

Upon Whom *the* Ends Have Come



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 6:12–17; Matt. 24:36–44; Gen. 6:1–8; 2 Pet. 2:4–11; Gen. 18:17–32; Dan. 7:9, 10.*

Memory Text: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12, NKJV).

The Bible is filled with accounts of God's people that point to future events and that hold keys to helping us understand present truth. In fact, some of those accounts foreshadow last-day events with surprising detail, providing us a broader foundation for understanding the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation clearly.

Without violating an individual's freedom of conscience, God can perfectly steer the events that will happen in the last days, events that He revealed to the prophets. Some of these important stories are obvious, because the New Testament refers to them specifically in describing last-day events: Sodom and Gomorrah, the Flood, and so on. Others require careful thought and exploration in order to mine from them the truths that have been given to us in the Word of God.

During the next couple of weeks, we will be searching through a number of key stories in order to see what they might have to say about events such as the Second Coming, the investigative judgment, the final crisis, and more. And, through it all, we find Christ as the center, for He must be the foundation as well as the end goal of all our prophetic endeavors.

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

The Wrath of the Lamb

Read Revelation 6:12–17. Consider the details of these people’s response to seeing last-day events suddenly play out. What do you notice about their response?

It is interesting to note that the lost are not crying out, “What is this?” or “Who is behind this?” They appear to *know* what is happening. They refer to Jesus as the Lamb, which would require knowing something of the story of Christ. They also seem aware that “the great day of His wrath has come,” and that they are caught in a hopeless position: “Who is able to stand?” (*Rev. 6:17, NKJV*).

Prior to the end, the gospel is carried to every nation on earth (*Matt. 24:14*), and the three angels’ messages are delivered to the entire planet. And yet, there will be people who are caught off guard—not for lack of information but because of their refusal to believe and to obey. This will be the reason that such people are lost in the last days.

Read Matthew 24:36–44. What lessons does Jesus tell us we should be drawing from the story of Noah?

Jesus points to the story of the Flood to warn us that His second coming will come as a surprise to many. As with the Second Coming, the Flood did not come as a surprise to the world because of a lack of information. Noah preached for 120 years to a world that refused to believe. All were told what was going to happen. They just didn’t believe.

Meanwhile, many people assure themselves that the passage of long periods of time means that the prophecies are false. Using the Flood story as context, Peter writes “that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’ ” (*2 Pet. 3:3, 4, NKJV*). As each year passes, this sentiment will only grow.

In each person’s own experience, the second coming of Jesus (or in some cases, the third coming) is never more than a moment after death, and we all know how quickly life goes by. How might this perspective help us deal with the “delay”?

Noah's Evangelism

Peter reminds us that many will be unprepared for Christ's return because they "willfully forget" (2 Pet. 3:5, *NKJV*) what happened at the Flood. Today, even though the world has a collective memory of a great deluge (an astonishing number of global cultures tell the story of a devastating flood, from the ancient Greeks to the Mayans), the story of Noah is today perhaps one of the most ridiculed of the Bible's accounts. As predicted, the world is willfully setting the story aside as a myth, no matter how clearly and explicitly it is depicted in the Old Testament and referred to numerous times in the New Testament.

Jesus said that the world situation would resemble "the days of Noah" in Matthew 24:37–39. Compare this passage with Genesis 6:1–8. What were the moral conditions that led to the Flood? What parallels exist between the two times?

There is another important lesson for God's last-day remnant people that emerges from careful study. Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah "prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (*NKJV*).

Imagine preaching for more than a century with nothing to show for it but your own family in the ark. If Noah had been a modern evangelist, we might be tempted to write him off as a failure: decades of preaching and what would appear to be *no results*.

Fortunately, at the moment, many parts of the world are *very* responsive to the three angels' messages. Evangelistic outreach—the preaching of our unique remnant message—is proving incredibly effective in many places, and many are coming to know the Lord. We have not yet reached the point where there are no results, although we have been told the moment is coming when "probation will close, and the door of mercy will be shut. Thus in the one short sentence, 'They that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut,' we are carried down through the Saviour's final ministration, to the time when the great work for man's salvation shall be completed."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 428.

Until then, we have a work to do as a church.

How can we learn not to get discouraged if our personal evangelistic efforts don't seem to be bearing much fruit for the moment? Why must we continue our efforts? (See John 4:37.)

The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah

There is another key Old Testament story to which Peter makes direct reference when describing last-day events: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities of the plain were legendary for their wickedness and became the first example of population centers destroyed by fire from heaven.

Read 2 Peter 2:4–11, Jude 5–8, and Ezekiel 16:46–50—and note all of the details. What were the moral conditions that led to the destruction of these cities, and what parallels exist today?

The warning offered to the last-day people of this planet through the account of Sodom and Gomorrah is plain: eventually, the wicked will also be destroyed by fire, as described so clearly in Revelation 20. Sin is remarkably deceptive in that it blinds us to the state of our own hearts, veiling our transgressions under a layer of self-approval, while the wickedness perpetrated by others often remains obvious to us. In the same chapter that God talked about how much love He had poured upon His nation, He also has to warn the nation that, while it did not commit the very same sins (*Ezek. 16:47*), it has actually become more wicked than Sodom.

Israel had been “playing the harlot” (*Ezek. 16:41*), committing spiritual adultery. Imagine the surprise of God’s people when they heard that they were *more wicked* than people who were legendary for their wickedness.

This is nothing new, not just with ancient Israel but with all humanity. In Romans 1:18–32, Paul presents a long list of human evil that could have been written based off of today’s newspapers. Paul’s description of Gentile sin was not intended to create feelings of superiority among the Jews but so that God’s people finally could understand the seriousness of their own sins. Nathan did the same thing when he spoke to David: he told the story of a rich man who stole a lamb from a poor man. This story “greatly aroused” David’s anger (*2 Sam. 12:5, NKJV*), because the injustice seemed obvious; even then, it took Nathan’s declaration, “You are the man!” (*2 Sam. 12:7, NKJV*) to make David see himself in the story.

It is important to remember that the Bible is not primarily addressed to the outside world but to God’s own people. When we see the heinous sins of others described in a passage such as Revelation 13 or 17, it is a warning that we, too, can fall into the same trap.

The Judge of All the Earth

Just prior to the destruction of Sodom, there is a curious story that takes place on the plains of Mamre. God, accompanied by two angels, appears to Abraham. When Abraham sees them, he invites the heavenly visitors to a meal, and it is at this point that God promises that Abraham and Sarah will have a son who would lead to the Messiah. Jesus, indeed, came from the line of Abraham (*compare with Gal. 3:16*). Then the story suddenly turns to the matter of the wicked cities of the plain.

Read Genesis 18:17–32. What do we learn from these verses about the character of God and the way He ultimately plans to deal with evil on our planet?

God does not owe us an explanation, but He chooses not to veil His motives and plans from the human race. “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,” the prophet Amos tells us, “unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NKJV*).

Before God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, He declares that the only right thing to do is inform Abraham of what is about to happen, about what he can soon expect to be witnessing.

God lingers with Abraham while the two angels go to the wicked city to call out those who will heed their warning. One cannot help but think of the prophetic angels who perform the same task in the last days, calling those of God’s people who live in Babylon to come out of her (*Rev. 14:6–12, Rev. 18:1–4*). As the final warning is being issued, God discusses with Abraham what is about to happen, and He willingly subjects Himself to the patriarch’s questions.

“‘Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked,’ ” Abraham comments, and then asks, “ ‘Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ ” (*Gen. 18:25, NKJV*). Abraham is not only examining the case of Sodom, but he is also *examining the character of God*. Likewise, before the end comes, God opens the books of heaven (*Rev. 20:4, 11–15*) and allows us to investigate the evidence before He finally brings fire down on the earth. That is, we will have a thousand years to get a lot of questions answered that, for now, remain unanswered.

Before the Lord will bring down final judgment upon the lost, He gives us a thousand years to understand what will happen to whom and why. What does this tell us about His character and about how open He is to scrutiny by created beings—beings fully dependent upon Him for existence—and who have no inherent right to know these things?

The Pre-Advent Judgment

The description of judgment found in Daniel 7 gives us a glimpse behind the veil—to an awe-inspiring opportunity to see how God is resolving the problem of sin while still redeeming those who wish to live in a covenant relationship with Him.

Read the description of the investigative judgment provided in Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 26, and 27. What is the primary focus in the judgment? What is the verdict rendered at the end of the process? What does this tell us about the plan of salvation?

There is little question that the human race is judged by God. Ecclesiastes 12:14 assures us that “God will bring every work into judgment” (*NKJV*), and Paul reminds us that we do not need to judge each other, because “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (*Rom. 14:10*). God, of course, does not need records to know who is saved or lost, but angels—who have been examining the plan of salvation all along (*1 Pet. 1:12*)—would naturally have questions. They were witnesses to the rebellion of Satan and saw a third of heaven’s angels expelled from heaven (*Rev. 12:4*)—and now God is bringing us into His presence. God opens the books and allows the saints to see everything.

The story of Abraham’s pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah—a type of the judgment—offers us some important insight into judgment. The sins of Sodom were obviously being investigated; God mentions that the wickedness of the city had given it such a reputation that the outcry against it was great (*Gen. 18:20*). But it was not only Sodom and Gomorrah that were investigated prior to their destruction. God also opened the door for Abraham to study whether or not God was acting righteously in His decision to destroy the wicked.

Meanwhile, who appears amid the heavenly judgment, in Daniel 7, but “the Son of man,” Jesus (*Dan. 7:13*; see also *Matt. 20:28*), whose appearance is the only reason why this judgment is “made in favor of the saints of the Most High” (*Dan. 7:22, NKJV*). His perfect righteousness alone gets His people through judgment.

Imagine standing in judgment with all your secrets exposed before our Holy God. What is your only hope at that time of judgment? (See Friday's study.)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Flood,” pp. 101, 102, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan’s accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God. . . .

“Satan’s accusations against those who seek the Lord are not prompted by displeasure at their sins. He exults in their defective characters; for he knows that only through their transgression of God’s law can he obtain power over them. His accusations arise solely from his enmity to Christ. Through the plan of salvation, Jesus is breaking Satan’s hold upon the human family and rescuing souls from his power. . . .

“In his own strength, man cannot meet the charges of the enemy. In sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus, our Advocate, presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause, and by the mighty arguments of Calvary, vanquishes their accuser. His perfect obedience to God’s law has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims from His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 583–586.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Jesus told His disciples that they were *in* the world but not *of* the world. (See *John 15:19*, *John 17:14–16*.) How do we balance our responsibility to win the world with the need to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (*James 1:27*)?
- ② What does Noah’s public ministry prior to the Flood teach us about how the great controversy works? In what ways do we play the same role today?
- ③ Prior to devouring the wicked with fire from heaven (as He did with Sodom), God raises them from the dead and allows Satan to work with them for a short while (*Rev. 20:7–9*). What reasons can you think of that this would be a necessary last step before God sets everything right?
- ④ As you consider the stories we studied this week, what cautions do you find for your own life? What do these stories teach you about your hope in Christ?

Part 6: Giving Up Alcohol

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Diana took her last drink of alcohol on US Independence Day. Opening a can of beer, she told friends, “There’s nothing better than an ice-cold beer on a hot summer day.” Then she took a big swig and nearly spit it out. She thought the beer had gone bad, so she got a different brand of beer out of the cooler. That beer also tasted awful. But a friend said both beers tasted fine.

That day, Diana quit drinking. It wasn’t because the Bible said beer was bad but because the Holy Spirit had changed her desire for alcohol.

A short time later, Diana and Loren were baptized by Loren’s father at an annual family reunion of his relatives near Chicago. Diana was surprised when she heard the baptismal vows for the first time. They included the line, “Do you believe that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; and will you honor God by caring for it, avoiding the use of that which is harmful; abstaining from all unclean foods; from the use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages; the use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption; and from the misuse of or trafficking in narcotics or other drugs?”

Diana shot Loren a quizzical look and thought, *How did we miss this?* She worked in a bar at the Salt Lake City airport. With big tips and easy work, it was considered one of the best jobs for unskilled workers.

Diana’s coworkers were stunned when she told them that she was quitting, and they asked why. The bartender asked several times. He and the others were interested in her new faith. Diana moved to another airport shop, where she made and sold cookies. It didn’t pay as well, but she got Sabbaths off.

Before long, Diana and Loren sensed that God was leading them to move to Tennessee to help Loren’s grandparents. They settled near Southern Adventist University. It was a time of great spiritual challenges. Diana still had many worldly traits to submit to God.

When a relative of Loren’s heard that Diana had newspaper experience, he asked her to apply for a position at Southern’s radio station, where he worked as general manager. Diana didn’t want the job, but Loren urged her to pray. She worked at the radio station for nearly ten years, including seven as its development director. During that time God helped her overcome sins that had troubled her from the time she was molested as a child.

Then Diana was asked to apply for a development director opening with the Adventist hospital system in Florida. She felt unqualified and didn’t want to apply, but Loren again urged her to pray. She worked at the hospital for the next ten years. Then she heard about Holbrook Indian School.

This mission story offers an inside look at how God miraculously worked in the life of Diana Fish, development director of the US-based Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, which received the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2021. Thank you for supporting the spread of the gospel with this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 28. Read more about Diana next week.