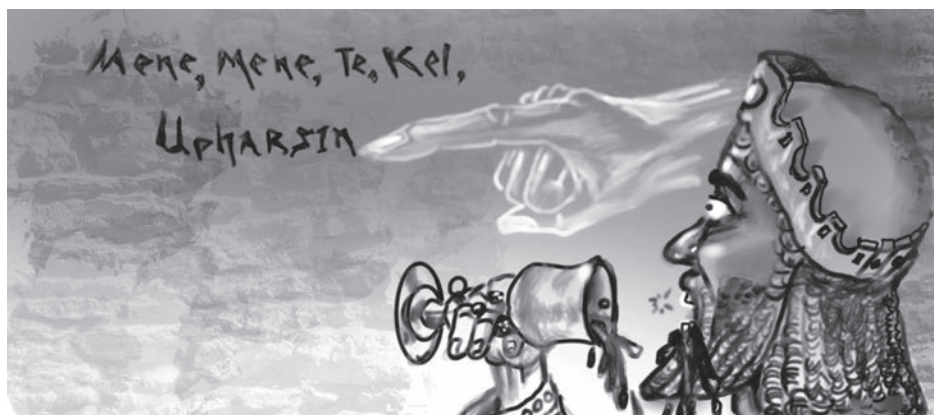


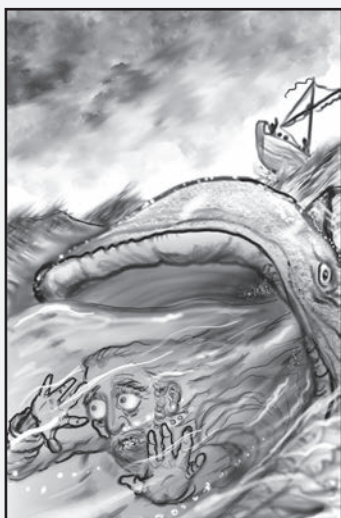
End-Time Symbols



SABBATH—JUNE 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 12:38–42; Jonah 3:5–10; Daniel 5:1–31; Daniel 5:18–31; 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jonah said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the land and the sea’ ” (Jonah 1:9, ERV).



We will look at stories about Jonah, the end of Babylon, and King Cyrus.

THIS WEEK, we will talk about some stories that will help us better understand the end times. We will look at stories about Jonah, the end of Babylon, and King Cyrus. Cyrus was the Persian king who made God's people free and helped them go back to the Promised Land.

These stories show us important Bible truth. They also show us Bible truth about the end times. They have special meaning for people living before Jesus comes back. So, we can learn from these stories important information and ideas that can help us better understand “present truth.” Present truth is the Bible truth we need most for our time.

We must be careful when we look at these stories. We must try to understand them the same way that we understand Jesus' picture stories. We should look for the most important rules and ideas. From these ideas and rules, we can learn the Bible truths that these stories are trying to teach us for the end times.

**JONAH: GOD'S UNWILLING MESSENGER
(Matthew 12:38–42)**

Jonah's story is very short (Jonah 1–4). But it teaches us many important Bible truths. Many of us see ourselves in this unwilling prophet. A prophet is a special messenger from God. Jonah's story also helps us understand the end times better.

Which parts of Jonah's story does Jesus discuss when He talks to the Jewish leaders? What lessons do Jesus' words teach us about God's work as Judge? Read Matthew 12:38–42 for the answer.

Jesus announced that He was more important than Jonah. Jesus knew that His coming to this earth meant the Cross. But He came anyway. He “came to find lost people and save them” (Luke 19:10, ERV). Jonah spent three days in the big fish because of his own sins. Jesus spent three days in the grave because of ours. That's what it took to save us.

Today, we know Jonah as the unwilling prophet. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. From a human view, we can easily understand why Jonah was so unwilling. The Assyrians were mean and nasty to their enemies. Their paintings show what they did to their prisoners of war. The Assyrians killed them in the most terrible ways possible. Who would want to go preach to these people in their capital city and tell them to confess their sins?!

Jonah's story contains a lesson for God's end-time church. When Jonah is asked who he is, he answers, “ ‘I am a Hebrew. I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the land and the sea’ ” (Jonah 1:9, ERV). This answer is much the same as the 1st Angel's Message (Revelation 14:7). Jonah's words show us that the Lord made everything. This Bible truth is the reason we should worship Him. As we already saw, worship is an important test in the end times.

God commands us to preach a message to the people in spiritual Babylon. When we say, “ ‘Come out of it, my people’ ” (Revelation 18:4, WE), this message means the same thing as telling people that they must confess their sins. Our message is not very popular. Many people get angry when they hear this message, even when we preach it in the most loving way possible.

How much of Jonah do you find in yourself? How can you let go of your wrong thoughts and feelings?



Jonah's words show us that the Lord made everything. This Bible truth is the reason we should worship Him.

NINEVEH CONFESSES (Jonah 3:5–10)

Jonah's message to the people in Nineveh was plain: God was ready to punish them for their sins. "Jonah entered the city. When he had walked for one day, he preached to the people. He said, 'After 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed!'"

Nineveh wasn't destroyed. So, what happened? Wasn't Jonah God's special messenger? Why didn't things happen the way he said they would happen? (Jonah 3:4, ICB).

Read Jonah 3:5–10. Why didn't this message happen?

The whole city confesses their sins. So, God doesn't destroy Nineveh, at least not at that time. "God didn't punish Nineveh. People who didn't know about God honored Him and His law. Many years would pass before Nineveh was destroyed. That was because the people of Nineveh refused to honor God anymore and became filled with pride."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 271, adapted.

Can we expect something the same as this experience to happen in the end times when we preach God's final warning to the people on this earth? Yes and no. Yes, there will be everywhere people who will hear the warning, " 'Come out of that city, my people, so that you will not share in her sins. Then you will not suffer any of the terrible punishment she will get' " (Revelation 18:4, ERV). Everywhere on earth, people will take their stand for God and against the beast. This group will "keep the commandments of God and hold fast [tight] to the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12, NRSVUE). These people who live in the end times will be much the same as the people in Nineveh. God will not punish them with the lost.

At the same time, we must understand that God said Nineveh would be destroyed only if the people didn't stop sinning (read Jeremiah 18:7–10). Sometimes what we do or don't do will not change what will happen. God will do what He says anyway: the first and second comings, the mark of the beast, the seven final troubles, the end-time attacks. Nothing we do will stop these things from happening. What we choose to do will decide which side we will be on during the final happenings of the end times.

What choices are you making now that can help you make the best choice during the final test that is coming?



The whole city confesses their sins. So, God doesn't destroy Nineveh, at least not at that time.

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST (Daniel 5:1–31)

In 612 B.C., an army from Babylon fought against Nineveh, and Nineveh lost. Nebuchadnezzar's father led the army that included both Medes and Babylonians. Then the city of Babylon grew strong. King Nebuchadnezzar made the city of Babylon mighty. The city grew very rich and powerful. Babylon was queen of the whole earth. Countries who wished to be a success announced their loyalty to her.

As far as we know, Nebuchadnezzar died believing in God. Earlier, he announced that Daniel's God was the real King of all the countries on the earth (Daniel 4:34–37). The next story in the book of Daniel is about the king who controlled Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar: Belshazzar.

Read Daniel 5:1–31. What important spiritual messages can we learn from these verses? What caused Belshazzar to lose his kingdom?

Maybe the worst part of this story is found in Daniel 5:22. First, Daniel tells the king the history of Nebuchadnezzar's fall and rise to power again. Then Daniel says to Belshazzar, " 'But, Belshazzar, you already knew these things. You are a descendant [grandson] of Nebuchadnezzar. But still [anyway] you have not been sorry for what you have done' " (Daniel 5:22, ICB). What did Daniel mean? Belshazzar knew the truth. Maybe he didn't see for himself with his own eyes what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. But he knew the story and chose not to learn from it. Belshazzar chose to do the same things that caused Nebuchadnezzar so much trouble.

Nebuchadnezzar publicly rejected God's special message about the future when he built the gold statue on the plain of Dura. In the same way, Belshazzar publicly went against God's special messages. Belshazzar used the bowls and cups from the Jewish temple to honor his gods. Belshazzar wanted to show that the Babylonians were in control of the Jews and their God who said their kingdom would be destroyed.

Belshazzar's actions showed his refusal to obey God. Belshazzar had more than enough "proof" to know better. He had enough knowledge to know the truth. The problem wasn't with Belshazzar's head or mind. The problem was with his heart. In the end times, everyone will hear the truth. Then they must decide to accept or reject it. Their choice, as Belshazzar's did, will depend on their hearts.



Belshazzar knew the story and chose not to learn from it. Belshazzar chose to do the same things that caused Nebuchadnezzar so much trouble.

WHEN THE EUPHRATES RIVER DRIES UP (Daniel 5:18–31)

One of the things that made Babylon a strong city was the Euphrates River. The river flowed under Babylon's walls, giving the city the water it needed. The Euphrates River also was the city's biggest weakness. Nitocris, an ancient Babylonian queen, wanted to build a road along the river. So, she drained the river into a swamp and dried up the river. Then the work crews could enter the dry river and easily do their work.

Cyrus thought he could do the same thing that Queen Nitocris did. So, Cyrus dried up the Euphrates River to march his troops under the city's wall. When Cyrus and his army were inside the city's walls, he saw that no one was guarding the walls. So, the city fell in a single night. The ancient Greek writer Herodotus tells us that "the people who lived in the center of Babylon didn't know that the Persians controlled the outer parts of their city. Babylon was celebrating a festival. Everyone in the city was dancing and chasing after pleasures."—Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by Tom Holland (New York: Penguin, 2015), page 94, adapted.



The people on this earth will be surprised at the Second Coming. Why? Because they chose not to believe the things that God said would happen.

Compare Daniel 5:18–31 with Revelation 16:12–19. What is the same between some of the seven final troubles in the book of Revelation and the story about Babylon's fall?

Jesus explained to His followers how to understand the signs of the end times: " 'So always be ready. You don't know the day your Lord will come. What would a homeowner do if he knew when a thief was coming? You know he would be ready and not let the thief break in' " (Matthew 24:42, 43, ERV). Just as with the fall of Babylon, the sudden appearance of Jesus at His second coming will happen as a surprise for some people. But the Second Coming doesn't need to be a surprise for anyone. God gave us enough proof of Jesus' coming in many special messages in the Bible.

The people on this earth will be surprised at the Second Coming. Why? Because they chose not to believe the things that God said would happen.

God gives us many end-time warnings in the Bible. An example is Revelation 16:15. In spite of the warnings in this verse, how does it show the Good News about Jesus? What does it mean not to "go without clothes" (ERV)?

CYRUS, GOD'S CHOSEN "KING" (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23)

When Cyrus took control of the city of Babylon, God's people were given their freedom. The Persians allowed the Jews to go back to the Promised Land and build their temple again. Under Cyrus, the Kingdom of Persia became the largest kingdom in history. History writer Tom Holland says that Persia had "the biggest collection in history of different countries under its control."—Tom Holland, *Dominion* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), Kindle edition, page 25, adapted.

People named Cyrus "The Mighty King" or "King of kings." Cyrus shows us what will happen when Jesus comes back for His church: Jesus is the King who comes from the east (compare with Matthew 24:27). Jesus will make war on Babylon. Jesus will help His people to escape Babylon, too. Jesus will bring His people to the land of promise. (Read Revelation 19:11–16.) That's why God names Cyrus His "chosen king" (Isaiah 45:1, ERV). Cyrus's fight against Babylon is a symbol that shows us Jesus' Second Coming.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23. In what ways does the story of Cyrus help us understand the story of Nebuchadnezzar? What is the meaning of the law that is passed in 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23? How did this law lead to the first coming of Jesus, hundreds of years later?

Today, the Old Testament ends with the book of Malachi. But in the past, the Old Testament ended with Cyrus's announcement, in 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23. Next came the book of Matthew in the New Testament, which starts with Jesus' being born. Cyrus is a symbol of Jesus. Cyrus gave the Jews the command to rebuild their temple. In the same way, Jesus started His work in heaven's temple after He woke up from the dead and went to heaven. This work will end when He makes His people free in the end times. Of course, Cyrus is not a perfect symbol of Jesus. No symbol is perfect. We must be careful not to read too much meaning into every symbol. At the same time, Cyrus is a useful symbol of Jesus that helps us better understand what will happen in the end times.

God used a Persian king in a powerful way to show His work and keep His promises to His people. How does this information help us trust that the Lord will finish His work, as He promised us?



Cyrus shows us what will happen when Jesus comes back for His church: Jesus is the King who comes from the east (compare with Matthew 24:27).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Unseen Watcher,” pages 535–538, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“God gives every kingdom and country a chance to use its power to do good and do the work God planned for it to do on earth. The end-time messages in the Bible show the rise and growth of the mightiest kingdoms on earth: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these kingdoms, and with less powerful kingdoms, we see the same thing happen again and again in history. God gave each kingdom or country a time to govern. This time was a test. Each kingdom or country failed the test. Then the glory of this kingdom and its power came to an end. When countries and kingdoms reject God’s important rules, they will become ruined. At the same time, we see God’s plan at work in all ages of history.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 535, adapted.

In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah watches a potter or pot maker at work. The potter shapes the clay into a bowl or pot or whatever he may be making. God uses this word picture of a potter shaping his clay to help explain an important rule: most special messages in the Bible depend on our choices. Just to make sure that we understand this important rule, the Lord talks through Jeremiah, saying: “ ‘There may come a time when I will speak about a nation [people group] or a kingdom that I will pull up by its roots or tear down and destroy it. But if the people of that nation change their hearts and lives and stop doing evil things, I will change my mind and not bring on them the disaster I planned. There may come another time when I speak about a nation that I will build up or plant. But if I see that nation doing evil things and not obeying me, I will think again about the good I had planned to do for them’ ” (Jeremiah 18:7–10, ERV).



God uses this word picture of a potter shaping his clay to help explain an important rule: most special messages in the Bible depend on our choices.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about Jesus’ words that God in His work as Judge will show the Ninevites more mercy than He will show to His people who reject Bible truth. (Read Matthew 12:39–42.) What lesson can the church learn from this warning?
- ② What is the same problem with all the kingdoms in the Bible’s end-time messages? How are the governments of today doing the same thing?

“LET’S MAKE A DEAL”

Maria was happy when a homeowner invited her inside his house to look at the books she was selling. Maria was a Bible worker in a non-Christian country in Southeast Asia. Maria pulled some health books from her bag. But the man stopped her.

The man said, “I see what you’re doing. You’re bringing out the health books first. Then after you get me to trust you, you’re going to bring out the Christian books that you really want me to see. So share the Christian books first.”

Maria prayed silently in her heart. “Lord, please help me. I don’t know what to say to this man.” Out loud, Maria said, “I have books on health and religion. I want to share whatever people want to see.”

The man rubbed his chin. He said, “Let’s make a deal. If I can ask questions about your religion, and you can answer, I’ll buy all of your books.”

Maria felt worried and nervous. She took a deep breath and said, “I’m not wise enough to answer anything you ask. I need help. May I pray first?” The man agreed. Maria prayed out loud. She asked God for wisdom and knowledge in the name of Jesus.

As soon as she finished praying, the man said, “We say Jesus was a prophet or special messenger. But you say He is God. Why do you say that? How can a man become God?”

Maria didn’t pause. She said, “Many people think that Jesus started to live only when He was born on this earth as a baby. But Jesus was around years before that. Jesus was part of the Godhead. The Godhead is God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent Jesus to this earth as a human baby. Then Jesus became a prophet. After that, Jesus became an offering for our sins. Then Jesus became our high priest in heaven. A high priest is the top spiritual leader. So right now, Jesus goes to God to get help for us. He asks God to forgive our sins. Jesus isn’t just a prophet. Jesus is more than a prophet. He is a high priest. Not just for me, but for everyone who accepts Him.”

The man said, “That is the nicest thing I’ve ever heard.” That was his first and only question. With tears in his eyes, he bought every book Maria had. As Maria and the man said goodbye, the man said, “You really explained to me what I wanted to know. Now I look forward to reading all your books.”

Pray for Maria and other Bible workers who work in Southern Asia. Maria’s name was changed in the story. Thank you for your 13th Sabbath Offering this Sabbath. Your offering will help us share the Good News about Jesus in Southern Asia.

INSIDE
Story

by LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN



The man said, “You really explained to me what I wanted to know. Now I look forward to reading all your books.”