activities:** If possible, select one example, such as a song, that illustrates the fascination in the media with Armageddon. Share it with the class and discuss the diverse reasons for this trend.

# The Return of Our Lord Jesus



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## 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.*

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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?

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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?

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## 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?

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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?

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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?

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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, who had been dead long enough for the corpse to start stinking, from death (*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.*

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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.*

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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?**

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**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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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?
- ❸ 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.

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*“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.”*

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Daniel 7:13*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Consider the reality and the turning point of the second coming of Jesus.

**Feel:** Anticipate and rejoice in the prospect of meeting the Lord face-to-face.

**Do:** Live with hope in spite of the prospect of death and the present reality of hopelessness.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The End Is the Beginning.**

**A** Why does the heavenly kingdom imply the destruction of the earthly kingdoms?

**B** Why is the Second Coming real and not just a spiritual parable?

**C** Why does the Second Coming make sense?

**II. Feel: Longing to See Him**

**A** What feelings do you have when you think of the Second Coming?

**B** How does the hope of the Second Coming affect your outlook?

**C** Why is the Second Coming the only real solution to our suffering?

**III. Do: Hope Against Hope**

**A** How does the hope of the Second Coming help you in the experience of injustice?

**B** How does hope in the Second Coming help you to deal with the idea of death?

**C** How does the hope of the Second Coming help you to make the right decisions in your daily life?

► **Summary:** The second coming of Christ is the fundamental belief that gives all the Christian religion its meaning. It is the event that ultimately fulfills all the dreams and hopes of humankind.



## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Timothy 4:7, 8*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** A belief in the second coming of Jesus comprises more than a dogmatic truth to be repeated in our confession of faith. It is the cornerstone of our spiritual life. Jesus' request " 'your kingdom come' " (*Matt. 6:10, NKJV*) is the pinnacle of His model prayer. The ancient Israelites prayed toward Jerusalem (*Dan. 6:10*), because prayer was the expression of their hope.

**Just for Teachers:** The belief of the second coming of Christ contains all other tenets of faith. Analyze with your students the meaning of the name "Seventh-day Adventist." Ask them to meditate on the meaning of each component of the name and on the significance of the tension between them. Then share the following quote: "Our name is made of two opposite entities. . . . While the phrase 'seventh day' connects us with earthly existence and human history the word 'Adventist' takes us to the future of history, what comes after human history and belongs to the prophetic domain, pointing to the heavenly order. While the phrase 'seventh day' confronts us with the present reality of the earthly city and makes us breathe with the rhythm of time 'under heaven' (*Eccl. 3:1*), the word 'Adventist' takes us away from here and makes us dream and pray and hope for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and strengthens in our heart the sense of 'eternity' (*Eccl. 3:11*)."—Excerpted from Jacques Doukhan, "The Tension of Seventh-day Adventist Identity: An Existential & Eschatological Perspective," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Jan. 26, 2015, pp. 29, 30.

**Opening Discussion:** Examine the connection between the truth of the Second Coming and other Seventh-day Adventist truths. If you did not have this hope, how would the other beliefs stand? What is the connection between the hope in the Second Coming and the Sabbath commandment?

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why does the Bible begin with Creation and end with the kingdom of God? What other examples do you find in the Bible that attest to that same connection?
- ❷ Why would it not be possible to be a good Adventist without the Sabbath? Conversely, why is it not possible to be a good Seventh-day Adventist without the hope of the Second Coming?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** One Christian lecturer mocked those naïve Christians who believed in the second coming of Jesus from heaven: “Do you think that Jesus will come in a parachute?” People laughed, and the lecturer made his point. During the past century, many Christian theologians have emphasized the importance of having an existential encounter with Jesus Christ. What is important, they argue, is our personal relationship with Him, our ethical life, and our faith in His love for us in our present life. This lesson will address this pernicious thinking. Biblical hope is not about this life but concerns a radically new world, which will be initiated by the real historical interruption of God, who will break through our history and bring a new life that has nothing to do with our present mortal condition.

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Kingdom of the Future (*Review Daniel 2:34, 35 with your class.*)

The prophecies of Daniel make it very clear. The heavenly kingdom of God will be different from all other earthly kingdoms. The prophetic history of the kingdoms of the earth is described as a continuous succession of kingdoms, which disappear one after the other, while still retaining something from the previous kingdoms.

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, appears abruptly from heaven and has no connection whatsoever with the previous earthly kingdoms. In fact, the establishment of the kingdom of God implies the total and radical destruction of all the other kingdoms: “ ‘No trace of them was found’ ” (*Dan. 2:35, NKJV*). Note that this operation is not the result of human wars or even of an ecological disaster. Just as the Creation of the world was God’s unique operation, the destruction of the world will happen “ ‘by no human hand’ ” (*Dan. 2:45, ESV*). On the other hand, “ ‘the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed’ ” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*). While the earthly kingdoms do not last and have no future, the kingdom of God is the only one that reveals the future.

This future perspective of the kingdom of God contains the secret of biblical wisdom. While the wisdom of the world is present-oriented, the wisdom of the kingdom of God is future-oriented. All we do should be tested by this question. As Ellen G. White advises: “No scheme of business or plan of life can be sound or complete that embraces only the brief years of this present life and makes no provision for the unending future. Let the youth be taught to take eternity into their reckoning.”—*Education*, p. 145.

**Consider This:** What are the differences between the earthly kingdoms (represented by the metals) and the heavenly kingdom (represented by the stone) in the vision of Daniel 2? Why is the second coming of Jesus irreconcilable with the idea of evolution?

## II. Like a Thief (*Review 1 Thessalonians 5:4, Revelation 3:3, 16:15 with your class.*)

The biblical view of hope is radically different from human theories of hope. While all human philosophies of hope expect the solution to human miseries to come from this world and from human effort, the Bible promises the solution to our problem comes from God in heaven. For this reason, the Messiah our Savior is pictured as someone coming “with the clouds of heaven” (*Dan. 7:13, Matt. 24:30, Rev. 14:14*). We cannot save ourselves, just as we cannot create ourselves.

Nor can we predict the moment of His coming. According to the Bible, the “end” is not a gradual process, the result of a progressive maturation. The Hebrew word *qets*, for “end,” is derived from the Hebrew verb *qatsats*, which means “cut off” (*Deut. 25:12, NKJV*) and implies an abrupt event, which has no link with preceding events. Therefore, the coming of Jesus will surprise and will strike like a violent and unexpected blow.

The Bible compares the coming of Christ to the coming of a thief. This comparison suggests that the world that He will take is presently not in His hands; it is in the hand of an enemy (*Matt. 13:28; compare with Job 1:11, 12*). To save us, God is obliged to break through and steal, just as He did when He stole Israel from Pharaoh or when He stole the demon-possessed from the devil (*Matt. 12:28, 29*).

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why can humans not save themselves?
- ❷ What human philosophies of hope are you acquainted with? How, and why did they, or will they, fail?
- ❸ Why will God’s people, as will everyone, be surprised by the second coming of Christ?
- ❹ Why does God’s salvation of the world imply violence?
- ❺ What lesson does the comparison to a thief imply for us in our waiting for His coming? (*Read Matt. 24:44.*)

## III. New Heavens and a New Earth (*Review Isaiah 65:17–25 with your class.*)

God will not just “steal.” He will give new things. The kingdom of Babylon is destroyed, and, instead, the New Jerusalem is created. Death is replaced by eternal life. The resurrection of the dead will be the first manifestation of the Second Coming. Daniel is the book of the Old Testament that resonates the most with that hope (*Dan. 12:2, 3, 13*). Eternal life will be lived fully in our newly made bodies.

God's kingdom will be a place that our imagination cannot conceive (*1 Cor. 2:7–9*).

The fact that God's kingdom is beyond the capacity of our imagination does not mean that this new order escapes our understanding. Rather, it means that God's promise is real even if we cannot imagine it, for the "Thief" did not come from our mind or our dreams. Heaven is a real place that the "Thief" has prepared for us (*John 14:2*). The life in this kingdom will be a real life, just as it has never been in our earthly life, because, for the first time after the Garden of Eden, it will be a life without the shadow of death.

**Consider This:** Why is it not possible for us to conceive of the kingdom of God? Why does the resurrection of the dead exclude the idea of the immortality of the soul?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The author of this quarter's Teachers Edition was once interviewed on French public radio. During the program, he spoke about his hope in God's kingdom in heaven. In contrast to his comments about hope in the God of heaven, the music technician, an atheist, broadcast a popular song that featured a bird flying in the skies to suggest that the author's faith was not about real things. For the technician, heaven meant only birds and literal sky. Contrary to what this song was intended to suggest, why is a hope in the Second Coming about real things, unseen though they are?

#### Application Questions:

- ❶ Why is it not possible to witness about the heavenly kingdom of God when we are not living as citizens of it here and now?
- ❷ What are the things in our lives today that distract us from the heavenly kingdom of God?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Discuss with the class the challenges we face in sharing the truth of the Second Coming with those who do not believe.

#### Activities:

- ❶ Ask the members of your class to share with others in the coming week about their hope in the Second Coming and report on peoples' responses next week.
- ❷ Encourage your students to self-reflect: What will they do differently in their lives, from here on out, after having studied this lesson?

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](mailto:info@christianrecord.org); Web site: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).