

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
April | May | June 2023

THREE COSMIC MESSAGES



Justin



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The Three Angels' Messages



On October 15, 1844, one week before the Great Disappointment, a boy had been born into a pious Lutheran family in Germany. His name was Friedrich Nietzsche, and he would become one of modernity's most influential atheists. Believing that the Christian God was dying in the West, Nietzsche railed against the Christian religion's continued moral influence, deriding it as a "slave morality," the morality of the weak who, in an attempt to protect themselves from the strong, concocted such silly notions as "Love your enemies." For Nietzsche, modernity needed to get beyond antiquated notions of "good and evil"; a character in one of his books (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*) declared, "Smash the old law tablets!" (meaning, of course, the Ten Commandments).

The year 1844 also was important for Karl Marx, the founder of communism. Called the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," this work had been written by Marx that year, even if not published until 1932 by the Soviet Union. The manuscripts show the early development of Marx's ideology in which he argued for a totally materialist reality that moved through various economic stages until the workers of the world would unite, overthrow their capitalist oppressors, and create a utopia on earth.

The year 1844 had been an important one for Charles Darwin too. In what has become known as the "Essay of 1844," Darwin produced one of the earliest expressions of his evolutionary theory, even if it was not then made public. Only in 1859, with the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, did Darwin publicly promulgate his view that all life on earth

originated from a common ancestor by natural and chance processes alone.

The year 1844 was, however, the fulfillment of the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, and the same year that, out of the leftovers of the Great Disappointment, seeds were planted that would burgeon in a worldwide movement whose core message repudiated the guts of Marxist, Nietzschean, and Darwinian ideology.

Contra Marx, the Seventh-day Adventist movement proclaimed that the great controversy between Christ and Satan, not a materialist flow of history, explained world history that would end, not in a man-made communist utopia but in the supernatural establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

Contra Darwin, the Seventh-day Adventist movement taught that life originated, not in the natural and chance process of random mutation and natural selection but by the power of the Creator God, who in six days created life on earth and rested on the seventh.

And contra Nietzsche, the Seventh-day Adventist movement proclaimed, not only that God exists but also that His universal code of morality (the "old law tablets"), the Ten Commandments, remains God's ultimate standard of judgment and binding on all humanity.

Was it a coincidence that all these events happened in 1844? One should not think so.

Marx, Nietzsche, Darwin—three influential figures whose work has caused humanity irreparable harm. But amid all these errors, God did not leave the world without a witness to His truth, which is why, amid these destructive ideologies, He raised up a movement that would, over time, morph into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and that would proclaim His last-day truth to the world—the three angels' messages. These are messages that, at their core, refute the errors and misconceptions promoted by those three terribly deceived men.

The three angels' messages are, in a sense, the marching orders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And at their core, they are the gospel, pure and simple, but the gospel presented in the context of "present truth" (2 Peter 1:12, NKJV).

And these, the three angels' messages, are our study for the quarter.

A native of Connecticut, U.S.A., Mark Finley, an internationally known evangelist, was a vice president at the General Conference from 2005 to 2010. After retiring from full-time employment, he became an assistant to the president of the General Conference. Pastor Finley and his wife, Ernestine, have three children and five grandchildren.

The three angels' messages are . . . the marching orders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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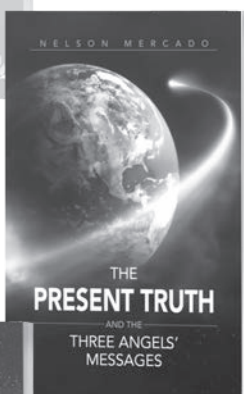
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Jesus Wins—Satan Loses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Revelation 12; Eph. 5:25–27, 32; Phil. 3:9; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 14:12–14; Rev. 13:14–17.*

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*).

In *Outnumbered: Incredible Stories of History's Most Surprising Battlefield Upsets*, Cormac O'Brien recounts the stories of armies that, though seriously outnumbered, still won. It tells of Hannibal's army of 55,000 soldiers, from Carthage, defeating the “invincible” Roman army of 80,000 strong. It tells the amazing story of Alexander the Great's Greek army defeating the empire of Persia.

We, too, are in a life-and-death battle with a wily foe. We are outnumbered, fighting against incredible odds. The forces of evil appear invincible. We seem to be facing certain loss. Defeat seems inevitable. Victory appears out of sight. From a merely human perspective, it seems that Satan's forces will overwhelm us.

But, thank God, though we are outnumbered, though the odds are (humanly speaking) stacked against us, though Satan's attacks are vicious, through Jesus we will win at last. The theme of the Bible's last book, *Revelation*, is this: Jesus Wins, Satan Loses. The heart of this battle is outlined in *Revelation 12*, the focus of our study this week. This study will give a good preparation for understanding *Revelation 14* and the three angels' messages.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 1.

The Battle in Heaven

Revelation 12 presents a stream of dramatic episodes, snapshots of the age-long conflict between good and evil that began in heaven but will end here on earth. These episodes take us down the stream of time, from the opening scene of Satan's rebellion in heaven to his vicious attacks on God's people in the last days.

Read Revelation 12:7–9, which describes this cosmic conflict between good and evil. How, possibly, could something like this happen in heaven? What do these verses imply about the reality of free will, free choice?

The freedom to choose is a fundamental principle of God's government, both in heaven and on earth. God neither created robots in heaven nor on earth. Created in the image of God, we as humans can make moral choices.

The power of choice is closely aligned with the ability to love. If you take away the power of choice, you destroy the ability to love, for love can never be forced or coerced. Love is an expression of free will. Every angel in heaven was faced with the choice either to respond to God's love or to turn away in selfishness, arrogance, and pride. Just as the heavenly angels were confronted by love with an eternal choice, Revelation presents each one of us with eternal choices in earth's final conflict.

There has never been neutrality in the great controversy (*see Luke 11:23*), and there will be none in earth's final war. Just as every angel chose Jesus' side or Lucifer's side, all humanity will be led to a final, irrevocable choice at the end of time. Who will have our allegiance, our worship, our obedience? This has always been the issue with humanity, and it will be so, however more dramatically, in the final crisis of earth's history.

But here is the incredibly good news: Revelation 12 describes Christ's triumph in the conflict, and all we have to do, using our free will, is choose to be on His side, the winning side. How great to be able to choose a side in a battle that you know, beforehand, it will win.

Think about how sacred free will and free choice must be to Jesus, who, though knowing that it would lead Him to the cross (*see 2 Tim. 1:9*), gave us free will anyway. What should this tell us about how carefully we should use this sacred, but costly, gift?

Satan's Attack

From the start, Satan sought to destroy Christ (*see Rev. 12:4, 5*). Yet, in every attempt, Satan failed. At Christ's birth, for instance, an angel warned Joseph and Mary about Herod's vicious plans, and they fled into Egypt. Jesus faced Satan's most enticing temptations in the wilderness with an "It is written," and thus found protection in the Word of God. In His death on the cross, He revealed the magnitude of His love and delivered us from the penalty of sin's condemnation. In His resurrection, as our living High Priest, He delivers us from the power of sin in our lives.

Read Revelation 12:4–6, 9; Ephesians 5:25–27, 32; and Psalm 2:7–9 and define the following symbols:

Dragon _____

Woman _____

Male Child _____

Rod of Iron _____

In the Bible, a rod is a symbol of dominion or rulership. A rod of iron is a symbol of an unbreakable, all-powerful, invincible rulership. Jesus faced every single temptation that we experience, but He came off a conqueror. The devil is a defeated foe. Christ has triumphed over him in His life, death, and resurrection. Because Jesus has already defeated the devil on Calvary's cross, we can be victorious, too. Christ's victory over Satan was complete, but the great controversy between Christ and Satan is not over yet.

Nevertheless, when we accept by faith what Christ has done for us, our sin debt is canceled and our sins are forgiven. We stand perfect before God, covered in Christ's righteousness. As Paul writes about being "found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (*Phil. 3:9, NKJV*). If we are forgiven, there is nothing that we can be accused of. Jesus conquered and overcame forever the worst that sin and evil could do to Him. He made the full assault on evil and overcame it. When we accept Jesus by faith, His victory is ours.

Why is the assurance of salvation, because of Christ's victory over Satan, so crucial to us? How can what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:9 be our own experience?

Accepting Jesus' Victory

As depicted in the Bible, Jesus has never lost a battle with Satan. He is the mighty Conqueror. He is the Victor over the powers of evil. It is one thing to believe that Jesus was victorious over the temptations of Satan; it is quite another thing to believe that Christ's victory is our victory, as well.

Read Revelation 12:10. What encouragement should you get from the fact that your accuser “has been cast down” (NKJV)?

Although the battle still rages on earth, Satan has lost. Period. This is true not only of Christ's ultimate victory at the climax of human history, but it also is true in our battle over the principalities and powers of evil in our personal lives. Some Christians live in frustrated defeat. They are hoping for victory over some attitude or habit but never grasp the reality of Christ's victory for them in their personal lives.

Read Revelation 12:11. What assurance of victory does Christ give us in this passage?

Seven times in Revelation's messages to the seven churches we find the expression, “he who overcomes.” Here in Revelation 12:11, we find this concept of overcoming again. The word “overcome” in the original language of the text is *nikao*. It can be literally translated “to conquer, to prevail, to triumph, or to come through victoriously.” Notice how it is possible for us to be overcomers. Revelation 12:11 affirms that it is “by the blood of the Lamb.”

In Revelation 5:6, in prophetic vision, John gazes into heaven and sees “a Lamb as though it had been slain” (NKJV). The sacrifice of Christ is the focus of the attention of all of heaven. There is nothing more sublime to demonstrate the infinite, unfathomable love of God than the Cross.

When we accept by faith what Christ has done for us, our debt is canceled, and we stand perfect in the sight of God. Our sins are forgiven (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Col. 2:14), and the “accuser of our brethren . . . has been cast down” (Rev. 12:10, NKJV). We are redeemed, victorious, and saved, not because of our own merits but because of Christ's victories in our behalf.

The Woman in the Wilderness

Read Revelation 12:6 and compare it to Revelation 12:14–16. Notice carefully the time period, Satan’s attack on the “woman” (God’s church), and God’s provision for His people. What are these verses talking about?

The 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 are parallel to the time, times, and half a time in Revelation 12:14. This same time prophecy describing the same time period is found in Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2, 3; and Revelation 13:5. Because these are prophetic symbols (a literal woman with wings did not go into the wilderness), we apply prophetic time, the day-year principle (*see, for instance, Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:4–6*), to these prophecies. This means, simply, that one prophetic day equals one year. Commenting on this same prophetic period of time in Revelation 11:2, the *Andrews Study Bible* states, “Historicist interpreters, therefore, have generally understood the period of 1,260 prophetic days to mean 1,260 literal years running from A.D. 538 to 1798” (p. 1,673 comments on Revelation 11:2). A corrupt church—together with a corrupt state—oppressed, persecuted, and at times slaughtered God’s faithful people.

This fierce, satanic persecution of Bible-believing Christians was an extension of the great controversy between good and evil. Coming out of the darkness of the Middle Ages, at the time of the Reformation, men and women were faced with a choice. Would they be faithful to the Word of God, or would they accept the teachings of priests and prelates? Once again truth triumphed, and God had a people who were faithful to Him in the face of mighty opposition.

There are some fascinating and extremely encouraging expressions of God’s care in these verses. Revelation 12:6 uses the expression, “a place prepared by God” (*NKJV*). Revelation 12:14 declares that the woman was “nourished” in the wilderness, and Revelation 12:16 declares, “The earth helped the woman.” At times of severe persecution, God provided for His church. As He did then, He will do the same for His end-time remnant.

Describe a time of trial or difficulty in your own life when you could easily have become discouraged, but God provided a place of refuge for you and nourished you in your challenges. How did God provide support when you needed it most?

God's End-time Remnant

The devil has been at war with Christ since his rebellion in heaven (*Rev. 12:7*). Satan's purpose then and his purpose now is to seize control of the universe (*see Isa. 14:12–14*). The focus of his attention in the last days of earth's history is upon God's people. Revelation 12:17 emphatically declares that the dragon (Satan) was wroth (angry) with the woman (the church) and went to make war with the rest of her offspring. This expression, the rest of her offspring, also is translated “the remnant” in the King James Version. God's remnant remains loyal to Christ, obedient to His truth, and faithful to His mission.

Read Revelation 12:17. What characteristics of God's remnant, His last-day church, are found in this verse?

In Revelation 12:17, Satan (the dragon) is angry with the woman, God's church. The devil is furious with a people who keep the commandments of God, and he will do everything he can to destroy them.

Eventually, he instigates a decree so that they cannot buy or sell and will be imprisoned and face death (*see Rev. 13:14–17*). If Satan cannot destroy Christ, he will attempt to destroy the object of Christ's deepest affection—Christ's church. Earth's last war is not centered in the Middle East and the various conflicts there; it is centered in the minds of God's people scattered all over the world. It is a battle between two opposing forces, Christ and Satan. Again, no one is neutral.

The central question in this final war is, “Who has our loyalty? Where is our allegiance?” Heaven calls for believers who are so charmed by Christ's love, redeemed by His grace, committed to His purposes, empowered by His Spirit, and so obedient to His commands that they are willing to face death itself for His cause.

Our world is headed for a major crisis. But in Jesus, by Jesus, through Jesus, and because of Jesus, our victory is assured—just as long as we stay connected to Him, which we do by faith, a faith that leads to obedience. It all comes down to our own choice.

How do you see the reality of Revelation 12:17 played out in your own life, in your own Christian experience? That is, in what ways do you find the great controversy being played out in your own life?

Further Thought: In a sense, we could argue that God had no choice: if He wanted beings who could love Him and love others, He had to create them free. If they were not free, they could not love, and what would our universe be without love? It would be what some people have claimed: nothing but a mindless machine that works according to strict laws of cause and effect and in which we have no free will, no free choice, and are nothing but flesh-and-blood packets of subatomic particles that follow only the laws of physics. Not exactly a pretty picture, nor does it represent what we know, in and of ourselves, to be true. Who among us thinks, for instance, that our love for our parents, our children, our spouses is nothing but an arrangement of atoms?

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

“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 confident and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 34, 35.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶** Why is Revelation 12 a fitting introduction to the three angels’ messages, especially in view of the coming conflict at the time of the end?
- ❷** How is Revelation 12 reassuring to you personally in the temptations and trials you face daily?
- ❸** There are some who believe that our actions are largely determined by our heredity and environment. Do you agree or disagree? What role does our choice have in determining our behavior? Discuss the relationship between our choice and God’s power operating in our lives.

Run to Jesus

By ALICIA MARIE HARDING

Homeschooling, a smoothly running schedule, a clean house, homemade healthy meals. These things are good, and I am passionate about them as an American missionary mother raising four missionary kids in Zambia. But these things also are simply tools that help us honor Jesus. If the tools get in the way of Jesus, we need to run to Him.

It was about 10:00 A.M. We were in the middle of homeschool, and I also was multitasking with laundry and lunch preparation. Then one child snapped at another for making too much noise. Tears started flowing when a child couldn't figure out her math problem, and an argument erupted between two siblings insistent on getting their own way. My own frustration was festering because I had to keep repeating instructions to an inattentive child.

At that point, I knew I had two choices, I could give way to my flesh and with a harsh voice set everyone straight. Or I could go against my inclinations and with a sweet, cheerful voice invite all of us to take our problems to Jesus. What did we gain in work and school if Jesus wasn't in our hearts?

Smiling, I called each child by name. "Shayla," I said to my 11-year-old daughter. "Wesley," I said, turning to my nine-year-old son. "Sienna and Winston," I said to my seven-year-old daughter and three-year-old son. "We are going to take all our problems to Jesus and let Him help us fix them."

We knelt under a shade tree and told Jesus about our problems. We read in the Bible about how Jesus calmed the storm. We praised Jesus with a song. Then we shared hugs and started our day all over again—with Jesus. Again.

Walking back into the house, each child's spirit was subdued. Once inside, each child listened more carefully to my instructions. There was a willingness to work out disagreements in a respectful manner that focused on others, a sharp contrast with the earlier self-focused spirit. We were reminded that Jesus was near and His presence was more precious than any to-do list.

Ellen White writes, "Mothers who sigh for a missionary field have one at hand in their own home circle. . . . Are not the souls of her own children of as much value as the souls of the heathen? With what care and tenderness should she watch their growing minds and connect God with all their thoughts! Who can do this as well as a loving, God-fearing mother?" (*Adventist Home*, p. 245).

Motherhood is more than running a home. It's about running your little ones to Jesus.



Thank you for your mission offerings that support missionaries around the world.

A Moment of Destiny



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:14, Rev. 14:14–20, Matt. 16:27, Acts 1:9–11, Mark 4:26–29, Rev. 16:1.*

Memory Text: Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe’ ” (*Revelation 14:14, 15, NKJV*).

God has always spoken to His people, giving them whatever relevant truths they needed to hear at the time. From the warning about the Flood (*Gen. 6:7*) to the first coming of Jesus (*Dan. 9:24–27*) to the pre-Advent judgment (*Dan. 7:9, 10; Dan. 8:14*) to final events before Christ's return (*Revelation 12–14*), God has spoken to us. In these last days of human history, He has sent a special message to the world and to His people, designed to meet the need of the hour. He pictures this message as being carried by three angels flying in midheaven with their urgent, end-time message to all the world.

The three angels' messages are Jesus' final message of mercy, a call that leads us from trusting in our own righteousness to trusting the righteousness of Jesus to justify us; to sanctify us; and, at the end of time, to glorify us.

As always, though, we must choose Christ, to surrender to Him and to obey Him, and the choices we make now will, indeed, impact the choices we make in the final crisis ahead of us.

Thus, now is the time to prepare.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 8.

Eternal Choices

Revelation 14 is Jesus' final message of mercy to a fallen and rebellious world, one that has, for about six thousand years, been steeped in sin and evil. There will come a day when every human being on planet Earth will make a final, irrevocable decision, either for or against Jesus. Revelation's message of Christ's righteousness delivering us from the condemnation of sin, as well as the grip of sin in our lives, will echo and reecho throughout the earth.

Read Matthew 24:14 and compare it with Revelation 14:6. What promise did Jesus give to His disciples regarding the worldwide spread of the gospel just before His return?

Jesus' promise that " 'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world' " (*NKJV*), given in Matthew 24:14, finds its final fulfillment in Christ's last-day message, in Revelation 14:6, which says that the gospel is proclaimed to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (*NKJV*).

Three times in Revelation 22 Jesus says that He is coming quickly (*Rev. 22:7, 12, 20*). In the context of His soon return, our Lord adds, " 'He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still' " (*Rev. 22:11, NKJV*). Revelation moves to one glorious climax in which every person is led to decide for or against Christ.

Of course, every day, by our choices even in the "little things," we are choosing either for or against Jesus. It's not likely that someone constantly making the wrong choices in their life now will suddenly, in the final crisis, come forward on the side of Jesus, especially when the force of the whole evil world is against them. Now, today, and every day we must choose to be faithful to Christ and to His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (*1 John 5:3*). As Ellen G. White has said: "Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny."—*Last Day Events*, p. 295.

How does God shape our characters? What means does He use for us to grow in grace? What can we do to more fully allow the Holy Spirit to transform us to be more like Jesus?

The Son of Man Returns

Revelation 14 contains the key texts in regard to the Lord's last-day message to His people and to the world. Central to it all is the return of Jesus, the fulfillment of His promise that " 'you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' " (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:14. What title is used to describe Jesus as He returns to earth? Why do you think John uses this title for Jesus?

Jesus used the term "Son of Man" to refer to Himself 82 times in the Gospels. It was one of His favorite titles. He used it as an expression of endearment to identify with us. He is a Savior who understands us, has experienced our temptations, and has passed through our trials. He is the "Son of Man" who is returning to take us home. The Jesus who comes for us is the same Jesus who lived among us. He is qualified to redeem us because He became One of us, and yet, as one of us, He met the full fury of Satan's temptations and, yes, was victorious.

What do we learn from the following Bible verses in Matthew about Jesus, the Son of Man?

Matt. 16:27 _____

Matt. 24:27, 30 _____

Matt. 25:31, 32 _____

Notice some elements in these passages: (1) Jesus, the Son of Man, is coming in glory with His angels. (2) He will divide the sheep from the goats (basically a judgment). (3) The destiny of the nations and all humanity will be decided for eternity.

Think about the term "Son of Man" and what it says of Christ's humanity. Though God, He became one of us, just like us, but unlike us, He never sinned. What amazing hope does this offer to you in terms of (1) knowing God's love for us and (2) knowing that He can relate to your struggles and give you victory over them?

The Heavenly Judgment

Read Revelation 14:14 and Acts 1:9–11. What similarities do you discover?

John states that “I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man” (*Rev. 14:14, NKJV*). When Jesus ascended to heaven, Luke records in Acts 1:9 that as the disciples stood gazing up into heaven, “while they watched, He [Jesus] was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (*NKJV*). Jesus ascended in a cloud of angels and will return with a cloud of angels. The angels then declared to the amazed disciples in Acts 1:11, “ ‘This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (*NKJV*). There is a divine truth embedded in this passage that may not be apparent. This “same Jesus,” the “Son of Man”—the One who walked the dusty streets of Nazareth, ministered in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, healed the sick in the villages of Israel, and preached on the grassy hillsides of Galilee—is coming again.

The Son of Man also is mentioned in the light of the judgment in Daniel 7.

Read Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14. Why did Daniel call Jesus the “Son of Man” in something as serious as the judgment? What, given what we have already looked at, should be comforting in knowing that the “Son of Man” is so central to judgment?

In Daniel 7:9, 10, Daniel views the seating of the heavenly court with ten thousand times ten thousand angelic, heavenly beings gathered around the throne. The judgment is set, and the books—the celestial records of our lives—are opened before the universe. In Daniel 7:13, 14, the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days, the Father, and receives His eternal kingdom. The judgment reveals before the entire universe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done everything possible to save all humanity. This judgment vindicates not only the saints but also God’s own character against the false charges of Satan (*see Job 1, Job 2, Ps. 51:1–4*).

Think about the fact that your whole life will come under scrutiny before God. What, then, is your only hope when this happens? (*See Rom. 8:1.*)

The Victor's Crown

John describes Jesus as the “Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle” (*Rev. 14:14, NKJV*). The word for “crown” is *stephanos*. It is a victor’s crown. When an athlete won an important contest, he was given a *stephanos*, a crown of honor, of glory, of victory.

Jesus once wore a crown of thorns, symbolizing shame and mockery. He once was despised and rejected of men. He was reviled, ridiculed, spat upon, beaten, and whipped. But now He wears a crown of glory and comes again but now as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Read Revelation 14:15 and Mark 4:26–29. What similarities do you see between the texts? What are they both talking about?

The angel comes from the presence of God in the glory of the temple and says, “It’s time. The harvest is fully ripe.” Go and get Your children and bring them home.

Jesus uses illustrations from agriculture repeatedly in the New Testament. On more than one occasion, He uses the symbolism of a ripening harvest to illustrate the growth of the seed of the gospel in the lives of His people.

“The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development, our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 65, 66.

The ripening of the golden grain represents all those transformed by grace, motivated by love, and living obedient lives to the glory of Christ’s name. Their hearts are one with Jesus’ heart, and all they want is what He wants.

How do you understand Ellen G. White’s statement that “at every stage of development, our life may be perfect”? What does that mean, especially when we can see our faults and defective characters now?

Every Seed Produces a Harvest

In Revelation 14 there are two harvests. The harvest of golden grain represents the righteous, and the harvest of gory grapes represents the unrighteous or the lost. Both harvests are fully ripe. Every seed sown is fully mature.

Read Revelation 14:17–20. What does the expression “the great winepress of the wrath of God” mean? See also Revelation 14:10, Revelation 15:1, and Revelation 16:1.

“Another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire” (*Rev. 14:18, NKJV*). Here is the angel who commands the fires of God’s final judgment. The harvest is ripe. Sin has reached its limits. Rebellion has crossed the line of God’s mercy. As evil and bad as things have been, it’s going to get even worse before it’s all over. A loving God has done everything He can do for us, which included offering Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*; see also *Gal. 3:13*).

What more could God have done beyond that cross? There is nothing more grace can do to redeem those who have repeatedly rejected the Holy Spirit.

Here is the urgent prophetic message of Revelation 14. Every seed has gone to harvest. The grain is fully ripe, and the grapes are fully ripe. The people of God reveal His image of grace, compassion, mercy, and love before the universe. The children of the evil one reveal greed, lust, jealousy, and hate. The character of Jesus is revealed in one group and the character of Satan in the other.

The universe will see in the people of God a revelation of righteousness that, perhaps, no generation before it has ever witnessed. In contrast to the righteousness of Christ revealed in His people, the universe will see the full results of rebellion against God. Wickedness, evil, sin, and lawlessness will be on full display before men and angels. The contrast between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience, will be apparent to all the universe, to both humans and angels.

How well can you discern the contrast between good and evil? Why is it important that we do? (*See Heb. 5:14.*)

Further Thought: “It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 555.

Subtly, imperceptibly, almost unnoticed at first, our characters and our personalities change based on the seeds that we are sowing in our minds. Sow good seeds, and you will produce good fruit. Sow the evil seeds of this world, and you will produce the fruit of this world in your character. If we sow indifference to God and spiritual values and priorities, we reap the fruit of indifference—apathy, spiritual complacency, and frustration in our spiritual lives. This is why those who think, *Well, I know that one day final persecution will come, the “mark of the beast” and so forth, but when it does, then I will get it together*, are choosing a very dangerous path. God calls us now, at this moment, to surrender our lives to Him. The longer one delays responding to the Holy Spirit, the harder and harder one’s soul becomes to the promptings of God and more susceptible to fall for, and believe in, the lies of the evil one.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What is the relationship between being saved by grace and growing in grace, in the context of Revelation 14:14–20 and the harvest principle?
- ② Discuss the elements necessary for the growth of plants and compare them to those necessary for our spiritual growth. What are the similarities? That is, what can we learn from how plants grow that we can apply to our own lives?
- ③ Is there a difference between our God-given ability to choose and willpower? Why is understanding this difference important for the growing Christian?
- ④ Why is the title “Son of Man” an encouragement in the judgment hour as we anticipate the second coming of Christ? Why is it comforting to realize that a man, a human being, is up there representing us in the judgment?

700 Former Rebels Baptized

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The Philippines was mired in conflict with rebels on Mindoro Island for 52 years. Land and money were offered to the rebels in exchange for peace, but nothing seemed to work. A seemingly endless cycle of ambushes and counterattacks left 40,000 people dead.

In 2017, Adventist World Radio (AWR) began broadcasting in Mindoro as part of a Seventh-day Adventist world church initiative known as TMI evangelism. TMI stands for Total Member Involvement, a program that encourages every church member to bring someone to Jesus. AWR leased time on local radio stations, and local church members got involved by giving Bible studies and inviting neighbors to evangelistic meetings. About 1,400 people were baptized at the meetings, and the broadcasts continued.

In 2019, rebels holed up in the lush, green mountains of Mindoro began to listen to AWR. As COVID-19 swept through the world in 2020, a number of them decided to surrender to Jesus.

Rebel leader Ka Martin could not understand what was happening, and he started to listen to AWR.

“He was hiding in the jungle, watching and trying to figure out why his fighters were leaving him,” said AWR president Duane McKey. “So he started listening to the radio.”

Martin was responsible for the deaths of dozens of people, including 21 soldiers whom he ambushed while they slept and shot dead with one of their own machine guns. But as he listened to AWR, he also decided to give his heart to Jesus.

A bloodstained chapter of Philippine history drew to a close when about 700 former rebels, including Martin and his wife, laid down their weapons and were baptized at AWR-led evangelistic meetings. In all, over 60,000 people were baptized during the “Earth’s Final Countdown” meetings across the Philippines about a year ago.

“What bullets couldn’t do, God has done,” McKey said.

The Philippine government has granted amnesty to the former rebels. AWR is working with the government and a nongovernmental organization, ASI member Farm Stew, to help the former rebels earn a livelihood through farming.



“We won’t stop the AWR broadcasts,” said McKey, who also serves as assistant to the General Conference president and is in charge of Total Member Involvement. “The local churches are now running the broadcasts, and we provide the sermons. The laypeople make this happen. This is a perfect example of Total Member Involvement.”

The Everlasting Gospel



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:6–12; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; Rom. 3:24–26; 1 Pet. 1:18–20; Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8.*

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*).

In ancient Israel, when the heathen around them were polytheists, worshipping multiple “gods” of wood and stone, Israel’s clear, identifiable, powerful statement of faith was found in Deuteronomy 6:4: “‘Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one’ ” (*NKJV*).

Throughout the centuries, the chanting of the Shema (the name of the prayer, based on the Hebrew word for “hear”) reminded the Jews of the spiritual vision that united them as a people and that strengthened their resolve to maintain their unique identity as worshipers of the one true God.

For Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14 are our Shema. They are our identifying statement of faith. They define who we are as a people and describe our mission to the world. In short, our unique prophetic identity is outlined in Revelation 14:6–12, and it is here that we find our passion to proclaim the gospel to the world.

In this week’s lesson, we will begin a detailed study of Revelation 14:6–12, but we will do so through the eyes of grace as we listen to God speaking to our hearts.

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 15.*

A Grace-Filled Book of Hope

When most people think about the Bible's last book, Revelation, they do not think about God's grace. When they consider God's last-day message, their thoughts often turn immediately to frightening beasts, mystic symbols, and strange images. The book of Revelation scares as many people as it reassures, which is unfortunate because it is, indeed, saturated with grace and filled with hope. That is, even amid the scary beasts and warnings of persecution and the hard times ahead, God still gives us reasons to rejoice in His salvation.

Read Revelation 1:1–3 and Revelation 14:6. How do these verses together tell us about not just the book of Revelation but about the “everlasting gospel,” as well?

Revelation is all about Jesus. It is His message to His people and is especially applicable to His church in the last days. It is the grace-filled message of our end-time hope. Throughout the book, Christ is described as the slain Lamb, and a blessing is promised to those who read, understand, and act on the truths revealed.

According to Revelation 1:5, 6, Jesus is the One who “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (*NKJV*). In Christ we are forgiven. Grace pardons our past, empowers our present, and provides hope for our future. That is, in Christ we are delivered from sin's penalty and power, and one day soon we will be delivered from sin's presence. This is the message of the Bible's last book, Revelation.

And it also is an urgent message, first pictured as an angel flying swiftly in midheaven having the “everlasting gospel.”

The gospel? Salvation by faith in Christ? Christ's atoning death for us? The promise of eternal life, not because of what we can do but because of what Christ has done for us? All this is at the beginning of the three angels' messages? Exactly!

No wonder, then, that they are grace-filled messages full of hope and promise for us as broken and suffering beings.

Though it's easy to focus on the beasts and warnings of the last days, as depicted in Revelation, how can we learn to balance all these out with what is, undeniably, the most important message of Revelation: Christ's self-sacrificing death in our behalf?

The “Everlasting” Gospel

Notice what Revelation 14:6, the beginning of the three angels’ messages, starts with: the “eternal” or “everlasting” gospel. If we fail to understand the depth of the gospel, we will miss the entire point of the three angels’ messages. We can never fully understand the issues in God’s judgment-hour message or the fall of Babylon or the mark of the beast if we fail to understand the gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Romans 3:24–26, and Romans 5:6–8. How is the “everlasting gospel” presented in these texts? What great hope is presented here for us?

The gospel is the incredibly good news of Christ’s death for our sins, His glorious resurrection, and His ever-present love and concern for us. By faith in His shed blood and His resurrection power, we are delivered from both sin’s penalty and power. Christ absorbed the apostle Paul’s thoughts and was at the center of his teaching and preaching. The crucified Christ redeemed him from the condemnation and guilt of his past. The resurrected Christ gave him power for the present, and the returning Christ gave him hope for the future.

Notice four points in these passages in Romans:

1. We are justified freely by grace.
2. Grace is a declaration of God’s righteousness.
3. Grace justifies those who by faith accept Jesus.
4. God’s love was demonstrated for us while we were yet sinners.

Christ’s grace is unmerited, undeserved, and unearned. Jesus died the agonizing, painful death that lost sinners will die. He experienced the fullness of the Father’s wrath, or judgment, against sin. He was rejected so that we could be accepted. He died the death that was ours, so we could live the life that was His.

Any wonder, then, that salvation must be by faith and without the deeds of the law? What could we possibly add? What could our works, even the best-intentioned, Holy Spirit–filled works, add to what Christ had done for us at the cross?

And this plan, the plan of salvation, had been put in place even before the beginning of time (*2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 1:2, Eph. 1:4*), which helps explain why it is called “the everlasting” gospel. Before the world was created, God knew what would happen, and so He instituted the plan of salvation to meet the crisis when it, eventually, would come.

A Story of Grace

The three angels' messages are a story of grace. They are the story of a Savior's love beyond measure—a story of Jesus who loves us so much that He would rather experience hell itself than have one of us lost. They are the story of a boundless, unfathomable, incomprehensible, undying, unending, infinite love.

God is never caught by surprise. He is not subject to the changing winds of humanity's choices. As we have already seen, His plan to deliver us from the domain of sin was not some afterthought when sin reared its ugly head. God was not caught off guard by the awful drama of sin.

Read Revelation 13:8 and 1 Peter 1:18–20. What do these verses teach us about the plan of salvation?

The phrase “everlasting gospel” in Revelation 14:6 speaks of the past, the present, and the future. When God created humans with the capacity to make moral choices, He anticipated that they would make errant choices. Once His creatures had the capacity to choose, they had the capacity to rebel against His loving nature. The only way to avoid this reality would be to create robot beings controlled and manipulated by some divine cosmic plan. Forced allegiance is contrary to God's very nature. Love requires choice, and once beings are given the power of choice, the possibility of making the wrong choices exists. Therefore, the plan of salvation was conceived in the mind of God before our first parents' rebellion in Eden.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God's throne.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

The “eternal gospel” speaks not only of the past and present—but it also is the basis of a future with hope. It speaks of living eternally with the One whose heart is aching to be with us forever.

Read Ephesians 1:4. Think about what it means that, even before the “foundation of the world,” you had been “chosen” in Christ to have salvation in Him. Why should you find this truth so encouraging?

Into All the World

Read Revelation 14:6 again. What is the extent of the proclamation of the everlasting gospel, and why is the answer important to us and our mission and calling as a church?

According to the urgent, end-time message of the first of these three angels, the “everlasting gospel” is to be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. Here is a mission so grand, so large, so great, and so comprehensive that it is all-consuming. It demands our best efforts and requires our total commitment. It leads us from a pre-occupation with our own self-interest to a passion for Christ’s service. It inspires us with something larger than ourselves and leads us out of the narrow confines of our own minds to a grander vision.

Read Matthew 28:19, 20. How do these verses dovetail with the first angel’s message?

In his book *A Quest for More: Living for Something Bigger Than You*, Paul David Tripp discusses the psychological need of every human being to be part of something larger than themselves: “Human beings were created to be part of something bigger than their own lives. Sin causes us to shrink our lives down to the size of our lives. The grace of Christ is given to rescue us from the claustrophobic confines of our own little self-focused kingdom and frees us to live for the eternal purposes and satisfying delights of the kingdom of God.”—B&B Media Group, “Living for Something Bigger Than Yourself,” n.d., <https://www.cbn.com/entertainment/books/questformore.aspx?mobile=false&u=1&option=print>.

There is nothing more inspiring, more fulfilling, more rewarding than being part of a divine movement, providentially raised up by God to accomplish a task far bigger, far larger, than any one human being could ever accomplish on their own. The commission given by God described in Revelation 14 is the greatest task ever committed to His church. It is an earnest appeal to give our lives to heaven’s grandest task to reveal God’s incomprehensible love just before Jesus’ return.

What has been your own experience in being involved in something bigger than yourself? How does that experience help you understand the point of this day’s study? Also, what could be bigger than being used by the Creator of the cosmos to make an eternal difference in the universe?

A Mission Movement

Through a perceptive, deep study of the Bible, the early Adventists had a growing understanding of the significance of these messages. They sensed that God had a message tailor-made for this generation—an urgent, end-time message that must be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, in order to prepare the world for Christ’s return. The messages of the three angels have been the motivation for Adventist missions since its beginnings.

In 1874, the General Conference sent out our first missionary to Europe. Ellen G. White called John Andrews “the ablest man in our ranks.” Andrews spoke at least seven languages, could repeat the New Testament from memory, and knew most of the Old Testament. He was a brilliant scholar, a prolific writer, a powerful preacher, and a competent theologian.

Why send a man like that to a place where there were very few believers? Why send “the ablest man” you had to an unknown mission field? And why was he willing to go? His wife had died a few years earlier. Why would he be willing to leave family and friends behind in America and sail with his two children to an unknown land, risking all for the cause of Christ?

There is only one reason. He believed that Jesus was coming soon, that the message of end-time truth must go to the entire world.

Throughout our history, our brightest and our best have traveled to the ends of the earth to proclaim God’s last-day message. They were teachers, medical personnel, pastors, farmers, mechanics, carpenters, and tradesmen of all types. Some were denominational employees, but many were not. They were laypeople who believed Jesus was coming soon.

Read Revelation 14:6, Acts 1:8, and Matthew 24:14. What similarity do you see in these verses?

The preaching of the everlasting gospel leaps across geographical boundaries. It penetrates earth’s remotest areas. It reaches people of every language and culture. Eventually, it will impact the entire world. How fascinating to know that our message has, so far, reached more than 210 of the world’s 235 countries recognized by the United Nations.

What role could you play, and how could you better play it, in helping spread the three angels’ messages to *every* “nation, kindred, tongue, and people”?

Further Thought: Dwell more on the idea of Wednesday’s study about our need to be part of something bigger than ourselves and our meager, short-lived, often corrupt, damaged, and disappointing lives (who doesn’t have some of those things in their existence?). This desire makes so much sense, too. Physically, what are we but small packets of flesh carrying around our own brains—a couple of pounds of carbon-based organic material closer in composition to a bucket of fried chicken than to a hard drive.

What can these small, self-contained packets of meat mean in contrast to the infinity that surrounds them? To live only for yourself, to live for something no bigger than yourself, when there’s so much all around us and beyond us, is like being locked for life in solitary confinement amid a large city that you can feel vibrating through the walls. And what larger, grander, and more glorious and consequential thing could we live for than proclaiming the promise of eternal life that we have been given in Jesus?

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 1, 1890. What relationship does justification by faith have to the three angels’ messages?
- ❷ Dwell more on the phrase “everlasting gospel.” What is everlasting about the gospel?
- ❸ What does it mean that Seventh-day Adventists are in so many countries of the world? What does it say about how God, so far, has blessed our efforts? At the same time, how can your local church, even your local Sabbath School, play a larger role in “finishing the work”?

Pink Hair and God

By Andrew McChesney

Days before the start of the school year, a mother called the principal of a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school for help in Ukraine.

"I don't understand anything about religion, and I don't know anything about religious denominations," the mother said. "I just saw the sign outside your school reading, 'Christian school,' and I'm absolutely certain that this is what I have been looking for."

The principal was intrigued by the call and asked for more information. She learned that the caller was the mother of a little girl named Natasha.

The mother said that when she had been pregnant with Natasha, she had often thought about sending her child to a church school one day. The persistent idea puzzled her because she was an atheist. When Natasha reached school age, the mother enrolled her in a private school that promised to nurture creativity in an atmosphere of complete freedom and no discipline. Natasha's mother became alarmed when the girl announced in the second grade that she wanted to dye her hair pink. That summer, she worried that the lack of discipline might hurt her daughter's future. Then she saw the sign for the Adventist school, remembered her thoughts when she was pregnant, and thought, *I want my child to go to this school.*

On the first day of school, Natasha started third grade in a class with five other children, all from Adventist families. She struggled at first to catch up with the other children, but she quickly gained ground. Reading the Bible and participating in morning devotions were new experiences for her. Wide-eyed, she eagerly absorbed everything she learned about God.

Several weeks into the school year, her mother called the principal to say she was delighted with the changes that had come over her daughter.

"She loves your Bible lessons, and she has fallen in love with the school," she said. "She tells us everything that goes on there and has us pray before meals. I am so happy I brought her to your school!"

Not long ago, the mother contacted the principal to ask for information about Adventist beliefs. "Natasha wants to become an Adventist, and I would like to know what changes need to be made in our lives," she said. "I also want to become an Adventist."



The family's story has not ended. "Their path with God is just beginning," said Ivan Riapolov (pictured), education director of the Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine. Thank you for your mission offerings that support Adventist education around the world.

“ ‘Fear God *and* Give Glory to Him’ ”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Revelation 14; Gen. 22:12; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Col. 3:1, 2; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17.*

Memory Text: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Revelation 14:12, NKJV*).

Danish author Søren Kierkegaard told a parable about the end time. It went something like this:

A fire broke out backstage in a big theater. A clown, who had been part of the performance, came out to warn the audience: “*Get out; the place is on fire!*” The audience thought it was just a big joke, part of the show, that’s all, and just applauded. He repeated the warning: “*Get out! Get out!*” But the more emphatically he warned them, the greater the applause. For Kierkegaard, that is how the world is going to end; that is, to the general applause of wits who believe it’s a joke.

The end of the world, and events leading up to it, are, as we know, no joke. The world faces the most serious crisis since the Flood. In fact, Peter himself uses the story of the Flood as a symbol of the end, warning that just as the world of old perished by water, in the end times, “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (*2 Pet. 3:10, NKJV*). Having been warned about what is coming, we now need to be prepared for it, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 22.

Fear God

The purpose of the book of Revelation for our generation is to prepare a people to be ready for Jesus' soon return and to unite with Him in giving His last-day message to the world. Revelation reveals the plans of God and unmasks the plans of Satan. It presents God's final appeal, His urgent, eternal, universal message for all humanity.

Read the apostle John's urgent end-time appeal in Revelation 14:7. (See also Gen. 22:12; Ps. 89:7; Prov. 2:5; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Eph. 5:21.) **What specific instruction does he give us?**

The Greek New Testament word for "fear" in Revelation 14:7 is *phobeo*. It is used here not in the sense of being afraid of God but in the sense of reverence, awe, and respect. It conveys the thought of absolute loyalty to God and full surrender to His will. It is an attitude of mind that is God-centered rather than self-centered. It is the opposite of Lucifer's attitude in Isaiah 14:13, 14, when he says in his heart, " 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High' " (NKJV).

Instead, it is the attitude of Christ, who, though "being in the form of God . . . humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6, 8, NKJV).

The essence of the great controversy revolves around submission to God. Lucifer was self-centered. He refused to submit to any authority except his own. Rather than submit to the One upon the throne, Lucifer desired to rule from the throne. Put simply, to fear God is to place Him first in our thinking. It is to renounce our self-centeredness and pride and to live a life wholly for Him.

And it obviously must be important because it's the first of the words out of the mouth of the first angel of the three.

Hence, we must take heed.

What has been your own experience of fearing God? How would you explain to someone, in a positive way, why "the fear of God" is something good?

Fearing and Obeying God

What else does the Bible teach us about what it means to fear God?

Read Deuteronomy 6:2; Psalm 119:73, 74; and Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14.
What do these texts reveal is the result of “fearing God”?

These passages reveal a linkage between fearing God and keeping His commandments. Fearing God is an attitude of reverential respect that leads us to obedience. Heaven’s urgent appeal is for those saved by grace to be obedient to God’s commands (*Eph. 2:8–10*). Grace does not free us from obeying the commands of God. The gospel sets us free from the law’s condemnation, not from our responsibility to obey it.

Grace not only delivers us from the guilt of our past, but it also empowers us to live godly, obedient lives in the present. The apostle Paul declares that “we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations” (*Rom. 1:5, NKJV*).

There are some people who have the strange idea that salvation by grace somehow negates the law of God or minimizes the necessity for obedience. They believe that any talk about obedience is legalism. They have declared, “All I want is Jesus.” The question is, which Jesus? A Jesus of our own making, or the Jesus of Scripture? The Christ of Scripture never leads us to downplay His law, which is the transcript of His character. The Christ of Scripture never leads us to minimize the doctrines of the Bible, which reveal more clearly who He is and His plan for this world. The Christ of Scripture never leads us to reduce His teaching to pious platitudes that are nonessential. Christ is the embodiment of all doctrinal truth. Jesus is truth incarnated. He is doctrine lived out.

Revelation’s final appeal calls us through faith in Jesus to accept the fullness of everything He offers. It calls us to “fear God,” which is expressed by faith in His redeeming power to empower us to live godly, obedient lives.

How do Jesus’ words here—“ ‘And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ ” (*Matt. 10:28, NKJV*)—help us understand what it means to fear God?

Living a God-Centered Life

In an age of consumerism, when secular values have made self the center, heaven's appeal is to turn from the tyranny of self-centeredness and the bondage of self-inflated importance to place God at the center of our lives. For some, money is the center of their lives. For others, it is pleasure or power. For some, it may be sports, music, or entertainment. Revelation's message is a clarion call to fear, respect, and honor God as life's true Center.

Read Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1, 2; and Hebrews 12:1, 2. What do these passages tell us about making God the true center of our lives?

The central issue in earth's final conflict is a battle for the mind. It really is one of allegiance, authority, and commitment to God's will.

The final battle in the great controversy is between good and evil for control of our thoughts. The apostle Paul gives us this admonition: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 2:5, NKJV*). The mind is the citadel of our being. It is the wellspring of our actions. The word "let" means to allow or to choose. It speaks of a volitional act of the will. The choice to have the mind of Christ is the choice to allow Jesus to shape our thinking by filling our minds with the things of eternity. Our actions reveal where our thinking process is. To fear God is to make Him first in our lives.

Think about how easy, in one sense, it is to control your thoughts, at least when you are conscious that you need to control them. Often, the problem is that unless we make a conscious effort to dwell on the right things, the "things above, not . . . things on the earth" (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*), our minds, fallen and sinful as they are, will naturally tend toward the base things, the things of the world. Hence, we need to, as Paul said, purposely and deliberately choose, using the sacred gift of free will, to dwell on the heavenly things.

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (*Phil. 4:8, NKJV*). How do we learn to do what Paul tells us here?

Giving Glory to God

A study of the use of the phrase in the Old Testament to “give glory to” God (*Rev. 14:7*) shows that it, interestingly enough, often (but not only) appears in the context of divine judgment (*Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5; Jer. 13:15, 16; Mal. 2:2*), just as it does in the first angel’s message, as well (*Rev. 14:7*). This idea is seen, too, in Revelation 19:1, 2—“‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments’ ” (*NKJV*).

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; and 1 Corinthians 10:31. How do these passages help us understand one way that we can glorify God?

According to the apostle Paul, our bodies are a sanctuary, the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, a temple made holy by the presence of God. The Scriptures give us a clarion call to glorify God in every aspect of our lives. When God is the center of our lives, our one desire is to give glory to Him, whether through our diet, our dress, our entertainment, or our interaction with others. We give glory to God as we reveal His character of love to the world through our commitment to doing His will. This is even more important in the light of earth’s end-time judgment.

Read Romans 12:1, 2. What appeal does the apostle Paul make regarding the totality of our life choices?

The New Testament Greek word for bodies in this passage is *somata*, which is better translated the collective sum of who you are—body, mind, and emotions. The Phillips translation of the Bible translates the expression “reasonable service” as an “act of intelligent worship.” In other words, when you make a total commitment to “fear God” and “glorify Him” in all you do, giving your mind, body, and emotions to Him, this is an act of intelligent worship. And, too, in light of God’s judgment, taking heed to obey is, indeed, a good idea.

Think about what you do with your body. What can you do to make sure that you are, indeed, glorifying God with it?

Revelation's Overcomers

“Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*). This is the depiction of God’s faithful people in the last days. Yet, the only way anyone can keep the commandments of God, then or now, is through the faith of Jesus. Notice our text does not say, “faith in Jesus,” although that is extremely important, but this expression, “the faith of Jesus,” is something more. It is the quality of faith that enabled Christ to be victorious over Satan’s fiercest temptations. Faith is a gift given to each believer. When we exercise the faith that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts, that faith grows. We overcome, not by our willpower, but by the power of the living Christ working through us. We overcome not because of who we are but because of who He is.

We can overcome because He overcame. We can be victorious because He was victorious. We can triumph over temptation because He triumphed over temptation.

Read Hebrews 4:14–16 and Hebrews 7:25. What is the means of overcoming and living lives that “fear God” and “give Him glory”?

Jesus, the divine Son of God, has overcome the wiles of the devil. He faced temptations trusting in the promises of God, surrendering His will to the Father’s will, and depending on the Father’s power. Trusting Him, looking to Him, believing in Him, we, too, can be victorious. Jesus is our all in all, and the three angels’ messages are all about Him. Revelation’s message is one of victory, not defeat. It speaks of a people who through His grace and by His power overcome.

The word “overcome” in one form or another is used 11 times in the book of Revelation. In the vision of the seven churches representing the Christian church from the first century to our time, there are believers in every generation who, John says, “overcame.” At the end time, those that “overcome” inherit all things (*Rev. 21:7*). This is not legalism. It is victory through Jesus Christ, whose perfect life of perfect righteousness, and that alone, is what gives them the promise of eternal life. It is faith in action. It is transforming, life-changing, miraculous grace in the life of the believer.

Are there things in your life you desire to overcome? How can we translate our desires into action? What practical steps can we take to become Revelation’s “overcomers”?

Further Thought: Think about the amazing words of Paul in Hebrews 7:25, which, describing Jesus as our High Priest, says that “He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (*NKJV*). “*Save to the uttermost . . .*” The Greek word for “uttermost” means “full, complete, total.” It is Jesus who saves us; our job is to surrender to Him, claiming His victory for us. Our trust must be in Him, not in ourselves.

“We can summarize the force of the expression ‘fear God’ in Revelation as God’s final call to humanity to choose Him as their glorious and majestic God, . . . who will be victorious over the forces of evil that oppose Him and His plan for the human race (cf. [Rev.] 14:9–11). This fear does not manifest itself, at least not for now (cf., [Rev.] 6:14–17), in terror and trembling, but in joyous and loving submission to God’s law and to His exclusive worship. No other power should be acknowledged as worthy of such devotion and loyalty. In fact, there are no other options, because what shows itself on the horizon of the cosmic conflict as possibilities are actions of demonic powers destined to extinction (Revelation 16:13, 14; 17:14; 20:11–15). The fear of the Lord is therefore a positive divine invitation . . . to take God’s side in the cosmic conflict in order to stand before His most glorious presence, filled with joy in eternal fellowship with Him ([Rev.] 21:3–4; [Rev.] 22:3–5).”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Think about the incredible power of God, the One who created and sustains the entire cosmos. We can barely grasp the idea of the cosmos. How then could we even begin to grasp the Creator of it? Think about how much greater and vaster and more powerful He is than we are. And this God will one day judge us? How do these facts help us understand the idea of the “fear of God” and what it means?
- ② How can we avoid legalism when we discuss the biblical concepts of holiness, overcoming, and victory? Why must we always understand that it was Christ’s victory for us, at the cross, that alone remains the foundation of our hope of salvation, regardless of our victories (or even failures) here now?
- ③ Why, even with all the promises of victory over sin, do we often find ourselves failing and not living up to the standard of righteousness that Jesus Himself modeled for us and promises us could be ours, as well? What mistakes are we making in not allowing God to do the work in us that He has promised?

Praying for New Friends

By DMITRY BAGAL

Elena Bagal felt lonely in Kochel, Germany. Born in Siberia, she knew no one when her family arrived, and her German was weak. As the days passed, she missed the life that she had enjoyed in Russia. One day, she cried out to the Lord for a new friend. “I really need a friend to spend time with,” she prayed.

Little did she realize that she was not the only Russian-speaking mother praying for friends. Snezhana had moved to the town a year earlier amid difficult family circumstances. On the same day that Elena prayed for a friend, Snezhana cried out to God, “Lord, I have no more strength! How can I go on living? Help me to meet someone to share my difficulties with.”

Snezhana had two children, ages 7 and 9, but they rarely went to the children’s playground. On that day, however, they went to the playground.

Elena, who had just prayed for a friend, took her baby girl to the same playground. She greeted Snezhana in German, but soon she realized that they both spoke Russian. She couldn’t believe it! She thought that the mother and children were visiting tourists, but it turned out that they lived in the town and were looking for new friends. Their families have become close friends. “God let me meet you so that I would have a friend,” Snezhana told Elena recently. Elena sends encouraging songs and uplifting sermons to Snezhana. She is praying that Snezhana will agree to Bible studies.

After the meeting, Elena kept praying for new friends. One day, she met Natasha, a Russian speaker in need of encouragement. The women became friends, and today Elena regularly sends Bible promises to Natasha.

Elena kept praying for new friends. While shopping, she met Irina, another Russian speaker, and invited her home for a visit. The two women now meet every other week. Sometimes, Elena gives Irina massages and, each time, she prays. The last time she gave a massage, Irina prayed for the first time. Elena has learned that Irina sometimes visited an Adventist church before moving to Kochel. “God’s ways are wonderful!” Elena said.

She prays that Irina will want to study the Bible with her and that she can start a small group for Russian speakers in her home. In the meantime, she keeps praying for new friends. Do you pray for new friends?



This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 1 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but also every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples.” For more information, visit IWillGo2020.org.

The Good News *of the* Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:7; Ps. 51:1–4; Rev. 20:12; Dan. 7:9, 14, 26; Rev. 4:2–4; Rev. 5:1–12.*

Memory Text: “Saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Revelation 14:7, NKJV*).

If the Bible was ever clear about anything, it's clear that God is a God of judgment, and that sooner or later, in one way or another, judgment—the judgment so lacking here and now—is going to come and be administered by God Himself, “the Judge of all the earth” (*Gen. 18:25; see also Ps. 58:11, Ps. 94:2, Ps. 98:9*). Or, as Paul himself had written: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (*Rom. 14:12*).

Scary thought, isn't it? Having to give an account of ourselves before God, the God who knows the deepest things, the God who will “bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (*Eccles. 12:14, NKJV*)?

Yet, ultimately the judgment reveals the goodness and the grace of God and that He is both just and merciful in how He deals with the saved, and even with the lost.

This week we will explore the deeper themes of the judgment in relation to the great controversy raging in the universe, and we will look especially at what happens when God's faithful people themselves face the inevitable “judgment to come” (*Acts 24:25*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 29.

The Significance of the Judgment Hour

The Bible's last book, Revelation, focuses on the culmination of the age-long controversy between good and evil. Lucifer, a rebel angel, challenged the justice, fairness, and wisdom of God. He claimed that God was unfair and unjust in the way that He administered the universe. Revelation's final judgment is at the very center of this conflict over the character of God.

Revelation 14:7 reads: “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*NKJV*).

Why is it significant that right after we are told about the “everlasting gospel,” the first angel’s message mentions God’s judgment? What does the “everlasting gospel” have to do with God’s judgment?

The gospel and the judgment, both parts of the first angel’s message, are inseparably intertwined. Were it not for the “everlasting gospel,” we would have no hope in the judgment. In fact, as we will see, the “everlasting gospel” is, indeed, our *only* hope in the judgment. There is no question that part of the content of the gospel is the announcement of judgment.

During this judgment, the unfallen worlds will see that God has done everything He can to save every human being. This judgment reveals God’s justice and mercy. It says something about His love and law. It speaks of His grace to save and His power to deliver.

The judgment is part of God’s ultimate solution to the sin problem. In the great controversy between good and evil in the universe, God answered Satan’s charges on the cross, but in the judgment, He reveals that He has done everything possible to save us and to lead us to the cross.

Heaven’s infinite, minute, exact, detailed records will be opened (*see Dan. 7:10*). We are so precious to God that the entire universe pauses to consider the choices we have made in light of the wooing of the Holy Spirit and the redemption so freely provided by Christ on Calvary’s cross.

Read Psalm 51:1–4 carefully, especially verse 4. How do these verses help shed light on the meaning and purpose of the judgment?

God's Mercy and Judgment

The cross and judgment both reveal that God is just and merciful. The broken law demands the death of the sinner. Justice declares, "The wages of sin is death." Mercy responds, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 6:23, NKJV*). If God's law could be changed or abolished, it would be totally unnecessary for Jesus to die. Christ's death establishes the eternal nature of the law, and the law is the basis of judgment.

Read Revelation 20:12. How are we judged? What relationship do our good works have to our salvation?

Our works reveal our choices and our loyalty to God. According to Ephesians 2:8, 9, "by grace you have been saved through faith . . . not . . . works, lest anyone should boast" (*NKJV*). But when Christ saves us, He changes us. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (*Eph. 2:10, NKJV*).

Our good works, empowered by the Holy Spirit, do not save us, but they do testify that our faith is genuine. God's final judgment strips away all pretense, all hypocrisy, all falsehood, and pierces into the very depth of our being. In depicting our position before God in the judgment, Ellen G. White provides this powerful insight into how the gospel and judgment go hand in hand.

"The fact that the acknowledged people of God are represented as standing before the Lord in filthy garments should lead to humility and deep searching of heart on the part of all who profess His name. Those who are indeed purifying their souls by obeying the truth will have a most humble opinion of themselves. The more closely they view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to His image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in themselves. But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.

How do you see, in her words, the inseparability of the gospel from the judgment? What hope can you take away from this link between the gospel and judgment for yourself?

A Magnificent Scene

The prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation are companion volumes pointing us to the unfolding events in the last days of earth's history. The book of Revelation announces that the hour of God's judgment has come. The book of Daniel reveals when the judgment began.

In Daniel 7, God revealed the history of the world to the prophet. Nations rise and fall. Persecuting powers oppress the people of God. After describing Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, the breakup of the Roman Empire, and the persecution of the church for the 1,260 years depicted in the text (*Dan. 7:25; see also Rev. 12:14*), God focuses Daniel's mind on a glorious celestial event that will set all things right. The prophet's attention is directed from the rise and fall of nations and the oppressive powers of earth to the throne room of the universe and God's final judgment, when He will right every wrong and establish His everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

God took Daniel in prophetic vision from the chaos and conflict of the earth to the glories of heaven's sanctuary and the sitting of the supreme court of the universe, where Christ, the Rightful Ruler of this world, will receive from His Father the kingdom that is rightfully His.

Read Daniel 7:9, 10, 13 and describe what Daniel saw in these verses. What, too, is the final result of this judgment? See Daniel 7:14, 26, 27.

The destiny of all humanity is decided in heaven's courtroom. Right prevails. Truth triumphs. Justice reigns. This is one of the most amazing, most marvelous, most spectacular scenes in all of Scripture. And the good news is that it ends very well for God's faithful people, those clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Jesus approaches His heavenly Father in the presence of the entire universe. Heavenly beings crowd in around the throne of God. The entire universe of unfallen beings stands in awe of this judgment scene. The long conflict that has been waged for millennia is soon to be over. The battle for the throne of the universe is fully, completely decided.

Daniel was right about the empires that came and went, just as predicted. Why, then, does it make so much sense to trust the Word of God about what it says regarding the final one, "an everlasting kingdom" that shall never "pass away"?

A Glimpse of Heaven

In Revelation 4, John beholds an open door in heaven and receives the invitation to “ ‘come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this’ ” (*Rev. 4:1, NKJV*). Jesus invited the apostle to look through the open door in heaven’s sanctuary to view eternal scenes in the great controversy between good and evil. We, too, can look through that open door with John and receive a glimpse of the eternal plan of salvation. We are witnesses of issues that are being decided in heaven’s celestial court. Fundamental issues in the great controversy between good and evil develop before our eyes.

Read Revelation 4:2–4. What similarities can you see here with the judgment scene in Daniel 7?

This is obviously a throne-room scene. God the Father sits upon the throne surrounded by heavenly beings. There is thunder and lightning symbolizing God’s judgments. We also notice in Revelation 4:4 that 24 elders are present around God’s throne.

Who are these 24 elders? In ancient Israel there were 24 divisions in the Levitical priesthood. These priests represented the people before God. In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle declares that New Testament believers are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood.” These 24 elders could, perhaps, represent all the redeemed that one day will rejoice around the throne of God; or, perhaps, they represent the people resurrected at Christ’s resurrection, who ascended to heaven with Him (*Matt. 27:52; Eph. 4:7, 8*).

Either way, this is good news. There are some of the redeemed from the earth around the throne of God. They faced temptations just as we face them. Through the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they overcame. They are clothed in “white robes” signifying the righteousness of Christ that covers and cleanses their sins. They have a golden crown upon their heads signifying that they are victorious in the battle with evil and are part of heaven’s royal line of faith-filled believers.

We see a throne set in heaven with God sitting upon it. There are heavenly beings around the throne, and soon all of heaven begins to sing, and the crescendo of praise builds higher and still higher: “ ‘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*).

Jesus Is Worthy

In Revelation 5:1–3, once again we see a throne. A scroll is introduced with writing on both sides. It is sealed with the divine seal, and no one in heaven or on earth can open the scroll. Heavenly beings tremble. The issue is serious. No angelic being can represent humanity in earth's final judgment. John weeps because no one can open the scroll. Then one of the elders, one of those redeemed from the earth, speaks words of encouragement to John's heart. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy to open the scroll.

John beholds the ultimate answer to the sin problem in Revelation 5:5. Here the aged prophet beholds the only way anyone can pass the final judgment at the throne of God.

"But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll.' . . . And I looked, and behold, . . . a Lamb as though it had been slain" (*Rev. 5:5, 6, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 5:8–12. How does all of heaven respond to the announcement that Jesus is worthy to open the scroll of judgment and redeem us?

Jesus, the Lamb of God who has sacrificed His life for the salvation of all humanity, takes the scroll of judgment and opens it. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous praise. His victory over Satan's temptations, His death on Calvary's cross, His resurrection, His high priestly ministry, provides salvation for all who choose by faith to respond to His grace. The judgment is incredibly good news for the people of God. It speaks of the end of the reign of sin and the deliverance of God's people.

Can anything be more encouraging? Jesus stands for us in the judgment. His perfect, righteous life covers us. His righteousness works within us to make us new. His grace pardons us, transforms us, and empowers us to live godly lives.

We need not fear. Jesus stands for us in the judgment, and the powers of evil are defeated. Judgment is passed in "favor" of the people of God (*Dan. 7:22*). The purpose of the judgment is not to find out how bad we are but to reveal how good God is.

Again, dwell on the great hope that we have in the judgment: Jesus as our Substitute. Why is that our only hope?

Further Thought: Look at the powerful insights the Spirit of Prophecy gives us in regard to the state of God's people in the last days, in the time of judgment and the end of the world.

"Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was pleading before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness, and as they look upon themselves they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer. . . . The people of God have been in many respects very faulty. Satan has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these in the most exaggerated light, declaring: 'Will God banish me and my angels from His presence, and yet reward those who have been guilty of the same sins? Thou canst not do this, O Lord, in justice. Thy throne will not stand in righteousness and judgment. Justice demands that sentence be pronounced against them.' But while the followers of Christ have sinned, they have not given themselves to the control of evil. They have put away their sins, and have sought the Lord in humility and contrition, and the divine Advocate pleads in their behalf. He who has been most abused by their ingratitude, who knows their sin, and also their repentance, declares: 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.' I gave My life for these souls. They are graven upon the palms of My hands.'"—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 473, 474.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How does the knowledge that "the hour of His judgment has come" (Rev. 14:7, NKJV) impact our daily lives? If most of us are honest, we'd probably say that it doesn't, right? How can we change?
- ② Why is the judgment good news and not bad news? In class, talk about the role Jesus takes for us in the judgment. How can this motivate us to be faithful to Him, knowing that only because of what He has done for us can we have the hope of salvation?
- ③ Dwell more on the idea of the judgment revealing to the universe the character of God. How does this idea fit in very well with the whole great controversy scenario?

A Guy on a Bicycle

By ANTHONY KENT

On dusty outback roads, through dry monotonous terrain, and under a merciless hot Australian sun, Philip rode his bicycle hundreds of miles selling hope-filled Christian books as a literature evangelist. One day, he came to a farm in the middle of nowhere, a place called Eugowra. Here, he saw a farmer plowing a field. The man was strong in physique but broken in spirit. It was Tom Kent.

Philip didn't know it, but Tom's family was heartbroken. His wife, Mary, had succumbed to pneumonia. He was in despair, struggling to care for their 11 children. Just before her death, Mary had asked Tom to promise that he would meet her in heaven—and bring the children with him. Tom had promised. Tearfully, he had looked for a Bible to see how he could keep his promise. That's when Philip met Tom.

Philip Ainslie Reekie was born in Scotland in 1846. In 1888, widowed and divorced, he migrated to Australia, looking for a new life. Just a year later, in 1889, he stumbled upon some Christian literature, discovered amazing Bible truths, and encountered the real Jesus. He'd not only found a new country but also a new reason to live. He wanted to spread hope. He quit working as an engraver so that he could engrave God's Word upon hearts by becoming a literature evangelist.

Now listening to Tom's heartbreaking story, Philip saw pain and heard of Mary's dying hope. He decided to share *The Great Controversy* with Tom. Tom wrestled with the biblical truths he read, but after careful study, he accepted the teachings. These new discoveries gave Tom the deep comfort and assurance that he so badly needed. He shared his discoveries with his children and neighbors. His children and five neighboring families became believers and disciples of Jesus. It was then that Tom knew he could keep his promise to his wife.

Today, this remarkable story continues. Tom Kent's descendants, together with the other five families and other people brought into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, add up to more than 20,000 individuals. Twenty thousand lives transformed by a faithful literature evangelist on a bicycle and a farmer who shared *The Great Controversy* with his family and neighbors.



Would you like to experience ultimate joy, meaning, and purpose in your life? Join the global church in 2023 and 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Visit greatcontroversyproject.org for more information or ask your pastor.

Anthony Kent is great-grandson of Tom Kent and General Conference associate ministerial secretary.

The Hour of His Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 8, Daniel 9, Ezra 7, Matt. 3:13–17, Rom. 5:6–9, Mark 15:38, Lev. 16:16.*

Memory Text: “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (*Romans 13:11, 12, NKJV*).

Several years ago, *National Geographic* magazine described a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park in the United States. After it ended, forest rangers trekked up a mountain to assess the damage. One ranger found a bird literally burned to ashes at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick.

When he struck it, three tiny baby birds scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. What a picture of the believer who is safe in Christ!

The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Him, at Calvary, and all who are in Christ are safe forever beneath His wings. At the cross, Christ was judged as a condemned sinner so that we could be judged as righteous citizens of the heavenly kingdom. He was judged as a criminal so that we could be set free from the destructive fires of eternal loss, both figuratively and, yes, literally, as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 6.

The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

As we have already seen, there must be a judgment before Christ comes. The angel announces in a loud voice that “ ‘the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). The book of Daniel gives us the time when this judgment begins.

Read Daniel 8:14. What specific timetable does Daniel give us regarding the cleansing of the sanctuary?

Each Jew clearly understood the meaning of the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary. It occurred on the Day of Atonement, which was the day of judgment. Although Daniel understood the concept of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the judgment, he was confused about the 2,300 days.

Read Daniel 8:27 and Daniel 9:21, 22. What was Daniel’s response to the vision of the 2,300 days, and what was God’s response to him?

At the end of Daniel 8, Daniel fainted and later exclaimed, “I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it” (*Dan. 8:27, NKJV*). That is, the vision of the 2,300 days (the rest of the vision already had been explained [*see Daniel 8:19–22*]). The next chapter, Daniel 9, records the angel Gabriel coming to explain to Daniel the 2,300-day prophecy. “ ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand’ ” (*Dan. 9:22, NKJV*).

Gabriel amazes Daniel as he reveals an answer to his prayer much broader than he ever imagined. The angel Gabriel took Daniel down the stream of time and revealed the truth about the coming Messiah, giving the exact dates of the beginning of His ministry and His cruel death, events that tied directly to the cleansing of the sanctuary, in Daniel 8. In other words, Christ’s death and the judgment are inseparably linked.

Why is it significant that the death of Jesus, as revealed in Daniel 9:24–27, is directly linked to the judgment, in Daniel 8:14? What great truth is taught here by this link?

The 2,300 Days and the End Time

Read Daniel 8:17, 19, 26. What time period does the angel declare that the vision of Daniel 8 and the 2,300 days apply to, and why is that important to understand?

Some argue that the 2,300 days are literal days. They also believe that this little horn of Daniel 8 applies to the Seleucid military leader Antiochus Epiphanes (216 B.C.–164 B.C.), who attacked Jerusalem and defiled the Jewish temple, even though 2,300 days does not fit even his time frame. This interpretation, however, is contrary to the angel's clear instruction that the vision applies to the "time of the end." Antiochus Epiphanes certainly did not live at the time of the end.

In Daniel 8, Gabriel begins his explanation of the 2,300-day prophecy. He names the ram as representing Media-Persia and the male goat as representing Greece (*Dan. 8:20, 21*). Though not named, as are the two powers before it, the next entity, the little horn, is obviously Rome (*Dan. 8:9, 23, 24*). He then depicts a kind of religiopolitical phase of Rome, which would "cast down the truth to the ground" (*Dan. 8:10–12, 25*) and interfere with Christ's heavenly ministry (*Dan. 8:10–12*). The cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14, the climax of the chapter, is God's answer to the challenge of earthly and religious powers that have attempted to usurp the authority of God. It is part of God's divine solution to the sin problem.

Gabriel is ready to explain the details in God's prophetic timetable. At the end of Daniel 8, we can clearly see that Daniel did not understand the part of the vision about the 2,300 days (*Dan. 8:27*). The earlier part about the ram, the goat, and the little horn had all been explained, even with the first two powers outright identified by name (*Dan. 8:20, 21*). The cleansing of the sanctuary was, however, not explained.

The angel Gabriel, who appeared in Daniel 8, appears now in Daniel 9 and says to him: " 'At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision' " (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*). What vision? As we will see tomorrow, it is the vision of the 2,300 days, the only part of the previous vision, in Daniel 8, that he hadn't explained yet to Daniel.

Gabriel called Daniel "greatly beloved." What does this tell us about the intimate link between heaven and earth?

The Angel's Instruction to Daniel

Read Daniel 9:23. What specific instruction does the angel give to Daniel? Why is this significant in understanding the meaning of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14?

The angel plainly instructed Daniel to “ ‘consider the matter, and understand the vision’ ” (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*). What matter, and what vision? Because there is no vision recorded in Daniel 9, the angel Gabriel must be speaking of the portion of the vision in Daniel 8 that the prophet did not understand—the vision of the 2,300 days (*Daniel 8:27*).

Gabriel continues in Daniel 9:24–27. What events in the life and ministry of Jesus is this about?

The first portion of this prophecy relates to God's people, the Jews. “ ‘Seventy weeks are determined for your people’ ”—the Jewish nation (*Dan. 9:24, NKJV*). In Bible prophecy, one prophetic day equals one literal prophetic year (*Ezek. 4:6, Num. 14:34*). In Daniel and Revelation, when you have symbolic imagery, you usually have a symbolic time prophecy, as well. One of the ways we can be certain that the day-year principle of prophecy applies here is that when we use it in Daniel's prophecy, each event on the time line comes out perfectly (see tomorrow's lesson). If we apply this principle, 70 weeks are composed of 490 days. Since one prophetic day equals one literal year, 490 days are 490 literal years.

Gabriel tells Daniel that 490 years are “cut off” (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word *chathak*, sometimes translated “determined”). Cut off from what? It only could be the other time prophecy alluded to here: the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. These 490 years, which are a time prophecy, are directly linked back to the time prophecy of Daniel 8:14, the only part of the vision left unexplained in Daniel 8 and the only time prophecy in Daniel 8, as well. Thus, we can see that Gabriel with this prophecy is coming to help Daniel understand what he didn't understand in the previous chapter: the 2,300 days.

The Messiah “Cut Off”

Gabriel began this 490-year prophecy with an event that was extremely important to Daniel and to the Jews—the command to restore and build Jerusalem. Though various decrees had been passed regarding Jerusalem, in Ezra 7, we discover that the decree passed in 457 B.C. allowed the Jews not only to return to their homeland but also to establish themselves as a religious community (*see Ezra 7:13, 27*).

It is significant to note that Artaxerxes’s decree was issued in the autumn of 457 B.C. From this decree, in 457 B.C., to the Messiah, according to Daniel, would be 69 weeks, or 483 years. If we begin at 457 B.C. and move forward on history’s time line, we arrive at A.D. 27.

The word *Messiah* means “the anointed one.” In A.D. 27, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was baptized. (*See Matt. 3:13–17*.) Daniel predicted hundreds of years in advance the exact year for the baptism of Christ, the time at which Jesus would begin His three and a half years of ministry.

Read Romans 5:6–9 along with Daniel 9:26. What great truths are revealed here?

“ ‘And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself’ ” (*Dan. 9:26, NKJV*). The Messiah would be “cut off,” or crucified. The verse adds “ ‘but not for Himself.’ ” In other words, the death of Christ on Calvary’s cross was for us, not for Himself, which is why Paul could write: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*).

In Daniel 9:27, we read that in the middle of the week, the last seven years, Christ would “ ‘bring an end to sacrifice and offering’ ” (*NKJV*). In the middle of this seventieth week, in A.D. 31, Christ confirmed the everlasting covenant with His blood by dying on the cross, and the sacrificial system lost any and all prophetic significance.

These prophecies reveal that Christ, the Messiah, would be crucified and cause the sacrificial system to cease its prophetic importance in the spring of A.D. 31. These predictions were fulfilled in every detail. Exactly at Passover, when the high priest was offering the Passover lamb, Christ was sacrificed for us.

With what has been written above in mind, read Mark 15:38 and Matthew 3:15, 16. How do these verses help us understand the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27?

The Year 1844

The first 490 years of the 2,300-year prophecy were designated especially for the Jewish nation of antiquity and the coming of the Messiah. The last part of the 2,300 years has to do with God's people, both Jew and Gentile, along with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, and, ultimately, the second coming of Christ.

The first 490 years applied to the first advent of the Messiah and ended in A.D. 34. Subtracting 490 years from 2,300 years leaves us with 1,810 years. These second 1,810 years apply to God's people. If we begin at A.D. 34 and we add 1,810 years, we come to A.D. 1844.

In the light of the cleansing or restoration of the truth about the sanctuary and heaven's end-time judgment, God makes His final appeal to all humanity in Revelation 14:6, 7 to respond to His love; accept His grace; and live godly, obedient lives.

Read Leviticus 16:16. What was the reason for the cleansing of the sanctuary, and what does this teach us about the gospel?

Because of the people's sins, the people's iniquities, the sanctuary had to be cleansed, which happened only with the blood of animals. It's the same with us. We need a Savior, whose life is symbolized by the animals slain on the Day of Atonement, as the only way to make it through the judgment.

Read Leviticus 23:26–29. What did God command His people to do on that day of judgment, and what should that mean for us today?

The Israelites were to “afflict their souls.” This expression indicates that they were to humble themselves and examine their hearts, confess their sins, repent, and ask God to cleanse them as the high priest was cleansing the earthly sanctuary.

The prophetic chapters of Daniel 7–9 and Revelation 14 focus especially on the judgment-hour urgent appeals to prepare. Since 1844, we have been living in the judgment hour, and Revelation's message of the first angel proclaims, “ ‘The hour of His judgment has come’ ” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). How, then, do we today “afflict our souls”?

Further Thought: Here's a quick and easy way to look at the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27.

First, there are the 70 weeks (*Dan. 9:24*),

Next, there are the seven weeks and 62 weeks, or 69 weeks (*Dan. 9:25*) of the 70 weeks.

There's the last week, the seventieth (*Dan. 9:27*).

And, finally, that last week is divided—"in the middle of the week" (*Dan. 9:27*)—into two three-and-a-half-year sections.

That's it. Seventy weeks, which are composed of sixty-nine weeks and one week. And that one week is divided in half. Just plug in the date, 457 B.C., at the beginning, and with simple math—yes, we come to 1844 on the time line.

Also, in describing the 2,300 days, Daniel 8 never said when the 2,300 days began. "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (*Dan. 8:14*). "Unto two thousand and three hundred days"—from what time? Why not from the time when Daniel had the vision itself, the "third year of the reign of King Belshazzar" (*Dan. 8:1*)?

That doesn't work. The vision in Daniel 8 didn't include Babylon. It started with kingdoms after it (i.e., Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, up to "the end"). Why date an event, the cleansing of the sanctuary, which is in the vision, from an event, the reign of the kingdom of Babylon, which is not? The starting date for the climax of the vision should come from within the vision itself, which started with Media-Persia and extends to "the end." That's a lot of years.

Which one began it? We are not told in Daniel 8. We are told in Daniel 9.

Discussion Questions:

1 In class, discuss the close relationship between the gospel and judgment as seen in these two parts of what is, really, one prophecy. Why is the link between the two such good news for us? How should this link help alleviate the fear that many have had regarding the idea of judgment?

1 Dwell more on the truth, revealed in Daniel 9:26, that the Messiah was cut off, but "not for Himself" (*NKJV*). What is this about? For whom was He cut off, and why?

3 Read again Leviticus 16:16 and Leviticus 23:26–29. Talk about the reason for the cleansing of the sanctuary (*Lev. 16:16*) and how the people were supposed to act when it happened (*Lev. 23:26–29*). What is the relationship between what happened then and what it should mean for us today?

Ukrainian Miracle

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ten-year-old Anas struggled in his classes amid an ongoing torrent of bullying in public school in Odessa, Ukraine. His skin was darker than the other children's, and his classmates made fun of him. He lived with his Ukrainian grandmother after being left at her home by his mother, a former Seventh-day Adventist. His father wasn't a Christian and lived far away in Iran.

Grandmother didn't like the way that Anas was being treated at school. Upset over the bullying, she finally transferred the boy to the local Seventh-day Adventist school.

At first, Anas was withdrawn and spoke little. But he loved the Bible classes so much that he tried to remember the teacher's words by whispering them as he heard them in the classroom. As the days and weeks passed, he began to open up and make jokes. The other children enjoyed his wit, and he soon became the class clown. He received his very own Bible.

His mother was furious when she learned that Anas was attending the Adventist school, and she took him away from Grandmother to live with her. She refused to speak with Grandmother, and she taught Anas at home.

Grandmother prayed for God to intervene. She prayed every day for a year. After some time, Mother began speaking to her again. They became friends again.

One day, Mother agreed to Grandmother's suggestion to meet with an Adventist pastor. Anas listened in on their conversation, and he learned to his surprise that three of his friends from the Adventist school were going to be baptized. "I also want to be baptized!" he exclaimed.

Mother was surprised. The pastor was surprised. They asked Anas some questions. It turned out that he had been studying his Bible on his own during the year that he had been living with Mother. More than anything, he wanted to be baptized. His fervent desire to give his life to Jesus touched Mother's heart. She gave her consent. Two weeks later, Mother and Grandmother watched as the 11-year-old boy was baptized with his three friends from the Adventist school.



It was a miracle facilitated by God and Adventist education, said Ivan Riapolov (pictured), education director for the Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine.

"There was not only a reconciliation of the family, but also a reconciliation with God," he said.

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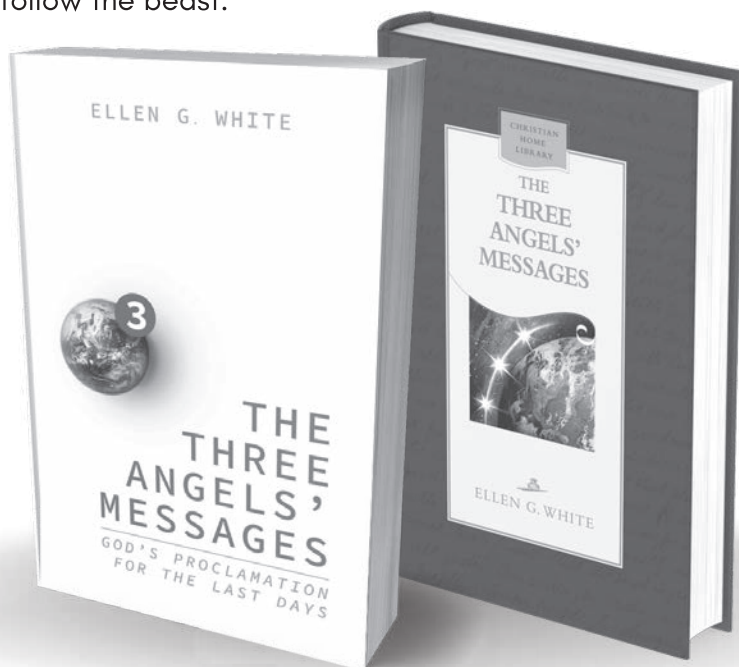


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SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:9, Isa. 40:26, 2 Cor. 5:17, Col. 1:17, Rev. 4:11, John 19:16–30.*

Memory Text: “‘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.’” (*Revelation 4:11, NKJV*).

It's easy to take things for granted, particularly things that we have always known or experienced. How easy is it, for instance, for young children to take their parents for granted, whom they have known all their short lives. How easy for us, too, to take for granted the sun, the sky, the air, or the ground beneath our feet.

However, have you ever stopped to think about how much we take existence itself for granted? That is, how often do we stop and ask the famous philosophical question, *Why is there something instead of nothing?*

Why does our universe itself, and all the majesty and grandeur and astonishing things in it, exist to begin with? What great logical contradiction would occur were our universe, and we who are in it, not here? According to the latest scientific theory (they tend to change), our universe once did not exist. In other words, ours is a contingent existence, and it's a miracle that we are here at all. And despite all sorts of myths about the universe arising from absolutely nothing, or from some kind of mathematical equation, our universe exists because God, the Creator, has made it and everything in it.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 13.*

A Companion in Tribulation

After His ascension to heaven (*Acts 1:9*), Jesus visited the last of the living apostles, John, on the island of Patmos, where John had been exiled by the ruthless Roman emperor Domitian.

Read Revelation 1:9. See also Matthew 13:21, Acts 14:22, and John 16:33. What's the message here for all who seek to follow Jesus in this world?

Separated from the support of his family, friends, and the Christian community, John was not left alone in the tribulations and trouble that he faced as a follower of Jesus. His ministry was not over. His witness was not complete. An angelic visitor of dazzling brightness visited John on that lonely isle and brought him a message directly from the throne of God. This message from Jesus was to echo down the corridors of time through the centuries. It was a message of hope for every generation, but especially a message to prepare God's last-day people for the coming of Jesus. It is a serious message of warning as well as an end-time message of encouragement as we get ready to face the trials of the final days (or any trials that you might be facing now).

If you were to enter the cave where it is purported that John was visited by the heavenly angel with Revelation's prophetic vision, you would immediately notice these words placed on a plaque at its entrance summarizing the entire book of Revelation: " 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water' " (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

The central issue in the book of Revelation is worship. We were created as worshiping beings. Every one of us worships something or someone. True worship, the worship of the Creator, enables us to discover life's true purpose. It gives us a reason for living. It gives us not only something to die for but also, even more significantly, something to live for and, if need be, to endure tribulations for. And indeed, as the final crises arise, we will better understand that " 'we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God' " (*Acts 14:22, NKJV*).

If faithful servants of God, like John, face suffering and tribulation, what makes us think we, ourselves, won't face trouble either? (See 1 Pet. 4:12–15.)

Worship the Creator

Read Revelation 14:7. How does the message of the first angel conclude? What final appeal does this judgment-hour message make? (See also Isa. 40:26, John 1:1–3, and Rom. 1:20.)

Revelation 14:7 ends with a clarion call to worship the Creator; this call is especially important now, when most of the scientific and even the Christian world have accepted evolution, a teaching that strikes at the very heart of all things biblical and Christian. If evolution were true, our faith would, of necessity, be a lie. That's how stark the issues are.

Revelation's final appeal, then, is rooted in the Bible's first book, Genesis. We will never fully understand the issues in this cosmic battle over worship unless we understand the significance of Creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (*Gen. 1:1, NKJV*). This verse is the foundation for all of Scripture. "In the beginning God created." The Hebrew word for "create" in this passage is *bara*, a verb that is used only and exclusively with God Himself as the subject.

To get just a small idea of how unlimited God's power is, let's consider just one object of His creation—the sun. The sun produces more energy in one second than humanity has produced by oil, gas, coal, or fire since the beginning of time.

The sun has a diameter of approximately 865,000 miles and could hold one million planets the size of earth. But the sun is just one of at least 100 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. One star called the Pistol Star gives off as much as ten million times the power generated by our sun. One million stars the size of our sun can easily fit within the sphere of the Pistol Star. How do we even begin to wrap our minds around the creation?

Creation reveals a God of awesome might and unlimited power. His creative power not only brought the heavens and earth into existence but also has worked in behalf of His people through the centuries. He is the God who began this world, who is ever present in this world, and who will never forsake His people in this world.

Despite how small we are in contrast to the creation, Christ died for us. How does the overwhelming size of the creation only amplify the reality of God's love?

A God Who Is Close

The God of Creation, who brought the sun, moon, and stars into existence, whose awesome power created this planet and filled it with living things, also is a God who is interested in each one of us. He is the God who delivered His people from Egyptian bondage, who guided them in their wilderness wanderings, who rained manna out of heaven, who caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, and who defeated Israel's enemies. The same God who unleashed His infinite power to create the universe unleashes that infinite power to defeat the forces of evil that wage the battles for our souls.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17, Psalm 139:15–18, Acts 17:27, and Colossians 1:17. What do these verses teach us about the closeness of God?

Theologians talk about the transcendence of God. This is the idea that God exists above and over all of the creation. But they also talk about the immanence of God. This is the idea that God also, somehow, exists within our world and, as biblical history shows, is intricately and intimately involved in it. Though the Lord dwells in a “‘high and holy place,’ ” He also is “‘with him who has a contrite and humble spirit’ ” (*Isa. 57:15, NKJV*). As Jesus Himself said, talking about His faithful followers: “‘I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me’ ” (*John 17:23, NKJV*). It doesn't get closer or more intimate than that.

The great news about our God is that His greatness and power are so vast that it reaches across the cosmos and into each of our lives. He promises to remake us, mold us, and transform us into the likeness of His image. Think about what that means. The God who created and who sustains billions of galaxies is the same God not only in whom “‘we live, and move, and have our being’ ” (*Acts 17:28*) but also who works in us, to give us new hearts, to purge us of sin, and make us into new creatures in Christ. What a powerfully comforting thought to realize our God, a God of such power, loves and cares for us.

How can we learn to draw hope and comfort from understanding the immanence of God? Or does it scare you because God knows your darkest secrets? How should the gospel give you peace in that context?

Gospel, Judgment, Creation

Look at the first angel's message. *Everlasting gospel. Hour of judgment. Worship the Creator.* Look at how closely related these ideas are. When we stand before our Creator in judgment, it's only the gospel that gives us any hope at all. "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" (*Rom. 8:1, NKJV*). No condemnation now—and certainly not in the judgment.

The message of God as Creator is so central to present truth, especially when evolution, even when dressed up in "Christian" garb, threatens to destroy the entire foundation of the Christian faith.

Yet, amid the onslaught of evolutionary thought, God has raised up a church, a people whose *very name itself* is a witness against the idea of evolution—a people who are to proclaim the foundational truth of God as our Creator and Redeemer.

Read Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:13–17, Revelation 4:11, and Romans 5:17–19. What do these texts teach about Jesus as Creator and Redeemer?

Look at how closely tied Jesus as Creator is to Jesus as Redeemer. The moment that His role as Creator is diminished, as the theory of evolution inevitably does, His role as our Redeemer comes into question, as well. Jesus comes to redeem us from sin, from death, from suffering, and from violence—when sin, death, suffering, and violence are, as evolution teaches, the very means of creation itself? God redeems us from the very process He used to create us to begin with? It's a dangerous lie.

And what makes it even worse is that evolution mocks the very idea of Jesus' death on the cross. Why? Paul (*see Rom. 5:17–19*) inseparably links the introduction of sin, by Adam, to the death of Jesus. There's a direct link, then, between Adam and Jesus. In any evolutionary model, however, no sinless Adam could have introduced death, because death—millions of years of death—was, supposedly, the force and power that was needed to create Adam to begin with.

Hence, right from the start, evolution destroys the biblical foundation of the Cross. In contrast, Seventh-day Adventists, by calling the world to worship the Creator, stand as a living witness against this error.

The Creator on the Cross

However much we can and do marvel and worship the Lord as our Creator, there's more to it. As we have already seen but worth looking at again is the idea that our Creator also is our Redeemer. The God who created us is the same God who redeemed us. The God who said, " 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness' " (*Gen. 1:26, NKJV*), is the same One who, on the cross, cried out, " 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' " that is, " 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' " (*Matt. 27:46, NKJV*). Talk about the reason to fear God or, even more so, to give glory to Him and to worship Him, as well!

How can we, as fallen human beings, adequately respond to such an amazing truth as this? What could we possibly do in response? We are told, in the first angel's message, what to do: " 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water' " (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

Read John 19:16–30, John's account of Jesus on the cross. As you read it, think of the Bible texts that we have looked at about Jesus as Creator, as the One by whom "all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (*Col. 1:16, NKJV*). How are we to respond to this amazing expression of God's love?

The first angel's message to worship the Creator came after the Cross, after it had become known to the onlooking universe and to Christ's followers that the One who "made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" is the same One who, though being God, took "the form of a bondservant, and [came] 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. 2:7, 8, NKJV*).

What an amazing spectacle that must have been to those who knew Jesus before He came to earth as a human being. No wonder heavenly beings worship Him, as well. As for us, redeemed by His blood, what else could we do but worship our Creator and our Redeemer?

Why is the idea, in light of the Cross, of fallen human beings being able to add anything to what Christ did on the cross such a heretical idea? Which of our works could add to what the Creator already has done for us?

Further Thought: The worship of God is central in the Scriptures and has always been a bone of contention for humans and for God's people. Throughout the Old Testament the prophets reprimanded the people of God for worshiping other gods or for worshiping the Lord using the worship practices of the pagan world. The conflict between worshiping God and worshiping other gods belongs at the very center of the cosmic conflict and comes accompanied by conflict over disregard for the law of God.

"Worship addresses the most fundamental aspect of human existence in that it has to do with what humans as living creatures should do when confronted by the presence of the Creator. . . . Only those who are alive can worship the Lord; the dead cannot praise and worship Him. . . . The One who created us invites us to surrender our lives in the act of worship in order to receive them back from Him enriched, to be used for the benefit of others. Worship has to do with the very nature and purpose of our existence and with the need for having a center outside of ourselves that frees us from selfishness. Not to worship God is to lose our reason for existence; it is to exist in a state of disorientation and therefore to be dying, heading to total extinction because we are disconnected from the very source of life."—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels' Messages," unpublished manuscript, p. 42.

Discussion Questions:

- ①** Dwell more on this idea of why, in a fallen world, being created by God is not enough. Why do we need the promise of redemption, as well?
- ②** Think about some experience in which you unmistakably saw the power of God work in your life; that is, in a way that showed you God's love for you personally. And then dwell on the fact that this is God who created the entire cosmos! And this God loves you enough to care about your life. Why should this reality not only be comforting but also humbling?
- ③** If evolution were true, think about how we would be called to worship a creator who used billions of years of death, violence, destruction, suffering, and mass extinction in order to create us, while at the same time giving us a completely different story in Genesis about how we were created. And yet, we are supposed to be worshiping him? Worship him for what? For lying to us for thousands of years about how we got here to begin with?

Sobered by God's Grace

By DALE WOLCOTT

Back in the 1970s, two sets of Navajo parents, unknown to each other, sent their teenagers to live in the dormitories at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, located 100 miles (160 km) away from home. At Holbrook, boy met girl, boy and girl both met Jesus, and they were baptized. In due time, there was a wedding, the first to be held in the newly constructed Seventh-day Adventist church in the boy's hometown of Chinle, Arizona.

When Dennis and Gloria Fulton's first baby arrived, they took him with them to church. So, baby Oliver grew up knowing that the Adventist Church was his church. But, somehow, he never really met Jesus. Things got in the way, such as Gloria's nursing job at the local hospital. Making matters worse, Dennis struggled with alcohol, and Oliver began drinking as a teen.

Oliver graduated from public high school, moved to the big city to earn a master's degree in information technology, and discovered that alcohol was controlling his life. At 38, Oliver in desperation moved back home to Chinle, where he knew his mother had been praying for him. He started attending his childhood church, hoping that something would change for him.

Oliver found that the church ran an addiction recovery ministry in which 80 Navajo people with struggles like his own met in the church fellowship hall five evenings a week for "Jesus and Me," a program modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous. His life began to change.

Meanwhile, the church pastor noticed Oliver in the congregation one Sabbath and suggested having lunch the next week. The meal filled Oliver with hope. "When I came home, I figured I was such a bad sinner that I could never go to heaven," Oliver says. "I just thought that maybe if I sobered up, I could help some other people get to heaven. But at lunch that day, the pastor told me that my sins could actually be forgiven. Jesus would accept me just as I am. I was amazed. It gave me hope."

Oliver has been sober for four years now. At the church, Oliver met a woman, Traci, with her own story of Jesus delivering her from heroin addiction. The pastor baptized Oliver just days before marrying him and Traci in the same church where his parents had been married about 40 years earlier.



Today, Oliver leads the Chinle church's recovery ministry. He also is taking online classes to become a certified substance abuse counselor.

Incidentally, Oliver's father has been sober for several years, as well. Sometimes on Sabbaths, father and son sit together in church, their sweethearts at their sides and smiles in their hearts. Thank you for your mission offerings that support Seventh-day Adventist education and other forms of mission outreach around the world.

The Sabbath *and the* End



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 2:8–13; Deut. 5:12–15; Ps. 33:6, 9; Revelation 14; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1.*

Memory Text: “And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (*Ephesians 3:9, NKJV*).

The essence of humanity's dignity is a common Creation. The fact that we are uniquely created by God places value on every human being. The unborn in the mother's womb, the quadriplegic teenager, the young adult with Down syndrome, and the Alzheimer-afflicted grandmother all have immense value to God. God is their Father. They are His sons and daughters. “ ‘God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. . . . And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth’ ” (*Acts 17:24–26, NKJV*).

Ours is a shared heritage. We belong to the same family. We are brothers and sisters fashioned, shaped, and molded by the same God. Creation provides a true sense of self-worth. When the genes and chromosomes came together to form the unique biological structure of your personality, God threw away the pattern. There is no one else like you in all the universe. You are unique, a one-of-a-kind creation, a being of such immense value that the God who created the cosmos took upon Himself our fleshly bodies and offered Himself as a sacrifice for you and your sins!

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 20.

The Judgment, Creation, and Accountability

If we are merely a collection of randomly formed cells, simply the product of chance and an advanced African ape, nothing more, then life has little meaning. If we are merely one of the estimated eight billion people clawing at one another for living space on a planet called earth, life loses its purpose, other than mere survival. In contrast, the biblical Creation provides a reason to live and a moral imperative for living. We have been created by God and are accountable to Him for our actions. The One who made us holds us responsible. He has established absolutes, even in a world of “moral relativism.”

Read Revelation 14:7, Romans 14:10, and James 2:8–13. What does judgment imply about such issues as accountability and responsibility? How are the judgment, the commandments of God, and worship linked?

The message of the three angels flying in midair in Revelation 14 announces that “ ‘the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). Since we were created by God with the capacity to make moral choices, we are responsible for the decisions we make. If we were merely a random collection of cells, products of our heredity and environment only, our actions would largely be determined by forces over which we had no control.

But judgment implies moral responsibility. In this crisis hour of earth’s history, the judgment hour, God calls us to make decisions in the light of eternity. The first angel’s earnest appeal to “ ‘worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of waters’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) acknowledges that the basis of all worship is the fact that we were created by God.

Meanwhile, our adherence to the seventh-day Sabbath demonstrates our belief that Jesus is worthy to be worshiped as our Creator. It reveals our acceptance of His Ten Commandment law as divinely inspired principles for living life to the fullest. Because the law is the foundation of God’s government and a revelation of His character, it becomes the standard of judgment. Our faithfulness to the Sabbath commandment is acknowledgment of our commitment to live obedient lives.

How does our understanding of Creation influence our behavior? What relationship do heredity and environment have to the choices we make daily? How can we, by God’s grace, overcome character defects that we didn’t choose to have in the first place?

The Sabbath and Creation

It is because our world so desperately needs the reassuring message of Creation that God gave us the Sabbath. In the mid-1800s when the evolutionary hypothesis was taking the intellectual world by storm, God sent a message of incredible hope. We have been studying this message, found in Revelation 14:6, 7.

Satan has made every attempt to distort the idea of Creation because he hates Jesus and does not want Him to receive the worship due Him as our Creator and Redeemer. The Sabbath is at the center of the great controversy over Christ's worthiness to receive worship as our Creator. God's last-day message is one that calls all humanity back to worshiping Christ as the Creator of heaven and earth. The basis of all worship is the fact that He created us.

Read Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 in the context of Revelation 14:6, 7. How do we see in the Sabbath commandment the link between Creation and Redemption, as well?

Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in Jesus. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (*Ezek. 20:12, 20*). Rather than being an arbitrary legalistic requirement, it reveals that true rest from righteousness by works is found in Him. The Sabbath speaks of a God who has achieved for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Scripture calls us to rest in His love and care each Sabbath. Sabbath is a symbol of rest, not works; of grace, not legalism; of assurance, not condemnation; of depending upon Him, not upon ourselves. Each Sabbath, we rejoice in His goodness, and praise Him for the salvation that can be found only in Christ.

The Sabbath also is the eternal link between the perfection of Eden in the past and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth in the future (*Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1*).

The Sabbath calls us back to our roots. It's a link to our family of origin. The Sabbath has been observed continuously since time began. It is an unbroken connection back through time to our creation. It keeps us focused on the glorious truth that we are children of God. It calls us to an intimate, close relationship with Him.

How is the Sabbath commandment hinted at in Revelation 14:6, 7, and why is it important to our end-time message? (*See Exod. 20:8–11.*)

A Not-So-Subtle Deception

In an attempt to destroy the uniqueness of our creation, the devil has introduced a not-so-subtle counterfeit. The counterfeit, accepted by even some among us, goes like this. God is the prime cause of creation, but He took long ages to bring life into existence. Evolution was the process He used. This approach attempts to harmonize “scientific data” with the Genesis account. It asserts that the days of creation are long, indefinite periods of time and that life on earth is billions of years old.

Read Psalm 33:6, 9 and Hebrews 11:3. What do these clear Bible passages tell us about how God created the world?

The biblical account is clear. God “spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (*Ps. 33:9, NKJV*). “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (*Heb. 11:3, NKJV*). The first chapter of Genesis affirms that God created the world in six literal days of 24 hours and rested on the seventh. The linguistic structure of Genesis 1 and 2 does not permit anything else. Even scholars who don’t believe in the literal six-day Creation acknowledge that the author’s intent was to teach the six-day Creation.

The Hebrew word for “day” in Genesis 1 is *yom*. Throughout the Bible, every time a number modifies the word *yom* as an adjective (third day, first day, and so on), it limits the time period to 24 hours. Without exception, it is always a 24-hour period.

Also, and to the immediate point, if God did not create the world in six literal days, what significance does the seventh-day Sabbath have? Why would God command it? It would make absolutely no sense at all to leave the Sabbath as an eternal legacy of a six-day Creation week if a six-day Creation week never existed to begin with. To accept long ages of creation is to challenge the very need for the seventh-day Sabbath. It also raises serious questions regarding the integrity of Scripture.

By attacking the Sabbath, Satan is challenging the very heart of God’s authority, and what could be more effective in destroying the memorial of the six-day Creation than denying the reality of the six-day Creation? No wonder so many people, including Christians, ignore the seventh-day Sabbath. What a setup for the final deception.

Creation, the Sabbath, and the End Time

The great controversy, which began in heaven millennia ago, was over the question of God's authority. The challenge remains the same today, as well.

Read Revelation 14:7, 9, and 12. Summarize these verses by completing the sentences on the lines below.

Revelation 14:7 is a call to _____

Revelation 14:9 is a solemn appeal not to _____

Revelation 14:12 describes a people who _____

These passages make it clear that the central issue in the conflict in the last days between good and evil, Christ and Satan, is worship. Do we worship the Creator or the beast? And because Creation forms the ground for all our beliefs (after all, what do we believe that makes any sense apart from God as our Creator?), the seventh-day Sabbath—embedded in the Genesis Creation account itself (*Gen. 2:1–3*)—stands as the eternal and immutable sign of that Creation. It's the most basic symbol of the most basic teaching. The only thing more fundamental to it is God Himself.

Hence, to usurp the seventh-day Sabbath is to usurp the Lord's authority at the most prime level possible, that of His identity as Creator. It's to get behind everything and uproot it at the core. It is, indeed, to seek to take the place of God Himself (*2 Thess. 2:4*).

Of course, the real issue in the last days is our love and loyalty to Jesus. But according to the Bible, this love is expressed in obedience to the commandments (*1 John 5:3, Rev. 14:12*)—and the Sabbath alone among the commandments is behind everything because it alone points to God as Creator (*Exod. 20:8–11*). No wonder it will be the outward symbol of the final divide between those who worship the Lord and those who worship the beast (*Rev. 14:11, 12*). Considering how basic and fundamental the Sabbath is to everything else, it's hard to see how the final issue of worshipping the Creator could be about anything else.

Many people argue that it makes no difference what day one keeps as the Sabbath, as long as we keep one. How do we answer that argument with the Bible?

The Sabbath and Eternal Rest

The Sabbath is a place of refuge in a weary world. Each week we leave the cares of this world and enter God's retreat center—the Sabbath. The famed Jewish author Abraham Heschel calls the Sabbath “a palace in time.”—*The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), p. 12. Each seventh day, God's heavenly palace descends from heaven to earth, and the Lord invites us into the glory of His presence for this 24-hour period to spend a time of intimate fellowship with Him.

In the introduction to Heschel's book on the beauty and solemnity of the Sabbath, Susannah Heschel, his daughter, writes of the significance of the Sabbath in these words: “The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God's presence; in our prayers, we anticipate a messianic era that will be a Sabbath, and each Shabbat prepares us for that experience: Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath . . . one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come.”—Page XV.

At Creation, Jesus built a special dwelling for us. We can find refuge there. We can be safe there. His work is complete. It is finished. When we rest on the Sabbath, we are resting in His loving care. We are resting in anticipation of our eternal rest in the new heavens and the new earth that are soon to come.

Read Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. How does keeping the Sabbath point us forward to eternity?

The same God who created the earth the first time will create it again, and the Sabbath remains an eternal symbol of Him as the Creator (*see Isa. 66:23*). In fact, the Jews had seen the Sabbath as a symbol, a foretaste of what was called in Hebrew the *olam haba*, the world to come.

The message of three angels flying through the heavens appealing for us to worship the Creator is heaven's answer to the hopeless despair of many in the twenty-first century. It points us to our Creator, the One who first made all things, and to our Redeemer, the One who will, after the judgment, after sin is eradicated, make all things new. “Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful’ ” (*Rev. 21:5, NKJV*).

How can you personally make the Sabbath a foretaste of heaven in your own life and your family?

Further Thought: “The reason provided . . . to worship God is that He is the Creator. In the heavenly liturgy, celestial beings expressed the idea in a very succinct way: ‘For You created all things’ ([Rev.] 4:11, [NKJV]). On earth, God’s creatorship needs to be emphasized as much as possible, so the angel says, ‘Worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters’ ([Rev.] 14:7, [NKJV]). It has been correctly indicated that the angel is using the language of the fourth commandment to justify the call to worship God (Exod. 20:11). . . .

“Within the Decalogue the Sabbath commandment stands as its seal in that it identifies who God is—the Creator; confirms the territory over which He rules—everything He created; and reveals His right to rule—for He created everything. In order for the dragon to succeed, he had somehow to set aside this memorial.”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, pp. 40, 41.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does the message of the Sabbath answer the great questions of life, such as where did I come from, why am I here, and what is my eternal destiny?
- ❷ Dwell on the marvel of Creation. Dwell on the miracle of our own existence in this vast universe. What should the fact that the prime memorial of this Creation, the Sabbath, comes to us (as opposed to us going to it), every week without exception, teach us about how important the doctrine of Creation is?
- ❸ In Daniel 3 and Daniel 6, how do you see the issue of worship being played out in these inspired accounts? What is found in these accounts that can help us prepare and anticipate the challenge God’s faithful people will face during the crisis around “the mark of the beast”?
- ❹ How do we show someone who believes in the millions, even billions, of years of evolution as the means of creation the irrationality of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial to that creation?

Quandary of Two Books

By CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

When I grew up in a secular Jewish home, the essence of my religious experience could be summed up by how we kept the holidays: They tried to kill us, they failed—let's eat! Nevertheless, I was always a seeker for truth.

In the fall of 1979, my seeking took me down the path of the occult and spiritualism. I even had a few experiences with astral travel. Not knowing the source of these experiences, only that they were real, I decided to start reading about them. Thus, I walked over to the library at the University of Florida to get a book on the occult and start delving deeper into it.

At that point, I was a hungry writer who needed a job. As I was walking to the library, I stopped at a health-food store in order to ask for work. A man came out and, as soon as I said something about the supernatural, he blurted out, "What?" He dragged me into the store and locked the door. After I told him about my experiences, he tried to warn me about demonic influences. Well, he might as well have talked to me about Santa Claus as about the devil. Before I left, he handed me a book and said, "Please, read it."

Thus, with his book in hand, I went over to the University of Florida library and found an occult book. Because I wasn't in school, I could not check it out, so I sat down in the library, read the first chapter, and even practiced the first technique, all of which was very new to me. Then, I went and hid the book on the shelves so that I could be sure that no one would check it out before I was done reading it myself.

Anyway, here's the rub: I was walking through the library with the two books. In one hand, I had, for the first time in my life, this book on the occult; in the other, for the first time in my life, I had the book that the man in the health-food store gave me. One book in one hand, one book in the other. Occult book in one hand, and what was in the other? *The Great Controversy*. At the time, I was clueless as to what was unfolding around me.

A few days later, after an amazing confrontation with the Lord, I gave my heart to Jesus and those occult experiences never came back. Soon afterward, I read *The Great Controversy*, a life-changing experience. No question, the Lord arranged for this powerful, timely, and important book to come into my life. Yes, I was a seeker for truth, and I found so much of it there.

Join the global church in 2023 and 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Visit greatcontroversyproject.org for more information or ask your pastor.



Clifford Goldstein, a prolific author, has served as editor of the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide since 1999.

A City Called Confusion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 17:1, 2, 15; Rev. 18:1–4; Rev. 17:4–6; Matt. 16:18; Jer. 50:33–38; Ps. 115:4–8.*

Memory Text: “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (*Revelation 17:14, NKJV*).

The great controversy theme is summarized in Revelation with the symbolism of two women: one clothed with the sun, in Revelation 12, and one dressed in scarlet, in Revelation 17.

The striking symbol of the woman clothed with the sun, in the dazzling glory of Christ, is found in Revelation 12. She is faithful to her true Lover, Jesus. She is not defiled with the corruption of false doctrines. Throughout the Bible, a pure woman symbolizes the bride of Jesus, or the true church. In Jeremiah 6:2, the prophet says, “‘I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman’” (*NKJV*). The prophet uses the expression “daughter of Zion” or a faithful woman to describe God’s people. (*See also Eph. 5:25–32 and Hos. 2:20.*)

In contrast, the Bible likens apostasy to harlotry or adultery (*James 4:4*). Speaking of Israel’s rebellion and unfaithfulness, Ezekiel laments, “‘You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband’” (*Ezek. 16:32, NKJV*).

In this week’s lesson, we will study these two women of Revelation and probe, more deeply, the conflict between truth and error.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 27.

Two Contrasting Systems

Read Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 17:14. How is God’s church described, and what is Satan’s reaction to it?

Down through the centuries, God has always had a people who have been faithful to Him. Revelation 12:17 describes the faithful as those who “keep the commandments of God,” and those who are elsewhere depicted as “ ‘called, chosen, and faithful’ ” (*Rev. 17:14, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 17:1, 2. What solemn announcement does the angel make? And what did Babylon do to warrant such an announcement?

John wrote the book of Revelation at the end of the first century. By this time, the ancient city of Babylon was a dust heap. When John wrote down the messages in the book of Revelation, the literal city of Babylon had been destroyed for more than several centuries.

In Revelation, the ancient city of Babylon is taken to be a type, or symbol, of the end-time Babylon. In the prophecies of Revelation, Babylon represents a false religious system that will have similar characteristics to Old Testament Babylon. The principles that guided ancient Babylon will be the undergirding structure of modern, spiritual Babylon.

In Revelation 17:1–6, a woman dressed in purple and scarlet strides across the landscape of time. This woman rides upon a scarlet-colored beast. The Bible calls her a harlot. She has left her true Lover, Jesus Christ. Here the apostle John gives us a graphic portrayal of an apostate system of religion that has powerful influence in the world. Look at the wording: this power was one with “ ‘whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication’ ” (*Rev. 17:2, NKJV*). Drunk? Always a negative in the Bible. And fornication? Symbolic of the false teachings, false doctrine, and practice.

Both leaders and the common people alike have been negatively influenced by this power. What’s our only protection? (*Read Eph. 6:10–18.*)

The Wine of the Wrath

Read Revelation 17:1, 2, 15 and Revelation 18:1–4. How extensive is Babylon’s influence?

The fallen church system has an international reach, influencing people around the world with her deceptions. Satan is enraged that the gospel will be proclaimed to every “nation, tribe, tongue, and people” and that this “ ‘gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world,’ ” so he employs every possible deception to captivate the minds of the “ ‘inhabitants of the earth’ ” (*Rev. 14:6, Matt. 24:14, Rev. 17:2, NKJV*).

Revelation 17:2 continues its explanation of the mystery of Babylon the great by declaring that she has “committed fornication” with the kings of the earth. What is fornication? It’s an illicit union. It is the fallen church system uniting with the state. In the true church system, the church is united with Jesus Christ. The fallen church looks to the political leaders of the earth for power and authority. It seeks the state to enforce its decrees. Rather than drawing her strength from Jesus as her true Head, she looks to the state for support.

Revelation 17:2 continues its dramatic portrayal: “ ‘And the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication’ ” (*NKJV*). The symbolism of the pure juice of the grape is used throughout the New Testament to represent the untainted, pure blood of Christ poured out for our salvation on the cross (*Matt. 26:27–29*). In Luke 22:20, Jesus says, “ ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood’ ” (*NKJV*). When the pure, new wine of the gospel is distorted, and the teachings of the Word of God are replaced with the teachings of human religious leaders, it becomes the “wine of Babylon.” (*See Matt. 15:9*)

Notice, too, that God calls His people out of Babylon. In other words, no matter how corrupt and evil the system is, its reach is so wide that it encompasses, at least for a certain time, His faithful ones, or “my people” (*Rev. 18:4*), as He calls them. Yet, the time is coming when God will call them out of that corrupt and evil system, which is about to fall because of its corrupt and evil nature, this “ ‘dwelling place of demons’ ” and “ ‘cage for every unclean and hated bird’ ” (*Rev. 18:2, NKJV*).

What role do those who proclaim the three angels’ messages have in being used by God to call “My people,” His people, out of Babylon?

Mystery, Babylon the Great

Read Revelation 17:4–6. What do these verses teach us about the nature of this evil system?

As we have seen, Revelation 17 describes an apostate religious system that introduces into Christianity many of the teachings of Old Testament Babylon.

“In order to search for an understanding of the nature of Babylon, we need to go back to its first reference in the biblical record, in Genesis. It all began on the plain of the land of Shinar, a region in the southern part of Mesopotamia, today south Iraq, called Babylonia. It is there that the Tower of Babel was built, a symbol of human self-sufficiency, self-preservation, and independence from God ([Gen.] 11:1–4).” —Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 43.

The Tower of Babel, the site of ancient Babylon, was built in direct defiance to the word of God. The Babel builders built this monument for their own glory, and God confused their languages. The Genesis account puts it this way, “Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth” (*Gen. 11:9, NKJV*).

So evil is this system that it is depicted as having been “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (*Rev. 17:6, NKJV*)—horrific images of just how corrupt Babylon is (*see also Isa. 49:26*).

In essence, spiritual Babylon represents a religion based on human teachings, established on human ideas, and supported by human traditions. It is a form of human-made religion built by, perhaps, brilliant human religious leaders, but it stands in opposition to the power of the gospel and the church that Jesus built, a church built on love, not violence.

The book of Revelation describes these two systems of religion. The first reveals total trust in Jesus and dependence on His Word. The second reveals trust in human authority and dependence on human religious teachers. One is a Christ-centered faith with total dependence on Christ’s grace, sacrifice, and atonement for salvation. The other is a humanistic approach to faith that replaces the total dependence on Christ for salvation with a dependence on the traditions of the church.

How can we protect ourselves from the subtle influences of Babylon, such as the tendency, easy as it is, to depend upon ourselves and not wholly upon God?

A Call to Commitment

Revelation's appeal is an urgent call to commitment, summarized in the symbolism of the two women in Revelation. Although at times it will appear that God's people will be defeated in this cosmic controversy between truth and error, God promises that His church will triumph in the end.

Compare Matthew 16:18 and Revelation 17:14. What promise did Jesus give His disciples regarding His church?

Christ is the solid foundation His church is built upon. His church is based on the teachings of His Word and guided by His Spirit. On the contrary, Babylon, as we have seen, is rooted in human-made teachings and traditions. Any religious leader who substitutes human opinions or traditions in the place of, or above, the revealed will of God in the Scriptures is simply fostering Babylonian confusion.

In the days of ancient Babylon, church and state were one and the same thing. When King Nebuchadnezzar sat in his temple on his royal throne, he supposedly spoke for the gods. On one occasion, as an act of defiance toward the true God, the Babylonian king passed a universal decree enforcing worship and commanded all his subjects to bow to his decree, a powerful symbol of what God's faithful people, who refuse to worship the false image, will face in the last days. (*See Daniel 3.*)

In the last days of earth's history, a church-state system will arise, spiritual Babylon, with a spiritual leader claiming to speak as God. His word will be declared to be the very word of God and his commands the commands of God. Throughout the centuries, the Roman pontiffs have declared that they stand in the place of God on earth. In his encyclical letter of June 20, 1894, Pope Leo XIII stated, "We hold upon this earth the place of Almighty God." The *Ferraris Ecclesiastical Dictionary* adds, "The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God and the vicar of God." The apostle Paul adds these words exposing this power "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (*2 Thess. 2:4, NKJV*).

Because we have already seen that God has faithful people in "Babylon," why must we be careful in how we talk about it, and why must we be careful not to judge people as individuals, as opposed to the system itself?

Babylon: The Center of Idolatry

Here is another clue in clearly identifying the “mystery of Babylon the great.” Idolatry was at the heart of Babylonian worship.

Read Jeremiah 50:33–38 and Jeremiah 51:17, 47. What do you discover in these verses about ancient Babylon’s worship of images and God’s response to it?

Jeremiah 50 and 51 predict Babylon’s destruction by the Medes and Persians. One of the reasons for Babylon’s demise was its idolatry. The Babylonians believed that these images were representations of their deities. In Babylonian religion, the ritual care and worship of the statues of deities was considered sacred; the gods lived simultaneously in their statues in temples and in the natural forces they embodied. The pillaging or destruction of idols was considered to be loss for the people of divine patronage. For example, the Chaldean prince Marduk-apla-iddina II fled into the southern marshes of Mesopotamia with the statues of Babylon’s gods to save them from the armies of Sennacherib of Assyria (Jane R. McIntosh, *Ancient Mesopotamia: New Perspectives* [Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005] p. 203).

The Bible prophets contrasted the worship of these lifeless images with the Creator God, who is both alive and life-giving (*Jer. 51:15, 16, 19*).

Read Exodus 20:4–6 and Psalm 115:4–8. What do they teach about idolatry?

Though the issues of the idolatry of spiritual Babylon go deeper than just bowing before images of wood and stone, spiritual Babylon does parallel ancient Babylon with the images introduced into its worship service. The use of images as objects of worship, or so-called “veneration,” is a violation of the second commandment because it limits the ability of the Holy Spirit to impress upon our minds the things of eternity and reduces the majesty of God to a lifeless statue. These images were introduced into Christianity in the fourth century to make Christianity more acceptable to the pagan populace. Unfortunately, these images are often given the sacredness and homage that belongs to God alone, which makes the whole thing spiritually degrading.

Further Thought: “The message of Revelation 14, announcing the *fall* of Babylon must apply to religious bodies that were once pure and have become corrupt. Since this message follows the warning of the judgment, it must be given in the last days; therefore it cannot refer to the Roman Church alone, for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 383.

Daniel 3—the story of the three Hebrews who had been ordered to “ ‘worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up’ ” (*Dan. 3:5, NKJV*) in ancient Babylon—stands as a symbol, a model, of what will happen when spiritual Babylon, in the last days, will enforce worship of a false “image,” as well (*see Rev. 13:15; Rev. 14:9, 11; Rev. 16:2; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:4*). How interesting that the commandment that the three Hebrews would have violated, had they obeyed the king, the second commandment (*Exod. 20:4, 5*), was one of the two commandments that this power, depicted in another place as seeking “ ‘to change times and laws’ ” (*Dan. 7:25*), had tampered with.

What was the other commandment it tampered with? Of course, the fourth commandment, which, as we have seen and will see again, sits at the heart of the whole question of worship and will be central in the final crisis when we face the question of whether we will worship the One who “ ‘made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day’ ” (*Exod. 20:11, NKJV; see also Rev. 14:7*) or the beast and his image.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What relationship does the Tower of Babel have to modern spiritual Babylon? What are the similarities between the two?
- ❷ How do you harmonize two contrasting ideas? Jesus has given authority to His church, but it is dangerous to place our religious experience in the hands of any spiritual leader. What are the limits of church authority?
- ❸ How can we learn that idolatry, one of the sins of Babylon, isn’t just bowing down to statues? In what ways can even Protestants fall into idolatry?
- ❹ What are some other parallels you can find between Daniel 3 and the forced worship there, and what we have been warned about in the last days?

Bike and Bible: Part 1

By M. B., as told to KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

I wish you could meet Hussein, the security guard for the building where my wife and I live as missionaries in the Middle East. From the time we first met, we could see he observed his faith carefully and lived with sincerity. I liked him. Hussein visited our home many times, and he invited us to his. We often conversed about the simple things in life and even sometimes about spirituality. At our initiative, he graciously joined us in prayer.

As our friendship grew by God's grace, we sought to take a new step in our friendship. We began to pray for the right moment to give him a Bible.

One day, I noticed that Hussein was upset. He impatiently explained that his bicycle, his only transportation to work, had been stolen. He was preoccupied with trying to find a bicycle to borrow. That's the day that I began praying for a bicycle for my friend. Several months passed, and we received an unexpected gift of U.S.\$40. I was puzzled. It seemed like God had sent the money directly from heaven. As I was praying a short time later, the distinct thought came to me, *"Show Jesus to your friend. Buy a bicycle for Hussein."* I set aside the \$40 and began adding to it.

But the country's economy worsened by the day, and no matter how much money I saved, I did not seem to have enough to buy a bicycle. But I kept praying and saving. I also went to many second-hand bicycle shops. I began imagining what it would be like to give Hussein a bicycle for his birthday!

When Hussein's birthday came, my wife baked a cake, I planned a special menu, and we invited him for supper at 5:30 P.M. Certain that God could still answer with a miracle, I went out looking for the bicycle that we had prayed about for so long. At 5:00 P.M., I returned home, unsuccessful and discouraged. My wife reminded me that God knew how much we wanted to help and had prayed. "He's taking care of the situation," she said.

The supper was a perfect surprise. Hussein was delighted! He told us how blessed he was to have us in his life. We enjoyed the meal together, presented him with the cake, and had a special prayer for him, thanking God for his life. But we had no bike. No gift.

The next day, still searching for a second-hand bike, I was startled by an online post indicating that a Russian man had listed a bicycle for sale only 10 minutes earlier. I couldn't believe the price, the photo, and the condition of the bicycle. I grabbed my phone, contacted the owner, and even bravely asked for a discount. The deal was made. As I lifted the bicycle into my car, I knew God had answered our prayers. The bicycle had cost the exact amount that I had saved over many, many months.

The mission story concludes next week.



Satan's Final Deceptions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:9; Rev. 16:13, 14; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Ezek. 8:16; Ezek. 20:1–20; Rev. 18:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.’ ”
(*John 17:17, NKJV*).

It was one of those gorgeous September mornings in Chicago. As the sun rose over Lake Michigan and commuters battled traffic jams on the Kennedy and Eisenhower expressways, and children made their way to school, a chilling story began to emerge that struck fear into the hearts of Chicagoans. People were becoming tragically sick, and some were dying just a few hours after taking Tylenol capsules. On testing, each of the capsules proved to be laced with potassium cyanide, a deadly poison. A deranged individual had tampered with the medication. To this day, we don't know who did this.

As we have seen, Revelation warns us that the “inhabitants of the earth” will drink a deadly potion called the “wine of Babylon.” There are false doctrines and teachings that, in the end, will lead only to death. However, the world is not left without the antidote, the protection, against this spiritual poison: the three angels' messages.

In this week's lesson, we will continue looking, not only at Babylon's deceptions but also at Jesus' plan to save us from them and the death that they would otherwise bring.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 3.*

The Way That Seems Right in a Man's Eyes

In the context of the last days, Jesus uttered a powerful warning, “ ‘For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (*Mark 13:22, NKJV*). Who are “the elect”? He later says, “ ‘And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other’ ” (*Matt. 24:31, NKJV*). A little scary, isn't it, when the deception in the last days will be so great that even the faithful ones will be in danger of being deceived?

Read Revelation 12:9. Who is deceived by Satan? How do we understand these words?

Obviously, God is going to have some faithful people in the last days, as He has had all through the ages. However, the wording here shows just how widespread Satan's deception really is.

Read Proverbs 14:12. What powerful warning is presented here?

People are often told to follow their own conscience in order to determine for themselves what is right or wrong, good or evil, and then live accordingly. But the Scripture says that we are all sinners, all corrupted (*Jer. 17:9, Rom. 3:9–18*), and so to trust our own sentiments is almost a guaranteed way to, sooner or later, get it wrong and even to do wrong. A lot of evil has been perpetrated through the ages by people utterly convinced of the rightness of their cause. That is, they followed the “way that seems right” to them.

Instead, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God, and from His Word, as we surrender to the Holy Spirit, learn truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil. Left to our own devices, or even to our own senses, we can become easy prey to Satan's deceptions.

Think through examples of people who have acted based on what they themselves believed was right, or even what they believed was God's will but have done evil things. What can we learn from these tragic events?

The Old Lie of Immortality

Read Revelation 16:13, 14 and Revelation 18:2, 23. What allusions to spiritualism do you find in these verses?

Such expressions as the “dwelling place of demons” or the “spirits of demons” and “sorcery” all indicate demonic activity. No wonder we have been warned that of the two great deceptions in the last days, one will be “the immortality of the soul” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588).

Of course, that’s so easy to see today. Even in the Christian world, the idea of the soul being immortal is all but staple Christian doctrine. Many Christians believe that, at death, the saved go soaring off to heaven, and the lost descend into hell. How often, for instance, after the great evangelist Billy Graham died, did we hear that “Billy Graham is safe now in heaven, in the loving arms of Jesus,” or the like? This kind of thing is taught all the time from pulpits; in classrooms; and, especially, at funerals.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 19:25–27; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; and Revelation 14:13. What clear instruction did God give His people about life after death, and where do we find our hope?

One of the pillars of Babylonian deception is a false understanding of death, which, centered in the idea of the immortality of the soul, prepares the way for the deceptive influence of spiritualism. If you believe that the dead, in some form, live on and might even be able to communicate with us, then what protection do you have from any of the myriad deceptions that Satan has? If someone who you thought was your dead mother or child, or someone else beloved, was suddenly to appear and talk to you, how easy would it be to be fooled by your senses? This has happened in the past; happens now; and, certainly, as we near the very final days, will happen again. Our only protection is to stand firmly rooted in what the Bible teaches and to cling to the biblical teaching about death as a sleep until the second coming of Jesus.

What examples of modern spiritualism exist in your culture today? Why is firm adherence to the Word of God our only protection?

Babylon: The Center of Sun Worship

Sun worship was prominent in Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and certainly Babylon. In his book *The Worship of Nature*, James G. Frazer makes this observation, “In ancient Babylonia the sun was worshipped from immemorial antiquity.”—(London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), vol. 1, p. 529. It may seem surprising, but at times, Babylonian sun worship influenced the worship of God’s people in the Old Testament.

Read Ezekiel 8:16 and 2 Kings 23:5, 11. What did the prophets write about the influence of sun worship in Israel and Judah? (See also Rom. 1:25.)

The prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, pictured some of God’s people with their backs toward the temple of God worshipping the sun toward the east. Rather than worshipping the Creator of the sun, they worshiped the sun instead.

In Revelation 17, John described a time when the principles of Babylon, including sun worship, would enter the Christian church during an age of compromise. The casual conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great joy in the Roman Empire. Constantine had a strong affinity for sun worship. Edward Gibbon, the renowned historian, writes, “The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.”—*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (London: J.O. Robinson & Co, Ltd., 1830), p. 12. In A.D. 321, Constantine also passed the first “Sunday law.” This edict stated, “On the venerable day of the Sun let the Magistrates and the people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.”—Edict of Constantine, A.D. 321. This was not a law enforcing Sunday observance for all of Constantine’s subjects, but it did strengthen the observance of Sunday in the minds of the Roman population.

It was in succeeding decades that emperors and popes continued through state decrees and church councils to establish Sunday as the singular day of worship, which it remains today, as well, for the majority of Christians. What a powerful example of the hard truth that just because the majority of people believe in something, or practice it, doesn’t make it right.

Look around at how prevalent Sunday worship is in Christian churches. What should this fact teach us about how pervasive Satan’s deceptions are? Again, as with the state of the dead, what is our only safeguard?

A Call to Faithfulness

The message of the second angel in Revelation 14 is “ ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen.’ ” In Revelation 17, the woman identified as spiritual Babylon, dressed in purple and scarlet, rides upon a scarlet-colored beast, passes around her wine cup, and gets the world drunk with error. Church and state unite. Falsehood prevails. Demons work their miracles to deceive. The world catapults into its final conflict.

At the same time, the people of God are maligned, ridiculed, oppressed, and persecuted, but in Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit, they are steadfast in their commitment. All the powers of hell and the forces of evil cannot break their loyalty to Christ. They are secure in Him. He is their “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (*Ps. 46:1*).

God is calling an end-time people back to faithfulness to His Word. Jesus prayed, “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*). The truth of God’s Word, not human opinion or tradition, is the North Star to guide us in this critical hour of earth’s history.

Here is a remarkable statement by Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, the author of the *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*. In 1893, he addressed a group of hundreds of Baptist ministers and shocked them as he explained how Sunday came into the Christian church.

“What a pity that it [Sunday] comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, then adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!”—Before a New York ministers’ conference, November 13, 1893.

Read Ezekiel 20:1–20. What is the gist of Ezekiel’s message here, and how does the Sabbath fit in with this call to faithfulness?

Ezekiel 20 is an earnest appeal for Israel to forsake pagan practices and to worship the Creator instead of false gods, in this case the “idols of Egypt.” In the message of the three angels, God is making a similar appeal for us to “worship the Creator,” for “Babylon is fallen.” And, too, as we know, the Sabbath, and faithfulness to it, will play a big role in final events.

What lessons can we take away for ourselves from what has been written in Ezekiel 20:1–20? (See also 1 Cor. 10:11.)

Grace for Obedience

The woman in scarlet and purple, riding on the scarlet-colored beast, has passed around her wine cup, and the world is drunk with Babylon's false doctrines. Speaking of the "wine of Babylon," Ellen G. White makes this clear comment: "What is that wine? Her false doctrines. She has given to the world a false Sabbath instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and has repeated the falsehood that Satan first told to Eve in Eden,—the natural immortality of the soul."—"Let the Trumpet Give a Certain Sound," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 6, 1892. These erroneous teachings have deceived millions. As a result, God is giving His people, still entrenched in error, a final last-day appeal.

Read Revelation 18:4, 5. What is God's appeal to multitudes still in fallen religious organizations?

As we already have seen (but worth repeating), many of God's people are in religious organizations that have compromised biblical teachings. They do not understand the truths of Scripture. God's loving appeal is straightforward: "'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues'" (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*).

Read 1 John 3:4 and compare it to Romans 14:23. How does the Bible define sin? How do these Bible passages harmonize?

Sin is the transgression or the breaking of God's law. The only way anybody can obey the law is through faith in the power of the living Christ. We are weak, frail, faltering, sinful human beings. By faith when we accept Christ, His grace atones for our past and empowers our present. He gives us "grace and apostleship for obedience" (*Rom. 1:5, NKJV*). Heaven's appeal to His people in churches that do not respect and obey the law of God is to step out by faith. His appeal to Adventists in Sabbath-keeping congregations is to forsake all self-centered, human attempts at obedience and live godly lives by faith in the grace of Christ, which delivers us from sin's condemnation and its domination. And just as Israel's faithfulness to the law (*Deut. 4:6*) would have been a powerful witness to the world, our faithfulness, too, can be a powerful witness and help guide people out of Babylon.

Further Thought: “‘Babylon the great’ in the book of Revelation designates in a special sense, the united apostate religions at the close of time. . . . ‘Babylon the great’ is the name by which Inspiration refers to the great threefold religious union of the papacy, apostate Protestantism, and spiritism. . . . The term ‘Babylon’ refers to the organizations themselves and to their leaders, not so much to the members as such. The latter are referred to as ‘many waters.’ (Rev. 17:1, 15).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 851, 852.

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

In the Old Testament, the spirits of the dead played a major part in Babylonian religion. The Babylonians had a strong belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. They believed at death, the soul entered the spirit world. The concept of the immortal soul is foreign to the teachings of Scripture. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* clearly identifies the origin of the false idea of the immortality of the soul. “The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is . . . nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture. . . . The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended.”—Kaufmann Kohler, “Immortality of the Soul,” (1906).

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is an understanding of the truth about death so critically important? What does it protect us from? Why is it so comforting too?
- ❷ Some of the devil’s deceptions are obvious, others more subtle. How can we avoid being deceived by either?
- ❸ In class, talk about the question, touched on in Sunday’s study, about those who do evil believing that they are following the will of God, as revealed in the Bible. How do we explain this? What role should the law of God play in the explanation?

Bike and Bible: Part 2

By M. B., as told to KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

My wife and I had saved money for many, many months to buy a bicycle for Hussein, the security guard for the building where we live as missionaries in the Middle East. God answered our prayers and helped us to buy a bicycle. As we inspected the answer to our prayers, we wondered out loud to each other, “What if we give Hussein a Bible with the bicycle?”

We wrote a note in a card and wrapped a Bible that we had bought many months earlier. We prayed for the best moment to present him with the gifts. I carefully planned what to say. I knew that the bicycle would be meaningful. I hoped that the Bible would be a sensitive step toward sharing truth.

Hussein was overwhelmed with emotion when we arrived at his door with the bicycle. The bicycle looked impressive! But I never expected the expression on his face as he gently held the Bible and carefully turned its pages. He was in awe. He was delighted. But I don’t know who was happier—him or me. After two years of friendship, I was finally giving my friend and brother a Bible, the gift I had prayed about the most! My joy was indescribable.

A few days later, Hussein invited me to his home for tea. When I arrived, I found him reading Genesis. His eyes sparkled. He explained that he had never read the Creation story before. I knew we had much to talk about, and I prayed for the Holy Spirit to give me the right words. That evening, we spoke of heaven and death. I showed Hussein some beautiful verses in his new Bible. As we spoke, Hussein kept quietly leafing through the pages of the Bible. He seemed so engrossed with the Bible that I sensed God urging me to offer to study the Bible with him. I heard myself giving that wonderful invitation, “Would you like to study the Bible together?” To my astonishment, he accepted—and with great eagerness. That week, we began our Bible studies. That week, God continued His amazing work, and He is still working. Hussein and I are both growing closer to God and to each other.

My heart is filled with thanksgiving to God. I am filled with awe by the privilege of sharing God with Hussein. I am thankful to my wife for her kind and faith-filled support. I am thankful to relatives in my homeland who have prayed with us for Hussein. I am thankful for believing friends who have prayed for us during this experience. I thank God for sending us the money to buy the bicycle and for giving us the courage to share His Word with someone who is thrilled to learn about God from a new perspective.



Thank you for your mission offerings that help spread the gospel in the Middle East and around the world.

The Seal of God *and* Mark of the Beast: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:12, Eph. 2:8–10, Matt. 27:45–50, Rev. 13:15–17, Rev. 14:4, Luke 5:18–26.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads’ ” (*Revelation 7:2, 3, NKJV*).

As we study end-time events in regard to the mark of the beast, one crucial point that comes through is the difference between how God operates and how the enemy of souls does.

As we have been studying, the central issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan are loyalty, authority, and worship. The prophecies describing the beast power in Revelation 13, the little horn in Daniel 7, and the “son of perdition” in 2 Thessalonians 2 all speak of a power that usurps God’s authority, commands loyalty, and introduces a counterfeit system of worship. And it does so through the use of force, coercion, and at times bribes and rewards—all in order to compel worship.

In contrast, love is the great motivating force of the kingdom of God. Rather than worshipping the beast, God’s people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshipping Him. They are committed to Him because they know how committed He is to them. There is only one thing that will keep any of us from receiving the mark of the beast in the end time—a love for Jesus so deep that nothing can break our hold upon Him.

In this lesson, we will explore these themes further.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 10.

Steadfast Endurance

As we have seen in Revelation 14:7, God calls all people to worship the Creator. This is the first angel's message. In Revelation 14:8, God warns people about "Babylon," a false religious system with roots back in ancient Babylon. This is the second angel's message.

In Revelation 14:9, 10, the third angel warns against worshipping the beast. The angel declares in a loud voice, " 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God' " (NKJV).

Read Revelation 14:12. What two characteristics do we discover in this passage about God's last-day people? Why are both important?

The Greek word for "patience" is *hupomone*, which is better translated "steadfast endurance." God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of opposition and fierce persecution. Through His grace, they stand with steadfast endurance, living God-centered, grace-filled, obedient lives.

Worshipping the Creator (Rev. 14:7) stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast (Rev. 14:9) and finds its expression in a people who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12). This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or allegiance to the beast power revolves around worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is going to be the Sabbath.

Read Romans 8:1–4, Ephesians 2:8–10, and Colossians 1:29. What do these passages teach us about the result of living by faith?

Living by faith, we receive His grace, and our lives are changed. The committed followers of the Savior not only will have faith "in" Jesus but also will have the faith "of" Jesus. Jesus' quality of end-time faith will be theirs, and they will remain faithful, even unto death, as Jesus did.

How faithful are you in the little things? What might that tell you about how you will be when the real trial comes? (See Luke 16:10.)

The Cosmic Struggle

Read Matthew 27:45–50. What does this teach us about what Christ experienced on the cross? What did Jesus mean by asking God why He had forsaken Him, and how does this scene help us understand what it means to have “the faith of Jesus”?

Hanging on the cross, enshrouded in darkness, bearing the guilt, shame, and condemnation of the sins of the world, and shut off from the sense of His Father’s love, Jesus depended on the relationship that He had with the Father throughout His life. That is, through a life of complete dependence upon the Father, even in good times, Jesus had been prepared for the worst times—even the cross. The Savior trusted, even when all around Him the circumstances cried out for Him to doubt. Even when it seemed that God had forsaken Him, Jesus didn’t give up.

“Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father’s acceptance heretofore given Him. . . . By faith, Christ was victor.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant*, p. 277.

The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the demons in the cosmos and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot understand, hangs on when there is little to hang on to. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith and it will carry us through the crisis ahead. It is “the faith of Jesus” dwelling in our hearts that enables us to worship Christ as supreme and steadfastly endure when Revelation’s mark of the beast is enforced.

And yet, it is not something that out of nowhere suddenly appears. God’s people have been learning to live by faith, day by day, now. In good times, in bad times, when God feels close, when God seems far away—it doesn’t matter. “The just shall live by faith” (*Gal. 3:11; see also Hab. 2:4*). The time for preparation is now. Every trial now, if endured in faith, can bear precious fruit in our lives.

Think about a time when life seemed to crumble around you and all that you had was your faith. How did you get by? What lessons did you learn? What did you experience that could help others who might be going through something similar?

The Ungodly Chain

The prophecy regarding the mark of the beast is about religious intolerance, an economic boycott, persecution, and eventually a death decree. Surprisingly, it also is a message of encouragement. Even in the worst of times, God will sustain His people who “keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). And, among those commandments, of course, is the fourth—the seventh day Sabbath.

The mark-of-the-beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the worst, the absolute fever pitch, of Satan’s war against God. His first strategy in this campaign is deception. Revelation 13 tells us about a time in the future when the devil will work through an earthly religious-political power called the beast and resort to force.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for worshiping the way God instructed them to worship (*see Gen. 4:1–8*). Jesus said persecution would happen even to believers in the first century and down through the ages: “‘The time is coming,’ ” He warned, “‘that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service’ ” (*John 16:2, NKJV; see also Matt. 10:22, 1 Pet. 4:12*).

The mark-of-the-beast prophecy is about the final link in this ungodly chain. Like the persecutions in the past, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship.

Read Revelation 13:15–17. What will God’s end-time people face in the final crisis?

The prophecy says the persecution will start with economic sanctions: “No one can buy or sell” unless they have “the mark.” When this happens, the immense majority will capitulate. Anyone who refuses will eventually be placed under a death decree.

The devil is preparing professed Christians by compromises in their lives to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes upon us in the future. God’s love for each one of us will strengthen us and preserve us during the troublous times ahead.

Read Galatians 6:7–9. Though this is not written in the context of last-day events, why is the principle here so relevant to issues over the mark of the beast and how we can stand faithful?

Those Who Follow the Lamb

Read Revelation 13:1, 2. Where does the beast come from, and who gives the beast his authority?

The first beast power of Revelation 13 receives his power, seat, and great authority from the dragon. Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2 identify the dragon as Satan. Satan is a cunning foe and works through earthly powers. Revelation 12:3–5 says this “dragon”—the devil—attempted to destroy the “male Child” as soon as He was born. This “male Child” was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*). This, of course, refers to Christ. Desiring to destroy the Christ child, Satan worked through Herod and imperial Rome. At the end of Jesus’ life, a Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die, a Roman executioner nailed Him to the cruel cross, a Roman soldier pierced Him with a spear, and Roman soldiers guarded His tomb. According to Revelation 13:2, the dragon, Satan, working through pagan Rome, would give the seat of its government to this emerging beast power.

“Though primarily representing Satan, the dragon, in a secondary sense, represents the Roman Empire. . . . The power succeeding the Roman Empire, which received from the dragon ‘his power, and his seat, and great authority,’ is clearly papal Rome.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 817. Historian A. C. Flick explains that “out of the ruins of political Rome, arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church.”—*The Rise of the Medieval Church* (1900), p. 150, as quoted in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 817.

Read Revelation 13:3 and Revelation 14:4. What contrast do you see in these verses?

In contrast to “all the world,” who follows the beast, God will have a people who will “follow the Lamb” instead. As always, it will be one side or the other, for Jesus or against Jesus. There will be then, as now, no middle ground, no neutral position. To not firmly commit to Jesus is, consciously or not, to commit to the other side.

“ ‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved’ ” (*Matt. 10:22, NKJV*). **How ready are you to endure to the end?**

Jesus: Our Only Mediator

Read Revelation 13:4, 5. What identifying marks of the beast power do we discover in these verses?

The beast of Revelation is an apostate religious power that rises out of pagan Rome and grows to become a worldwide system of worship. According to Revelation 13:5, it is a blasphemous power. In the New Testament, blasphemy is equated with assuming the privileges and prerogatives of God as an equal.

Read Luke 5:18–26 and John 10:33. What two aspects of blasphemy do these verses identify?

Jesus was accused of blasphemy by the leaders. In Jesus' case, the accusations were unjust because He has all the powers and prerogatives of God—including the right to forgive our sins. And that is because Jesus is God. Or as He so powerfully expressed it: “ ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ ” (John 14:9).

Meanwhile, 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches that there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. In contrast, the Roman Church teaches that the priest is the mediator between God and sinful humanity. But because the priest himself is a sinful human being, he cannot be our mediator because he also needs a mediator. Blasphemy also is defined as the claim of any human to be God or to stand in the place of God. Here are just two statements from the Roman Church's authoritative sources:

“The pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man. . . . He is as it were GOD on earth.”—Lucius Ferraris, “Papa,” article 2 in his *Prompta Bibliotheca* (1763), vol. 6, pp. 25–29.

Pope Leo XIII boasted: “We [the popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty.”—*The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: Benziger, 1903), p. 193.

These claims become even more relevant when we understand that the prefix *anti-*, as in *antichrist*, doesn't always mean “against” but also can mean “in the place of.” Hence antichrist also means “in place of Christ.” Talk about blasphemy!

Further Thought: “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. . . . In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Throughout Revelation, worship and Creation are indissolubly linked. The essence of the controversy between good and evil and the issues surrounding the mark of the beast revolve around whether God is worthy to be worshiped.

As we have seen, the concept of Christ as Creator is at the very heart of Sabbath worship. Jesus consistently underlines the significance of the day of which He calls Himself the “Lord” (*Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5*). The Sabbath is an eternal reminder of our identity. It reminds us of who we are as human beings. It places worth on every human being. It constantly reinforces the idea that we are created beings and that our Creator is worthy of our allegiance and worship. This is the reason why the devil hates the Sabbath so much. It is the golden link that unites us with our Creator, and this is why it will play such a crucial role in the final crisis at the end.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What are the basic principles behind the sea beast’s claim to authority? In what ways can those same attitudes be lodged in our hearts without our knowledge?
- ② How do you respond to those who argue that the idea of a literal Satan is a primitive superstition that educated, or at least intelligent, people can’t take seriously? What arguments could you use in response?

“I Can’t Do This”

By Andrew McChesney

The party sounded perfect. A table was booked at a club in Harare, Zimbabwe. Alcohol was purchased, and people were invited. But Elder didn’t come. “What happened?” Hubert asked when he later saw his friend.

“I can’t do this,” Elder replied. “I’m an elder.”

Hubert had heard the explanation before. He and Elder had become friends while teaching at a high school in Harare. Nineteen-year-old Hubert was taking off a year to teach before entering the university. Elder was 25 and an elder at a Seventh-day Adventist church. Hubert partied, but Elder would not participate. He always explained, “I can’t do this. I’m an elder.”

Hubert had never met an Adventist before, and he thought, *This guy is true to his church*. But he declined Elder’s invitations to go to church.

The next year, Hubert enrolled at Midlands State University in Gweru. He kept remembering Elder, and he visited an Adventist church for the first time. The people were warm and friendly, and the sermon touched his heart. During the semester break, he went to another Adventist church while visiting an aunt. It got to the point that every time he saw a church, he wanted to go inside. He felt like something was missing from his spiritual life.

For his second year of studies, Hubert received a scholarship to study in Russia. He wondered whether he would find an Adventist church there.

One Saturday, he was drunk when Mildred arrived at the birthday party of a mutual friend at 8:00 P.M. in Moscow. “Why did you come so late?” he asked.

“I was at church,” Mildred said.

“But it’s Saturday,” Hubert said. “Church is on Sunday.”

“Well, I’m a Seventh-day Adventist,” she said.

Hubert couldn’t believe his ears. Mildred saw his interest and invited him to go to church the next Sabbath. She even waited for him in the metro station on Sabbath morning. But Hubert was embarrassed that she had seen him drunk and did not show up. When she called to see where he was, he found himself saying, “I’m sorry. I’ll come next Sabbath.” Mildred called him throughout the week to remind him of his promise. He accompanied her to the Moscow International Seventh-day Adventist Church on Sabbath.

A year later, Hubert gave his heart to Jesus in baptism. He contacted Elder and thanked him for being faithful. Elder was overjoyed!



Today, Hubert Nyabadza is an active church member. “I am thankful to God that He led me to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” he said.

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan:

“To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.” For more information, visit IWillGo2020.org.

The Seal of God *and* Mark of the Beast: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:6, 14; Dan. 7:25; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4; Deut. 6:8; Deut. 11:18; Exod. 20:8–11.*

Memory Text: “He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (*Revelation 13:10, NKJV*).

In the fifteenth century, the Piedmont valleys, high in the Alps of northern Italy, were home to the Waldenses, a people determined to stay faithful to their understanding of the Bible. As a result of their steadfast loyalty to Christ, they were fiercely persecuted. In A.D. 1488, the Waldenses in the Valley of Loyse were brutally murdered by the Roman Church for their faith.

Another wave of persecution came in the seventeenth century, when the duke of Savoy sent an army of 8,000 into their territory and demanded that the local populace quarter his troops in their homes. They did as he requested, but this was a strategy to give the soldiers easy access to their victims. On April 24, 1655, at 4:00 A.M., a signal was given for the massacre to begin. This time the death toll was more than 4,000.

History, unfortunately, is often repeated. The “mark of the beast” prophecy is about the final link in an ungodly chain of religious persecution that goes back through the ages. Like the persecutions of the past, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship. As always, though, God will have a people who will not capitulate.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 17.

The Deadly Wound

As we have already studied, the beast powers of Revelation 13 and 14 represent a worldwide system of false worship. But there's more.

Read Revelation 13:5; Revelation 12:6, 14; and Daniel 7:25. How long would this power dominate the religious landscape in the previous centuries?

The beast would continue for a specific duration of time in history. In symbolic time prophecies, a prophetic day equals a literal year. In Numbers 14:34, we read: “for every day a year”—applying the Bible principle of counting a day for a year. Again, God says, “I have appointed thee each day for a year” (*Ezek. 4:6*). This principle has repeatedly proven itself accurate in interpreting biblical time prophecies, such as the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24–27. Calculating the time period mentioned in Revelation 13:5 of 42 months, with 30 days in a month, we come up with 1,260 prophetic days or literal years. The ancient calendars regularly had 360 days per year.

In the fourth century, the Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the empire. When he moved his capital in A.D. 330 to Byzantium to unite the eastern and western parts of his empire, it left a leadership vacuum in Rome. The pope, then, filled this void. He became not only a powerful religious leader but also a political force to be reckoned with in Europe. In A.D. 538, Justinian, the pagan Roman emperor, officially granted the Roman bishop the role of the defender of the faith. The medieval church exercised great influence from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798, including in the terrible persecution mentioned in the introduction to this week's study. Napoleon's General Berthier took the pope captive in A.D. 1798, in exact fulfillment of the prophecy.

Berthier and his army *captured* Pope Pius VI and unceremoniously *removed* him from the papal throne. The blow to the papacy was serious, but, according to Revelation 13:12, the deadly wound would be healed, and the world would hear more from this power—a lot more.

Think about how amazing biblical prophecy is and how it reveals to us God's knowledge of future events. What should this fact teach us about why we can trust the Lord's promises, even the ones we don't yet see fulfilled?

The Falling Away

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4, 9–12. What does Paul predict about the last days? What identifying marks does he give for the beast, the antichrist power?

The apostle Paul warns the Christian community of a “falling away” from the truth of God’s Word. He is concerned about the seeds of apostasy already present in the New Testament church, which would flourish in the coming centuries before the second coming of Christ. A counterfeit gospel would come into the church, distorting the Word of God.

Satan is the one who is behind this apostasy. He is the true “man of sin” who desires to exalt “himself above all that is called God” and sits in the “temple of God” (2 Thess. 2:4). But the “great deceiver” works through human agencies to accomplish his purposes. The identifying characteristics in Daniel and Revelation reveal that the little horn of Daniel 7, the beast of Revelation 13 and 14, and the “lawless one” of 2 Thessalonians 2 represent the same entity.

The SDA Bible Commentary states it this way: “A comparison with Daniel’s prophecy of the blasphemous power that succeeds that of pagan Rome . . . , and with John’s word picture of the leopardlike beast. . . . reveals many similarities between the three descriptions [of the little horn, the beast power, and the lawless one]. This leads us to the conclusion that Daniel, Paul, and John are speaking of the same power, . . . the papacy.”—Volume 7, p. 271.

It is extremely important to remember that Bible prophecy is describing a system of religion that has compromised God’s Word, substituted human traditions for the gospel, and drifted away from biblical truth. These prophecies are given by a God of incredible love to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus. They are a rebuke to apostate religious organizations that have departed from God’s Word, and not necessarily the people in them (see Rev. 18:4). Our message is about a system that has deceived millions. Though deceived, these people are much loved by Christ. Hence, we must treat them accordingly.

“ ‘Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’ ” (Matt. 7:12, NKJV). How must we apply this principle in dealing with the theme of the beast powers in Revelation 13 and 14?

Satan's Final Strategy

Surveys reveal a deep lack of trust in institutions and governments. Millions wonder, "Where is there someone who is morally fit to lead the world?" Revelation's prophecies identify the beast power as the one who, under the auspices of a religious/political union, will be the power believed fit to fill this role.

Read Revelation 17:12–14. How does John describe these final scenes of earth's history? What powerful contrast is seen here?

There are three significant points John makes in this passage. First, the political powers have "one mind" and "give their power and authority" to the beast. Second, this conglomerate of error makes war against Jesus the Lamb. Third, in earth's last war, Christ and His followers are triumphant. The beast does not win; Jesus does.

Have you ever wondered what strategy the devil might use to unite the nations? History often repeats itself. We discover valuable lessons from the collapse of the Roman Empire. When the Germanic invasions from the north ravaged Western Europe, the Roman Emperor Constantine turned to religion. The authority of the church, combined with the power of the state, became the very instrument Constantine needed. The continual strengthening of the sanctity of Sunday in the fourth century was a calculated political and religious move to unite the empire at a time of crisis. Constantine wanted his empire united, and the Roman Church wanted it "converted." The renowned historian Arthur Weigall states it clearly: "The church made a sacred day of Sunday . . . largely because it was the weekly festival of the sun; for it was a definite Christian policy to take over the pagan festivals endeared to the people by tradition and give them Christian significance."—*The Paganism in Our Christianity* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), p. 145.

At a time of great crisis, when all the world is scared, hurting, and fearful, people will be desperate for someone to bring some stability and protection. This is how tyranny has arisen in the past, and there's no reason to think that it could not happen again. According to prophecy, something will bring about these final events.

Though it's hard to know how all this could unfold, the world has already seen how great changes can come, and very quickly too. Though we don't know details about what is coming, we need to be ready for whatever does come.

The Mark of the Beast

Read Revelation 14:9 and compare it to Revelation 14:12. Where is the mark of the beast placed? (See Deut. 6:8, Deut. 11:18.) What two characteristics distinguish God's people from those who receive the mark of the beast?

One group worships the beast, and one keeps the commandments of God (which includes the fourth, the one commandment the beast power thought to change) and has the faith of Jesus. That's the contrast. Working through the sea and land beasts, the devil attempts to undermine God's authority by attacking the heart of worship; namely, the Sabbath. The mark of the beast is placed either in the forehead or the hand. The forehead is a symbol of the mind, where conscience, reason, and judgment are located; the hand, in contrast, is a symbol of actions and deeds.

The day is coming, and possibly sooner than we think, that laws will be passed restricting our religious liberty. Those who conscientiously follow the Word of God and keep the true Sabbath of the Lord will be labeled as opposing unity and the good of society.

"Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt of authority. They will be accused of disaffection toward the government."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 592.

The church of Rome claims that Sunday is the "mark" of its ecclesiastical authority. "Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act. . . . And the act is a mark of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters."—*The American Catholic Quarterly Review*, January 1883.

Revelation predicts that in the future, at a time of international crisis, our world will face some kind of radical political, social, religious, and moral transformation, in which Sunday keeping will be enforced and then will become "the mark of the beast." Again, how all this unfolds we have not been told. Scripture gives us only broad outlines—but enough to show us that the great controversy is going to climax around the issue of worshiping either the beast or the Creator and that the seventh-day Sabbath will play a central role.

In what ways has humanity always been divided along the lines of being on either God's side or on Satan's? Why can there be no middle ground? How can we know, for sure, just whose side we really are on?

The Sabbath Test

Even now, perhaps, the stage is being set for this impending persecution. On June 6, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI made an urgent appeal to more than 15,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square in Rome that Sunday must be a day of rest for everyone, so people can be free to be with their families and with God. "By defending Sunday, one defends human freedom." This isn't, of course, the same thing as demanding that others keep this day, as opposed to the biblical Sabbath, but it does show that the idea of Sunday as the "day of rest" is, definitely, a real issue. Sooner or later, laws will be passed, and those who conscientiously follow the Word of God and keep the true Sabbath will be labeled as opposing society's best interests.

In this time of crisis, God's faithful people will, by His grace and through His power, stand firm in their convictions to follow Him. They will not yield to the pressure.

In contrast to the mark of the beast, they will receive the seal of God. Seals were used in ancient times to attest to the authenticity of official documents. We would then expect to find God's seal embedded in His law. Ancient seals were a distinctive, individualized mark. Isaiah the prophet says, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples" (*Isa. 8:16, NKJV*).

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What elements of a biblical seal do you find in the Sabbath commandment? How is the Sabbath command different from all the other commandments?

The fourth commandment contains three elements of an authentic seal. First, there is the name of the sealer: " 'The LORD your God' " (*Exod. 20:10, NKJV*). Second, there is the title of the sealer: the Lord who "made" (*Exod. 20:11*), or the Creator. And third, there is the territory of the sealer: " 'the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them' " (*Exod. 20:11, NKJV*). According to Revelation 7:1, 2, the seal of God is placed only on our foreheads, a symbol of our minds. Jesus respects our freedom of choice. He invites us to let Him shape our minds by His Holy Spirit so that we cannot be moved from the anchor of our faith in the Word of God (*Eph. 4:30*). Thus, we understand that the faithful are those who "keep the commandments of God, and [have] the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12*), and included in those commandments is the fourth, the one commandment the beast power thought to change (*Dan. 7:25*).

What conditions can you see currently developing that could potentially lead to the restriction of our religious liberty? What obstacles remain, as well?

Further Thought: “When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country [the United States] shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451.

“We have tended to overlook the fact that Sunday is the day of worship of the opposing forces . . . in the story line of the Book of Revelation. Sunday is an extremely important symbol, revealing the unbelievable craftiness and sophistry of the dragon. . . . This . . . change of God’s law expresses in one simple action the very essence of the hatred of the dragon against God in the cosmic conflict. Its simplicity is highly deceptive. The dragon has sought to usurp God’s place in the cosmos by depicting himself as the true object of *worship* and arguing that God’s *law* is unjust—that it should be changed. The dragon changed the law at the juncture within the Decalogue where God is identified as Creator and Redeemer, the only one worthy of worship (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5; cf. Rev 4:11; 5:9, 13, 14). The change of the law manifests not only the dragon’s hatred for the will of the Lord (the law), but it is also his attempt to usurp God’s place by becoming the object of worship. . . . The universalization of this change in the law would assure him victory.”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, pp. 53, 54.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Though living in anticipation, even expectation, of final events, why must we be careful about not getting into fanaticism, date setting, or speculating beyond what has been revealed to us through inspiration? What are the dangers of doing this, and what have been the results when the expected events have not unfolded when and how people have said they would happen?
- ❷ While we must avoid the dangers depicted in the previous discussion question, how do we respond to those who say that our scenario about the mark of the beast and persecution cannot happen because it just doesn’t seem possible, given the current state of the world? Why is this line of reasoning, though on the surface seemingly sensible, really not sensible at all? (After all, look at how quickly great changes can come to the world.)

School Saves

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A luxury car pulled up at a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school on the first day of classes in Ukraine. Two children carrying bouquets of flowers emerged from the car, together with their parents. Ukrainian children often present teachers with flowers on the first day of school. “We want our children to study at your school,” the father told the school principal.

“I’m afraid that’s impossible,” the principal replied. “We don’t have room.”

The father persisted. “We will buy new desks and chairs for all the students and pay double the tuition,” he said. “Please let our children study.”

The principal wondered whether the father’s expectations might be too high.

“You know that we don’t have government accreditation to hold final exams,” she said. “Your kids would have to take them at the public school.”

“That’s no problem,” the mother said. “We’ll help you get accreditation.”

“You know this is a Seventh-day Adventist school,” the principal said.

Adventists are dismissed as a sect by many people in the former Soviet Union. But the father knew it was an Adventist school, and he was not deterred. “Yes, and we want our children to study here,” he said.

The mother explained that the family had vacationed at the Black Sea a few weeks earlier, and the children had made new friends from the school. Every evening, the children had excitedly told their parents about the school and pleaded to go. Then the mother handed her business card to the principal. She was a city judge. Her husband was a high-ranking military officer.

The children entered the second and third grade at the school, and they immediately loved it. But as the weeks passed, they began begging their parents to read *Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories* to them just as their classmates’ parents were reading to them. The mother told the children to ask the teacher to sell the books to them. “Then I will read to you every night,” she said. The children bought the books, and she read to them every night.

The months passed, and the children asked to go to Sabbath School and church. The parents took them every Sabbath. The next summer, a year after the family first heard about Adventists while on their Black Sea vacation, both the mother and father were baptized.



“Adventist education is closely connected with the mission of the church,” said Ivan Riapolov (pictured), education director of the Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine.

“You cannot separate Adventist education and Adventist mission. Wherever schools open, the church grows.”

Thank you for your mission offerings that support Seventh-day Adventist education worldwide.

Ablaze With God's Glory



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 5:1–6; John 8:32; Rev. 18:1; Rev. 4:11; Exod. 33:18, 19; Rev. 5:6, 12; Rev. 13:8.*

Memory Text: “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory” (*Revelation 18:1, NKJV*).

Sooner or later, final events will unfold. Exactly when, exactly how—we have not been told. But we have been told enough. Some kind of legislation enforcing Sunday keeping, in contrast to Sabbath keeping, will occur. Revelation has revealed to us the crucial issues at stake, the crucial players involved, and in broad sweeps, it has told us what will happen when, in contrast to the worship of the One “‘who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), people—all “whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8, NKJV*)—will worship the beast and his image. In other words, all those who have chosen to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and obey His commandments—their names remain in the book of life. How much better to be in the register of God than in the records of man.

God has raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to preach this message to the world. Thus, we need, ourselves, to be converted to the truth as it is in Jesus, and to have been transformed and made new by the “everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14:6, which is centered on Christ’s death for us, the assurance of our salvation in Him.

** Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 24.*

Preparing for the Final Crisis

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6. What admonition does the apostle Paul give us regarding the last days of human history?

The apostle Paul urged the believers at Thessaloniki to “watch” and “be sober” in the context of the second coming of Christ. And if Paul would say that to believers then, what would he say to us today?

He also declared that they were “children of light” (*1 Thess. 5:5, NIV*) and that they were not in “darkness, so that this day [the return of Christ]” (*1 Thess. 5:4, NIV*) should overtake them “as a thief” (*1 Thess. 5:4, NKJV*). Jesus used the expression to “watch” in connection with earnest, heartfelt prayer (*Matt. 24:42, Matt. 26:40, 41*). To watch is to be spiritually alert. To be sober minded is to be serious about the times that we are living in and focused on the things that really matter.

Ellen G. White adds: “We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 28.

And while it might be a surprise to the world, it should not be a surprise to us. Though we don’t know when it will happen, we can see enough to know that it is coming, and that now, today, is the day to be ready.

Review Daniel 2, and note the sequence of kingdoms that came and went, exactly as predicted. What should this teach us about how we can trust that what God says will happen, will indeed happen?

Christ has given us these last-day messages so that, knowing what is coming, we can prepare for it. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, combined with the modern gift of prophecy, give us divine insight into what is coming upon this world. The prophetic Word of God outlines salvation history in advance, and Daniel 2 provides powerful, rational evidence that we can trust God.

Paul says not “to sleep” as others do. What does that mean, and how can we know if we are, indeed, sleeping and, if we are, what will it take to wake us?

Knowing Truth

Read John 7:17, John 8:32, and John 17:17. What promises does Jesus give regarding knowing truth and where is it found?

God's final appeal to His people is to flee the errors of Babylon and walk in the light of eternal truth found in His Word. The key to everything is the Bible. As long as people stick to the Bible and follow what it teaches, they will not be deceived in the final crisis, particularly regarding the Sabbath.

The message of the second angel appeals to us to accept truth rather than error, Scripture rather than tradition, and the teachings of God's Word rather than the errors of false doctrine.

The third angel's message, which follows the first two angels', presents a warning against the mark of the beast. Throughout the prophecies of the Bible, a beast represents a political or religious power. The sea beast of Revelation 13 and 14 arises out of Rome as a worldwide system of worship. Eventually this Roman power extends its influence over the whole world and will lead out in a movement to unite church and state. The goal will be to achieve world unity at a time of economic upheaval, natural catastrophes, social turmoil, international political crisis, and global conflict.

And the United States will eventually take the lead in this global confederation. "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."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

These messages conclude with an urgent appeal for Christ's faithful followers to keep the commandments of God through the living faith of Jesus dwelling in their hearts (*Rev. 14:12*).

How do you understand Jesus' words: " 'the truth shall make you free' " (John 8:32, NKJV)? What does that mean? How has the truth set you free? What does it mean to be "free" in this context?

The Reformation Continues

God has raised up a last-day people to stand on the shoulders of the great Reformers of the past with the Bible as their only creed, Christ alone as their only Source of salvation, the Holy Spirit as their only Source of strength, and the return of our Lord as the consummation of all their hopes. Truths long obscured by the darkness of error and tradition, including the true Bible Sabbath, will be proclaimed to the world just before the return of our Lord.

The three angels' messages gave birth to this last-day movement to complete the Reformation and to participate with Christ in finishing His work on earth. The great prophecies of the Bible's last book reveal a divine movement of destiny arising out of disappointment to proclaim God's final message to the world. Revelation 14 describes a worldwide church spanning the globe with the good news of the eternal gospel.

The three angels of Revelation 14 are joined by a fourth angel in Revelation 18. This angel gives power to the proclamation of the three angels so that the "earth [is] lightened with [God's] glory" (*Rev. 18:1*). Chapter 18 focuses on the major events leading up to the climax of human history and the final, ultimate triumph of the gospel.

Read Revelation 18:1. What three things does John tell us about this angel? (*See also Hab. 2:14.*)

The angel who comes down from the glorious presence of God in the throne room of the sanctuary is commissioned to proclaim God's last message of mercy and to warn the inhabitants of the earth of what is coming upon planet Earth.

The text says that the angel comes with "great authority." The New Testament Greek word for "authority" is *exousia*. Jesus uses this word in the Gospel of Matthew in harmony with the sending out of His disciples. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples "authority" (*NIV*) over the principalities and powers of evil. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28:18, 19, He once again sends them out, but this time with "all authority" in heaven and on earth to go and "make disciples of all the nations" (*NKJV*).

Ultimately, how do the issues in the last days (as they really do every day) come down to *authority*? Whose authority do we follow: God's, our own, the beast power's, or someone else's? Whose authority are you following now?

God's Glory Fills the Earth

Read Revelation 4:11, Revelation 5:12, Revelation 19:1, and Revelation 21:26. What words are associated with the glory of God that fills the earth as described in Revelation 18:1?

The great controversy between good and evil in the universe also is about God's honor or reputation. Satan, a rebel angel, has declared that God is unjust, that He demands worship but gives little in return. The evil one declares that God's law restricts our freedom and limits our joy.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection exploded that myth. The One who created us plunged into the snake pit of this world to redeem us. On the cross, He answered Satan's charges and demonstrated that God is both loving and just.

Charmed by His love, concerned about His honor, His end-time people reveal His glory—His loving, self-sacrificing character to a self-centered, godless world, and the earth is illuminated by the character of God.

Read Exodus 33:18, 19. How does God reveal His glory to Moses? What is God's glory?

God's glory is His character. The earth will be filled with the glory of God when we are filled with the love of God and our characters are changed by redeeming love.

Revealing His love in our personal lives reveals His glory, His character, to the world. The last message to be proclaimed to a world engulfed in spiritual darkness carried by three angels in the midst of heaven is " 'Fear God and give glory to Him' " (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

There is no glory for us in our good works, or our righteousness, or our goodness. "The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other. . . . This is the glory of God which closes the work of the third angel."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 19. Ellen G. White also writes: "What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself."—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

No glory for ourselves but, yes, glory to God instead.

The Lamb, the Slain Lamb

There are many symbols in Revelation, biblical symbols of importance; that is, a dragon in heaven (*Rev. 12:3, 4, 7*), angels flying in the midst of heaven (*Rev. 14:6*), a woman riding a scarlet beast (*Rev. 17:3*), and so forth. They are in the Word of God; the Holy Spirit inspired John to put them there, and they have important roles in revealing truth to those who read the words of this book and do them, for, as it says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (*Rev. 1:3, NKJV*).

There is, however, another image that appears, again and again, all through the book of Revelation. What is the image, and what does it represent?

Read Revelation 5:6, 8, 12; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 14:1; Revelation 15:3; Revelation 19:7; Revelation 21:22, 23; and Revelation 22:1, 3. What is the meaning of the symbolism of the Lamb, and why would it appear so many times in the book of Revelation?

Of course, as the opening words of the book say, this is a revelation “of Jesus Christ.” And not only is He a Lamb but also a Lamb “slain” (*Rev. 5:6, 12; Rev. 13:8*). That is, Jesus Christ crucified. Here is the heart and soul, not only of all the Bible but also of the book of Revelation and of the three angels’ messages. We cannot be faithful to our calling, we cannot do the work that God has raised up this church to do, unless we have the Lamb, the slain Lamb, Jesus crucified, a sacrifice for our sins, as the focal point of our message.

“We must intentionally place the Lamb that was slain at the very center of our doctrines and mission and at the heart of every sermon we preach, every article we write, every prayer we make, every song we sing, every Bible study we give, and in everything we do. Let the love revealed by the Lamb on the cross transform the way we treat each other and move us to also care for the world.”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 70.

That is, amid the imagery of dangerous beasts, of a dragon making war, of plagues, of persecution, and of the mark of the beast, there remains front and center the Lamb, the Lamb slain. And He alone, and what He has done for us, is doing now, and will do before it’s all over—He is, ultimately, what the three angels’ messages are about.

Why is keeping the slain Lamb at the center of our message crucial not only for leading others to Him but also for your own spiritual life?

Further Thought: “Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Ellen G. White states that “the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message . . . in verity.”—*Evangelism*, p. 190. What does that mean? What relationship does justification by faith have to the three angels’ messages?
- ② Read Revelation 14:12 again. What is the difference between keeping the commandments of God and legalism? When does obedience become legalism? In what ways can someone who doesn’t keep the commandments of God still be a legalist?
- ③ What answer can you give to those who criticize us when we talk about the ferocious beasts and fearsome warning found in the book of Revelation? Besides the obvious answer, which is that we talk about them because, well, they are there, written in the book, what other answers can you give?
- ④ Discuss in class current world events. What things have you seen happen that could help lead to final events? How do we strike a balance between being aware of the times we are living in and not getting caught up in fruitless speculation about what hasn’t been revealed to us yet?

Training Boys to Read the Bible

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

What is the secret for teaching a child to spend personal time with God?

Christian Müller, an Argentine volunteer at a Seventh-day Adventist school in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan, surprised me with his answer as we spoke in his home. I was in town to collect mission stories for Adventist Mission.

Christian said his six-year-old son, Thomas, had interrupted his personal devotions that morning.

“Normally, I would have asked him to wait,” Christian told me. “But he held up his Bible in his little hands and said, ‘Papa, I don’t understand what I am reading. Can you help me?’ What else could I do but help him?”

I expressed astonishment that a such a small boy was reading his Bible in the morning. My incredulity grew as Christian explained that Thomas and his seven-year-old brother, Lukas, read their Bibles every morning.

“How did you teach them to have morning devotions?” I asked.

Christian thought for a moment. “Actually, I have never taught them to have morning devotions,” he said.

The boys began having personal devotions around the time that they were learning to walk. Christian and his wife, Romina, would sit at opposite sides of the kitchen table to read their Bibles for personal devotions every morning in their home in Argentina. The boys would wake up and, naturally, want to be with their parents. Crawling out of bed, they would find their father and mother in the kitchen. Christian told the boys from the beginning that it was very important for Daddy and Mommy to spend time with God in the morning and that the boys could not interrupt the morning devotions. If the boys wanted to remain in the kitchen, they needed to be quiet and have their own devotions. The boys chose to stay. Initially, they could not read, so they quietly leafed through Bible picture books. As they grew older, they began to read their Bibles. After moving to Kyrgyzstan, the parents and the boys had morning devotions in their own rooms.

This was the secret for teaching a child to spend personal time with God



in the morning. “I never once told the boys that they needed to start having morning devotions,” Christian said. “They just saw that their mother and I had devotions and followed our example.”

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in the fourth quarter of 2017 helped enlarge the Seventh-day Adventist school where Christian volunteered in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath that will help spread the gospel around the world. Read more about Thomas and Lukas online: bit.ly/mission-kids.

Years after the exciting start of the Christian church in Ephesus, the members there begin to struggle with their faith.

As Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians from prison, he is worried that they may forget what it means to be Jesus' disciples in their pagan culture. Paul seeks to reignite the fire of their devotion to Christ and to resurrect the excitement of being part of God's church.

Ephesians, our study for this quarter written by John K. McVay, speaks especially to times like our own, in which the allure of the world and the passing of time threaten to dull Christian discipleship. It lifts up Christ and accents the significance of following Him as engaged, active members of His church as we live out the hope of His return. This quarter we have the privilege of prayerfully studying Ephesians and experiencing anew the excitement of following Jesus in challenging times.

Lesson 1—Paul and the Ephesians

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Paul, Evangelist to Ephesus** (*Acts 18:18–21*)

MONDAY: **A Riot in the Amphitheater** (*Acts 19:21–20:1*)

TUESDAY: **Hearing the Letter to the Ephesians** (*Eph. 1:1–6:24*)

WEDNESDAY: **Ephesians in Its Time** (*Eph. 1:1, 2*)

THURSDAY: **Ephesians: A Christ-Saturated Letter** (*Eph. 1:9, 10*)

Memory Text—*Ephesians 1:9, 10, ESV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians at a time when they are tempted to lose heart. His purpose is to awaken them to their full identity and privileges as followers of Christ.

Lesson 2—God's Grand, Christ-Centered Plan

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Chosen and Accepted in Christ** (*Eph. 1:3–6*)

MONDAY: **Costly Redemption; Lavish Forgiveness** (*Eph. 1:7, 8*)

TUESDAY: **God's Grand, Christ-Centered Plan** (*Eph. 1:9, 10, ESV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Living in Praise of His Glory** (*Eph. 1:11, 12*)

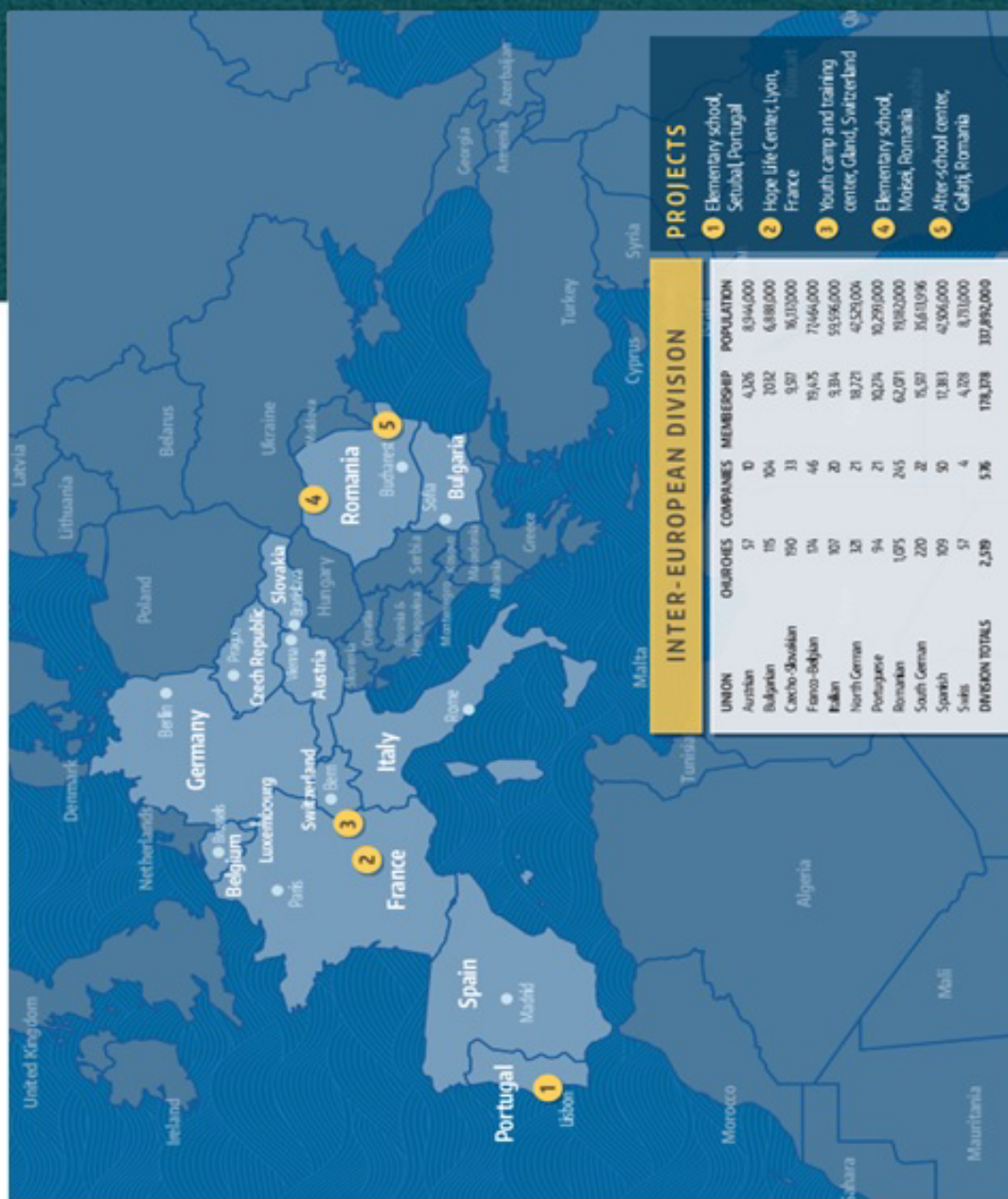
THURSDAY: **The Holy Spirit: Seal and Down Payment** (*Eph. 1:13, 14*)

Memory Text—*Ephesians 1:3, ESV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul begins Ephesians by praising God for all the blessings He has poured out and for working through the ages on behalf of believers.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. 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; email: info@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.

Inter-European DIVISION



Map and information provided by the Office of Adventist Mission

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.

