

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide  
April | May | June 2025

# ALLUSIONS IMAGES SYMBOLS

How to Study Bible Prophecy



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# Precursors for Prophecy



During the First Gulf War (1991), a well-known Protestant writer and speaker was convinced that the book of Revelation predicted this conflict. His argument was based on the fact that some of the helicopters in the war looked like the locusts depicted in Revelation 9. “And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power” (*Rev. 9:2, 3, NKJV*).

Not exactly the best way to interpret biblical prophecy, is it? Yet, interpretations like this are fairly common. In fact, over the decades a stream of books, articles, videos, and now websites, all dedicated to prophecy, have made many predictions, including date setting, about final events—usually centered on wars or turmoil in the Middle East.

And, surprise of surprises, in every case those predictions have not come true. As Seventh-day Adventists, we take a different approach, a Christ-centered approach, in which the focus of prophecy is no longer on a single geographic location in the Middle East and whatever military conflicts unfold there. Instead, we view the prophecies through the lens of the great controversy between Christ and Satan—a worldwide spiritual struggle that will climax when God’s people, Jew and Gentile (*see Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*), face the final crisis, which centers on worshipping the Creator (*see Rev. 14:7*), as opposed to the beast and his image.

A key element in understanding these last-day prophecies is Daniel 2, which contains

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not only the historical outline of the prophecies but the interpretive key to unlocking their meanings, as well.

Daniel 2 depicts four world empires—Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome—followed by God’s establishing His eternal kingdom, “ ‘which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever ’ ” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*). The parallel prophecies in Daniel 7 and 8 contain this same basic outline, that of these worldly empires arising and vanishing until God’s kingdom is forever established.

In Daniel 7, the angel interpreter sets it all out for us: “ ‘ “Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” ’ ” (*Dan. 7:17, 18, NKJV*).

Four worldly empires (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome) move in an unbroken succession through history until, after the second coming of Jesus, God establishes His eternal one.

Of course, we are still here, in the time of the division of Rome, the fourth and final earthly kingdom before Christ returns.

With this historical perspective as the foundation for understanding prophecy, we are going to study this quarter the theme of how to interpret Bible prophecy, specifically some of the allusions, stories, images, and metaphors that unlock prophetic truth and final events.

We go from the Genesis creation account—important for understanding not only prophecy but for what follows, especially the cross and the atoning death of Jesus—to the tower of Babel, to the sanctuary service, to the Psalms, even to some Old Testament marriages. In all these, and more, we can find images, symbols, and metaphors that, when studied prayerfully and with a humble, submissive spirit (if you go to the Bible with a rebellious heart, you are wasting your time), will help make end-time prophecies, specifically in Revelation, come alive.

One quarter is certainly not enough even to begin to study all the stories and images that help unlock prophetic truth. Who knows—we might need eternity for that. Until then, by God’s grace, we will study what we can.

*We can find images, symbols, and metaphors that, when studied prayerfully and with a humble, submissive spirit, . . . will help make end-time prophecies, specifically in Revelation, come alive.*

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# Some Principles of Prophecy



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Jer. 29:23, 24; Ps. 139:1–6; Dan. 12:4; Rev. 22:10; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Heb. 4:12.*

**Memory Text:** “‘But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,’ says the LORD” (*Jeremiah 9:24, NKJV*).

As with most everything else in Scripture, Christians disagree about prophecy, which often convinces others that Bible prophecy is a waste of time. After all, if Christians fight over every prophetic jot and tittle, how valid could it be? Unfortunately, many believers also begin to think that some books of the Bible, such as Revelation, are simply incomprehensible. Instead of reading them, they avoid them, sometimes with the encouragement of a well-meaning pastor who thinks that studying prophecy causes more problems than it solves.

It was not always so. For the first eighteen centuries of Christian history, most Christians were very comfortable with biblical prophecy, and there was a surprising level of agreement on what the key messages of the prophecies were. This is how God intended for it to be: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (*1 Cor. 1:10, NKJV*).

This week, we will explore some principles that yield a consistent and reliable understanding of prophecy.

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

## Whoever Reads, Let Him Understand

Walk into any Christian bookstore and scan through the titles on Bible prophecy. You will quickly discover that there is a mind-boggling assortment of views and interpretations, and it can be tempting to believe that no one can truly understand what books such as Revelation are saying. For example, one author says the antichrist is nothing but a metaphor; another says he is still coming in the future; and another that he was a reference to something or someone in the days of the pagan Roman Empire. As one old preacher put it, “Perhaps the Bible is like an old violin; you can play any tune you’d like on it.”

The Bible itself, however, does not suggest any such thing. Instead, it invites us to read, assuming that God is not speaking in vain and that we can know the truth of what He is saying through His Word.

**Read** Matthew 24:15; Revelation 1:3; Matthew 11:29; and Jeremiah 9:23, 24. What do these texts suggest about God’s intention to make Himself understood?

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Many universities offer courses named “The Bible as Literature” or something similar. For the believer, it can be astonishing to sit through countless lectures, only to discover that the professor reads the Bible the same way one might read pagan mythology. The idea is that there may be a kernel of moral “truth” in the stories, but one can make of the stories whatever one wishes. To these teachers, the idea that this book was inspired by God is laughable.

Thus, the instructor reads the Bible but does not hear the voice of God speaking. Others come to conclusions clearly at odds with the message of the Bible. Without being surrendered to the Lord, and without a heart open to learning the truth, those who read the Bible will likely come away not only missing its message but misunderstanding the loving and holy character of the God revealed in its pages. This could be easier to do than many realize, which is why just reading the Bible without the right tools and (most important) the right attitude under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can be hurtful.

**Someone not known to be pious was found reading the Bible. When asked what he was doing, he responded, “Looking for loopholes. Looking for loopholes.” Why is that exactly the *wrong* attitude to have when reading God’s Word?**

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## God Wants to Be Understood

Nothing is quite as frustrating as urgently needing to communicate, perhaps at a clinic or pharmacy, while in a foreign country where you barely speak the language. You know what you need to say, but you do not have an adequate vocabulary to say it.

With God, a different problem emerges. “ ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,’ ” He says, “ ‘so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’ ” (*Isa. 55:9, NKJV*). The problem isn’t that God doesn’t have the vocabulary to communicate with us; the problem is that we don’t have the vocabulary or intellectual capacity to understand Him fully.

**What** do the following passages suggest about God’s understanding in comparison to our own?

*Ps. 139:1–6* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 147:5* \_\_\_\_\_

*Rom. 11:33* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 John 3:20* \_\_\_\_\_

The truth of the matter is that we will never fully understand the mind of God because He is infinite and omniscient. After all, we can barely understand everything about the creation; how would we fully understand its Creator? We can’t.

Though we will never understand everything, we can understand what is necessary for our salvation. (*See 2 Tim. 3:14, 15.*) When the apostles explained the gospel to their audiences, they frequently referred to fulfilled prophecy, from which we can deduce that one of the key purposes of prophecy is to illustrate the plan of salvation. Indeed, in the end, Bible prophecy must ultimately, in one way or another, lead us to Jesus and the promise of salvation that He offers to all humanity.

After all, the Lord, through whom all things were created (*see Col. 1:16, John 1:1–3*), comes down to this earth and then offers Himself as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of every human being, even the most wretched. That is how much God loves all of us. Having done all that for us, the Lord would obviously want everyone, wretches included, to know what He offers us in Jesus. And prophecy can do just that.

**Though, yes, there is much that we don’t know, why is it crucial to focus now on what we do know and to follow what we know—as opposed to obsessing over what we don’t know?**

## Daniel—Shut Up the Words

**Read** Daniel 12:4. What was the Lord telling Daniel here? (*Contrast this with Rev. 22:10.*)

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It is not uncommon to hear preachers use Daniel 12:4 to predict the rise of technological and scientific knowledge just prior to the advent of Christ. Many also use it to describe the advances in rapid travel that have taken place over the past century or so. Many of our own books have taken this approach. Though certainly reasonable interpretations, it might mean something else, as well.

Read the passage again. The angel's instruction to Daniel begins with an injunction to "shut up the words, and seal the book." The subject being discussed is the book of Daniel itself. Perhaps, then, could that knowledge which would suddenly increase at the end of time be knowledge of the book of Daniel itself?

This makes the book of Daniel somewhat different from Revelation, in that John was told *not* to seal his book (*Rev. 22:10*). Revelation was meant to be understood from the first, because " 'the time [was] at hand.' " In contrast, Daniel would be understood more clearly at some point in the distant future.

Over the centuries, many fine Christian thinkers attempted to explain the book of Daniel, and some made great headway. Understanding of Daniel increased rapidly, however, after the end of the 1,260-year prophecy, which ended in 1798, when multiple expositors around the globe started concluding that something spectacular was going to happen around 1843. The most notable of these, however, was William Miller, whose preaching launched the Great Advent Movement of the nineteenth century and began a chain of events that would give birth to the "remnant" church and a clear understanding of the three angels' messages.

The birth of our global movement, in other words, is a fulfillment of Daniel's prediction that "knowledge shall increase" at "the time of the end."

In contrast, and without judging people's salvation, think about the "darkness" that so much of Christendom exists in. Something as basic as the seventh-day Sabbath, established in Eden, is ignored, even dismissed, in favor of Sunday, a day rooted in Roman paganism. Or think of the utter ignorance about death, with the vast majority of Christians believing the pagan idea that the dead immediately go soaring off to another existence, which for some means an eternally burning hell.

In contrast, we should be thankful—and humbled—by the knowledge of the truth.



## Studying the Word

Seventh-day Adventists owe much to William Miller for their understanding of Bible prophecy. While his understanding of key passages (such as Daniel 8:14) was not perfect, Miller's methodology was, nonetheless, important, because it paved the way for the birth of our last-day remnant movement.

**Read** Matthew 5:18, 2 Timothy 3:15–17, and Luke 24:27. What do these verses teach us about the way we ought to approach Bible prophecy?

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In some ways, studying the Bible is not unlike assembling a large jigsaw puzzle. If you gather just two or three pieces together, it is nearly impossible to discern the entire picture. Perhaps in those two or three pieces, you can see a horse, and so you conclude that you are assembling a picture of horses. But a few more pieces reveal a chicken and a cow, and then once you have assembled hundreds of pieces, you can finally see that you have been working on a picture of a landscape, which includes a city, a farm, and a range of mountains in the distance.

One of the central ways in which some Christians err in their study of the Bible is that they treat the Scriptures as a loose collection of sayings or proverbs that they can use to address a specific situation. Some will turn to the simple study guide at the front of a Gideons Bible, where they can find helpful verses on a number of topics, and assume that it represents the sum total of the Bible's teachings on a given subject.

Unfortunately, they take the same approach to prophecy, lifting an individual text out of its context and comparing it to current events instead of the rest of the Bible. This, in part, has led to the constant stream of modern books on prophecy that have to be updated every few years because they were wrong on what they said was going to happen—and when.

That's why it's so important not merely to select some specific texts on any given topic but instead to study carefully everything the Bible says about that topic and to take into consideration the context in which it says it, as well. It is very easy to pull a passage out of context and make it say whatever we want.

**What has been your experience with those who use only certain selected texts to try to make their point about, say, the state of the dead? Or even the Sabbath? What is the best way to respond?**

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## Figurative or Literal?

One of the key issues students of prophecy need to deal with is how to determine whether the language of the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively. How does one determine if the author was using symbolic language, and how does one know what the symbol represents? The crucial way to do this is to see how that figure, the symbol, has been used all through the Bible, as opposed to looking at how a symbol is used in contemporary times. For example, some see the bear symbol in Daniel 7 as pointing to Russia, because that image is often used today as a symbol of Russia. This is not a sound or safe way to interpret prophetic symbolism.

**Look** up the following texts, allowing the Bible to be its own expositor (to define its own terms). What is the prophetic symbol common to the texts in each case, and what does the Bible say it represents?

*Dan. 7:7, Dan. 8:3, Dan. 7:24* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Rev. 1:16, Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Rev. 12:1; Rev. 21:2; Eph. 5:31, 32; Jer. 6:2* \_\_\_\_\_

By following the simple rule that the Bible must be allowed to define its own terms, most of the mystery behind prophetic symbolism simply disappears. For example, we see that a horn can symbolize a political power or a nation. A sword can symbolize the Word of God. And, yes, a woman can symbolize the church. Here we can clearly see the Bible explaining itself.

What remains to be answered, however, is why God would speak in symbols instead of being forthright? Why, for example, would Peter cryptically refer to the city of Rome as Babylon, in 1 Peter 5:13?

There may be many reasons why God has chosen to communicate symbolically in prophecy. In the case of the New Testament church, for example, if the book of Revelation had plainly named Rome as the perpetrator of so much evil, the already bad persecution of the church might have been even worse. Whatever the reasons, we can trust that God wants us to understand what the symbols mean.

**Even if some symbols and prophecies remain mysteries, how can focusing on what we do understand strengthen our faith?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “An American Reformer,” pp. 319–324, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Ministers and people declared that the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation were incomprehensible mysteries. But Christ directed His disciples to the words of the prophet Daniel concerning events to take place in their time, and said: ‘Whoso readeth, let him *understand*.’ Matthew 24:15. And the assertion that the Revelation is a mystery, not to be understood, is contradicted by the very title of the book: ‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass. . . . *Blessed* is he that *readeth*, and they that *hear* the words of this prophecy, and *keep* those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.’ Revelation 1:1–3. . . .

“In view of the testimony of Inspiration, how dare men teach that the Revelation is a mystery beyond the reach of human understanding? It is a mystery revealed, a book opened. The study of the Revelation directs the mind to the prophecies of Daniel, and both present most important instruction, given of God to men, concerning events to take place at the close of this world’s history.

“To John were opened scenes of deep and thrilling interest in the experience of the church. He saw the position, dangers, conflicts, and final deliverance of the people of God. He records the closing messages which are to ripen the harvest of the earth, either as sheaves for the heavenly garner or as fagots for the fires of destruction. Subjects of vast importance were revealed to him, especially for the last church, that those who should turn from error to truth might be instructed concerning the perils and conflicts before them. None need be in darkness in regard to what is coming upon the earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 341, 342.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can the study of prophecy greatly increase your faith? What prophecies—some written thousands of years ago about events that would happen hundreds, if not thousands of years later—have helped increase your trust in the Bible and, more important, in the God who inspired it? How, for example, does Daniel 2 give us powerful, and logical, reasons to trust not only that God exists but that He knows the future?
- ❷ What are the best ways to protect ourselves from the many wild and speculative attempts to interpret prophecies, sometimes even from those within our own church? Why must we be careful to “test all things; hold fast what is good” (*1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV*)?

## “I Want That Book!”

By LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN

Tim was a new missionary, and he was scared. He was selling Christian books on a predominantly non-Christian island in Southeast Asia, and he didn't want any trouble.

As he made his way down a street, Tim prayed and nervously stepped into the store of a seamstress. Ahead of him, he saw four people waiting in line. The minutes seemed to drag by.

The wait was taking longer than Tim had expected. He was tempted to leave, but something stopped him. He noticed that the seamstress kept glancing over in his direction with an odd expression on her face. From time to time, she even moved over to one side of the counter, close to the wall, so she could peer around the other customers and get a better look at his face.

Finally, the last customer left the store, and it was Tim's turn in line. But before he could say a word, the seamstress pointed to the books sticking out of his bag.

“I want that book!” she exclaimed. “I want that book, and I want that book!”

“What?” Tim said. “How do you even know that I have books for sale?”

“I had a dream,” the seamstress said. “In the dream, I saw a young man who looked just like you. He had books with him that I needed to read, and one of those books was called *The Great Controversy*. So, I knew that you were going to come. I knew that I had to purchase *The Great Controversy*. Do you have that book?”

Tim's fears about having trouble as a missionary instantly disappeared. He grew excited about selling books. He realized the truth of Deuteronomy 31:8, which says, “And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed” (NKJV). He knew that God was going ahead of him, paving the way for him to share the good news about Jesus and His soon coming.

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*Pray for Tim and other missionaries seeking to reach unreached people groups in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, where this story took place. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter that will help spread the gospel in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.*

*This Inside Story illustrates the following objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's “I Will Go” strategic plan: Mission Objective No. 1, “To revive the concept of worldwide mission and sacrifice for mission as a way of life involving not only pastors but every church member, young and old, in the joy of witnessing for Christ and making disciples,” and Mission Objective No. 2, “To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions.” For more information, go to the website: [IWillGo.org](http://IWillGo.org).*



# The Genesis Foundation



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 40:7, 8; Gen. 22:1–13; John 3:16; Rev. 5:5–10; 1 Cor. 15:15–19; Rev. 12:1–9.*

**Memory Text:** “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*).

One of the key problems with modern interpretations of Bible prophecy, such as in Revelation, is that they fail to recognize the ancient roots of Revelation. The author assumes a knowledge of the Old Testament and uses concepts that would have been well-known to his audience. While searching the entire Bible for passages that resemble the text you are studying in Revelation is useful, there are also core texts that set the stage for understanding the book better than other texts do. This is particularly true of Genesis, which lays out the path by which our world descended into sinful chaos. Nearly every key concept mentioned in Revelation appears—in some form—in the opening chapters of the Bible.

This week, we are going to study a handful of big concepts at the core of Revelation. There are many, and so we will choose a few to illustrate the all-important point that understanding the ancient foundations behind Revelation enables the student to see countless nuances in the text, each of which can yield important lessons about the nature of humanity, of God, and of the conflict being waged in our universe and, thus, in our lives, as well.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 12.

## The Principle of “First Mention”

Most academic programs begin with a general survey course (often given the number “101”), a course that covers broad and basic principles that will form the basis for further study as you dig deeper into the subject. Likewise, when you read through the entire Bible, you quickly discover that God also has a general survey course in the book of Genesis, where He introduces ideas that will be examined in more detail throughout the rest of the Bible.

Generally speaking, the first time a concept or symbol is mentioned in the Bible—particularly in the opening chapters of Genesis—you will discover that it establishes a general understanding of that concept, which will help you understand how it’s being used later on.

Some Bible students refer to this as the “law of first mention,” although it would more properly be labeled a principle (or a pattern) rather than a law, because it is certainly not ironclad, and there are many exceptions to the rule. The pattern that seems to emerge, both in general Bible study and in Bible prophecy, is that God slowly feeds His children information over time, beginning with a basic concept and then enlarging on it many times over the years, or even the centuries.

**Read** Isaiah 40:7, 8; Malachi 3:6; and Hebrews 13:8. What principle can you derive from these texts that would help you properly anchor your study of prophecy?

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Much of the modern world speaks about “truthiness” instead of “truth,” because it is assumed that “truth” is a malleable thing that can change over time. Or, in some cases, the very concept of “truth” itself is deemed suspect.

When God establishes truth, however, He does not change His mind. Once He begins teaching His people truth, we can count on the fact that repetitions of the same biblical principle or theme do not change its meaning but, in contrast, shed further light on that meaning. It makes great sense in studying prophecy, therefore, to develop a good understanding of the book of Genesis, where you find many key concepts explained for the first time, and then take that foundational understanding with you as you explore the rest of the Bible.

**Why is it so important that we not allow anyone or anything, no matter how smooth or logical, to weaken our faith in the Bible and the infallible truths it teaches? What are subtle ways that this weakening can happen?**

## Understanding God's Love

Part of inheriting a sinful nature means that our perception of the universe has been tainted by our own propensities toward selfishness and pride. We see the world from our own limited perspective rather than from God's omniscient one (obviously). Perhaps no concept has been more skewed by the sinful human race than that of "love." Popular culture tends to promote an understanding of love that centers on self-fulfillment rather than on others. This self-centered approach to the subject makes it hard for us to understand how God views the subject.

Understanding the nature of love is an important key to understanding Bible prophecy. One of the key themes in the great controversy is the existence of a substantial misunderstanding about God's character. Ellen G. White, after all, ends her summary of *The Great Controversy* by writing: "The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—Page 678.

**Read** Genesis 22:1–13. The first mention of "love" in the Bible is found in Genesis 22:2. What does this story teach us about the nature of God's love?

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Occasionally, in addition to finding the first occurrence of a concept in the Bible, it can be useful to find the first mention of that same concept in individual books of the Bible—especially in the Gospels. In Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22, and John 3:16, we find the first mention of "love" in each of the Gospels.

For example, the first mention of "love" in John (*John 3:16*) is particularly enlightening: it appears to allude to the story of Isaac on the altar. Abraham's faith in God was such that he trusted Him, choosing to believe that God could raise his son if he went through with the sacrifice (*Heb. 11:19*). It foreshadowed God's love for the human race. He loved us to the point where He "gave His only begotten Son" (*see Gen. 22:2, 12, 16*)—and, then, raised Him from the dead. Thus, we are given a revelation of the kind of love, the self-sacrificing love, that God has for us.

**How do we even begin to manifest to others the kind of self-sacrificing love that God has for us? Why, for most of us, is this kind of love not necessarily basic to us?**

## Isaac's Question: Where Is the Lamb?

The Bible's first mention of a *seh* (Hebrew: a lamb) occurs in the same story as the first mention of love: Genesis 22. The lamb, of course, is one of the most persistent symbols found in the book of Revelation, in which Jesus is called "the Lamb" more than 20 times. In one of the most powerful scenes of Revelation—John's visit to the throne room of God in chapters four and five—the Lamb plays the central role.

**Read** Genesis 22:7, 8; Exodus 12:3–13; and Revelation 5:5–10. How does the story of Isaac's near-sacrifice help us understand how lambs are used symbolically? How does this story tie into what John sees in Revelation 5?

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The first mention of a *seh* (lamb) in the Bible comes in the form of Isaac's question: "Where is the lamb?" (*Gen. 22:7*). Interestingly enough, the rest of the Bible answers that question in great detail. The other 38 books of the Old Testament lead the reader along a path where Isaac's question is progressively answered with more and more details, from the Passover rituals to David's early occupation and onward. The entire story is punctuated with countless Messianic prophecies that anticipate the answer to Isaac's question. Then in the New Testament, the question is answered when Jesus appears in flesh and blood, ministers among His people, and finally sacrifices His life at the cross.

Meanwhile, look at the first mention of a Lamb in John's Gospel, in John 1:29–34. It would almost seem as if John the Baptist is personally answering Isaac's question, and the setting couldn't be more apropos. Sinners are repenting and going under the water in baptism, symbolizing the death of the sinner and the beginning of a new life. In this context, Jesus, the Lamb of God, suddenly appears and, according to Matthew's account, the heavens open to announce Him: " 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' " (*Matt. 3:17, NKJV*). Notice how a voice, the Angel of the LORD, also announces from heaven the solution to Abraham and Isaac's problem (*Gen. 22:11–14*).

When you weave all the threads together, it is clear that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is our Substitute. That sheds much light on our understanding of the slain Lamb in John's vision.

**Why is knowing that Jesus is our Substitute so foundational to our salvation? What hope would you have without Him, as that Substitute, especially in the judgment?**



## Dealing With Death

Perhaps the cruelest aspect of living in a world detached from its Creator is the way that death lurks in the background of every life, ready to strike at any moment. It is the “wages of sin,” the penalty that we pay for having been disconnected from the only Source of life in the universe: the Creator. As such, it plays a major role in Bible prophecy, both its reality and, even more important, its solution, which is found only in Jesus and His death and resurrection.

Both the first mention of death in the Bible and its first occurrence shed much light on this major theme in prophecy, helping us to understand the gravity of the sin problem and giving us important tools to understand God’s solution to the problem.

**Read** Genesis 2:15–17, Genesis 4:8–15, 1 Corinthians 15:15–19, and Revelation 1:18. What do these passages—which include the first mention and occurrence of death—tell us about why people die, how God views death, and what His solution is for our problem?

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We often say that “death is just part of life.” That is a lie. Death is the opposite of life, the undoing of life; it is an alien intruder that was never meant to be part of our experience here. Even though we have become accustomed to death, our hearts still protest strongly when we encounter it, as if the human race still collectively realizes that there is something fundamentally wrong with it. As painful as death is, there are some instances of death that seem even more tragic than others, such as the death of a child. For the most part, we expect that parents will precede their children in death, and we have come to accept that as the normal order of things.

The first death recorded in Scripture, however, goes against the expected norm. Before Adam and Eve went through death themselves, they experienced the tragedy of death when their righteous son was murdered by his unrighteous brother. It was a particularly unjust death.

Think about Jesus, the righteous murdered by the unrighteous, as was Abel. What death could have been more unjust than Christ’s? What other parallels might one find between the death of Abel and of Christ on the cross? How might the nature of Abel’s death help us to understand why Jesus has “the keys of Hades [the grave] and death” and what God is offering us in Him?

**Without the problem of death being solved, why are our lives ultimately useless, meaningless, and futile? What does this fact teach us about how thankful we should be for what Jesus has done for us?**

## The Serpent

The issue of worship is a key subject in the book of Revelation. The perpetrator and enabler of false systems of worship is identified as the “dragon” (*Rev. 13:2–4*), and the serpentine description of this fallen cherub is no accident. It clearly points us back to the Garden of Eden, where a serpent entered Paradise and persuaded Adam and Eve to follow him into rebellion against the Creator.

**Compare** Genesis 3:1–5 with Revelation 12:1–9. What are some of the common themes in each account? How do the details found in the introduction of the serpent in Genesis help us to understand some of the issues that had previously led to the war in heaven mentioned in Revelation?

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There are two accounts in the Scriptures in which Satan leads the whole world astray. In Genesis, at a moment when there were only two people in existence; and then in the account given in Revelation 12 and 13, in which Satan is identified as the one who “deceives the whole world” (*Rev. 12:9*) and as the one who enables the sea beast power so that “all the world” marvels and follows it (*Rev. 13:2, 3*). One of the themes found in Bible prophecy is the unchanging nature of the great controversy. God’s character and Word do not change, and neither do the ambitions of the devil.

Fortunately, because the nature of the great controversy does not change, and because we have clear reference points in the prophetic Scriptures, Christians are able to sift through trends and begin to recognize where spiritual pitfalls might lie. God will always be who He is, and the same is true of the devil. Satan may wear a thousand disguises, but millennia of fallen human history, coupled with the prophetic scenario painted in Revelation, demonstrate that he never strays from the game plan he used in Eden. God has promised us wisdom and discernment (*James 1:5*), and armed with the certainty of the Scriptures, we need not fall for the devil’s lies. Unfortunately, many have fallen for them, and many more—the majority—will, as well.

**Consider how culture changes over time. Societal norms shift; things that were once acceptable become unacceptable and vice versa. Given that the underlying issues and actors in the great controversy do not change, what things should a Christian consider in examining the shifting cultural landscape? For example, the original lies that the devil told, such as you shall not die and you shall be as gods: where can you find them being told in your culture today?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Revelation,” pp. 578–581, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Many world religions simply deal with ideas; in powerful contrast, the ideas found in the Christian religion are anchored firmly in historical events. The Bible is the story of God’s interacting with humanity throughout history, and by studying thousands of years of such interactions, we can learn much about the consistent character of God.

Sometimes, however, Christians complain that they are getting tired of hearing the same things. Sometimes, when our distinctive prophetic message is being preached publicly, we think that we already have heard it and have nothing new to learn.

The fact that our message is unchanging and consistent, however, does not mean that it is simplistic or unchallenging. Quite the opposite: when you are studying information relayed to us from the mind of an infinite God, you quickly discover that you will never reach the end of a subject.

Ellen G. White states that one of the reasons the book of Revelation was written was to anchor the Christian church in its historical message for all time. “Some of the younger workers [at that time] . . . had become weary of oft-repeated truths. In their desire for something novel and startling they attempted to introduce new phases of doctrine.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 580. To that extent, it is not merely a book about the future; it is also a book about the past, designed to keep us rooted in our historical faith so that we are not led astray by a desire to seek originality.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① The Scriptures never fail to yield new information and new understanding. How does one balance the desire to learn something new with the importance of staying anchored in the truths that we already have been given?
- ② How should the church respond to new interpretations of prophecy? Though we know that there is always more to learn, how do we discern whether the new light is essential or just a fad, or even error?
- ③ In World War II as a sailor in the Pacific lay dying, he cried out to the medic, “I am an orphan. When I die, who will remember me?” The medic responded, “I will always remember you.” However well-meaning the medic’s words, sooner or later he also would die, and so would the memory of the orphaned sailor. How does this account help us realize the futility and meaningless of all our lives if death, ultimately, has the final say?

# The Milk Miracle

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

No cow stood in the yard when Mother returned home from the market.

Mother looked around the yard. No cow. She knew her two small children were waiting for her in the house. Tears filled her eyes. How could she tell them that the cow, their only source of income, had been stolen? Without the cow, they would die.

Mother decided not to tell the children. She didn't want them to see her tears. Walking over to some bushes, she poured out her heart to God. She reminded Him that her husband, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, had been arrested for keeping the Sabbath and sentenced to eight years of hard labor far from their home in the then-southern Soviet republic of Tajikistan. She thanked God for the now stolen cow, whose milk she had traded for flour, potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, tomatoes, and cucumbers at the village market.

"What next?" she wept. "How can my children and I survive?"

As she cried and prayed, she looked at the bushes and saw something caught in the branches. She looked closer and saw that it was a banknote for a large sum of money. "Thank You, God!" she prayed. "You have sent money to buy another cow."

Mother dried her tears and returned to the market to look for another cow. But every seller wanted more money than she had found in the bushes.

Finally, a man agreed to lower his price.

"I'll give you my cow for the amount of money that you have," he said.

It was the smallest, scrawniest cow in the market.

Mother handed over the money and took the cow home.

"God, this cow is in Your hands," she prayed.

At home, Mother fed the cow, and the two children played with it. With food and love, the cow grew and grew. Before long, it was producing twice as much milk as the cow that was stolen.

"God saved our lives during this difficult time," said Liubov Brunton, the granddaughter of the mother in the story.

She said the miracle with the milk serves as a powerful reminder that God protects and cares for His mission workers, no matter where and when they serve. But the story of the cow didn't end there. Liubov's grandmother was about to witness another miracle. Read about it next week.



*Thank you for your mission offerings that support the spread of the gospel around the world.*

# Images From Marriage



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:23–25, Eph. 5:29–32, Ezek. 16:4–14, Rev. 18:1–4, Gen. 24:1–4, Rev. 19:1–9.*

**Memory Text:** “Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” ’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’ ” (*Revelation 19:9, NKJV*).

**T**he Bible is replete with love stories that powerfully reveal aspects of salvation and of God’s love for His people. The most intimate of relationships, marriage, proves to be a school in which, if we allow ourselves to experience it the way that God had intended, we can discover deep lessons about His love for us, about our relationship to Him, and about the lengths to which He has gone to redeem us.

Modern conceptions of love and marriage have skewed our ability to appreciate what God is trying to teach us through the marital covenant. Though human sinfulness has greatly perverted marriage (and just about everything else), marriage can still be a powerful way of revealing truth, even prophetic truth. More than just to make us happy, marriage should be a school in which we learn deep lessons about ourselves and our relationship to God.

This week we will explore different ways the Word of God talks about marriages, good and bad. We can then draw lessons from these examples to understand better how God relates to His people, even when they fall short, and we can learn some truths about His love that can help us better grasp last-day events.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 19.

## One Flesh

Few biblical metaphors underscore the intimacy that God desires with the human race more than that of marriage. This metaphor is used so frequently in the biblical narrative—and shows up so pointedly in Revelation—that it is imperative for Bible students to grasp what God is driving at when He uses it in the Word.

**Read** Genesis 2:23–25 and Ephesians 5:29–32. In what ways does a human marriage mirror Christ’s bond to humanity?

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On an occasion when Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, He quoted the Genesis account of Adam and Eve’s marriage, to which the Pharisees quickly raised the question, “ ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ ” (*Matt. 19:7, NKJV*).

Moses, of course, was deemed a founding prophet for the nation. Imagine questioning the Author of the institution of marriage by pitting Him against His own prophet. Their tact was typical of their approach to Jesus; they often attempted to prove that His teachings contradicted the Scriptures.

Lifetime, faithful marriage was the ideal established by God at the foundation of the human race. Fallen humanity, unfortunately, damaged this foundational gift from God.

Perhaps, given the importance that Scripture assigns to marriage, it is not a coincidence that the institution has always been under relentless attack. Along with the Sabbath, it is one of the two gifts bestowed on us in Eden, and both were intended to demonstrate God’s desire for an intimate relationship with His creation.

Marriage, the intimate pairing of two imperfect people, will always give cause for tension. A marriage between the church and Christ is the pairing of a perfect Savior with a very imperfect bride. Nevertheless, we can learn about God’s love from what a good marriage offers.

**Here are three principles for marriage. First, forgive your spouse, however undeserving, just as Christ forgives us, however undeserving. Second, accept your spouse, faults and all, just as Christ accepts us, faults and all. Third, just as Christ put us before Himself, put your spouse before yourself. How could all three of these gospel-based principles help us not only to understand how God relates to us but also to help any marriage?**

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## The Beautiful Bride

Ezekiel 16 shows us an astonishing picture of God’s regard for His people. He describes the nation of Israel as an abandoned baby, left in a field to die. He takes her home, cleans her up, and when she is fully grown, he marries her. It is a powerful picture of an unlikely marriage.

**Read** Ezekiel 16:4–14. What do the details about this bride’s exaltation teach us about God’s intentions toward us?

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God told Israel that, under His care, she grew “ ‘exceedingly beautiful’ ” (*Ezek. 16:13, NKJV*). When God first found her, nobody found her beautiful; she was a reject among other children, cast aside in the hopes that she would die. But as God showered His attention on her, she became more and more beautiful, until she was the talk of the world. In the earliest days of the Hebrew kings, under David and Solomon, this was particularly true. The queen of Ethiopia even made a special trip in order to see the splendor of Israel for herself!

Israel’s beauty, however, was entirely the gift of God. She was beautiful—the talk of the nations—precisely because she was His bride. God says that her beauty “ ‘was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you’ ” (*Ezek. 16:14, NKJV*).

This is a recurrent theme in the Bible: God’s bride is beautiful, not because of anything she has done but because God has showered His favor on her and made her that way. In a similar way, believers appear beautiful in the estimate of heaven, not because of anything we have done to earn it but because of the favor of God, the salvation that He has showered on us. We are beautiful because we are covered in His righteousness, the “righteousness of God” Himself (*2 Cor. 5:21*).

All was good, however, until the next verse in Ezekiel: “ ‘But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it’ ” (*Ezek. 16:15*).

We were created to reflect the goodness and glory of God. When God’s creations assume that their beauty is their own, that beauty is cheapened, and trouble awaits.

**What are the dangers of us trusting in our “own beauty”? That is, how might we think that there is anything in and of ourselves that gives us merit with God or makes us deserving of His love? How can we always guard against spiritual pride?**



## Hosea's Harlot Wife

God's request of the prophet Hosea may be one of the strangest assignments ever given to one of His servants: marry a harlot—on purpose! But God was using Hosea to help us understand, from His own perspective, the pain of human sin and rebellion. God had lovingly chosen a wife, Israel, who repeatedly cheated on Him, and yet, astonishingly enough, He took her back and restored her.

**Compare** Hosea 1:2; Hosea 3:1; Revelation 17:1, 2; and Revelation 18:1–4. What is the harlotry mentioned here? What lessons can the Christian church learn from the story of Hosea? In what ways has the church repeated the sins of the Old Testament?

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The Bible reveals that the errors of Israel in the Old Testament would be largely repeated by Christ's New Testament church. God's covenant people went wildly astray prior to their exile, bringing the idolatrous practices of neighboring nations into God's covenant nation. In the early fourth century, the Christian church, sensing a potential advantage, courted the emperor of Rome, Constantine, and invited him to start settling the disputes of the church. In each case, God's people wandered outside of their relationship with Him in order to find "solutions" for perceived problems.

God's choice of words makes it seem obvious that He is not only trying to show us what we've done wrong but also sharing how it makes Him feel. Those who have been betrayed by a spouse can begin to grasp the feelings of devastation that our infidelity to Christ might stir in the courts of heaven. Perhaps the most amazing part of Hosea's story is the lengths to which the prophet went to redeem his wayward wife.

When we see the final cry to humanity, calling God's people to come out of Babylon, it is noteworthy that He is calling *His own people*, and not strangers. He knows them intimately. He loves them. And as the world pitches toward its worst hour, He is still offering the redemption price that He had paid in order to purchase us back with His own blood. The cross of Christ, more than anything else, should show us just how earnestly the Lord wants to save His wayward people.

**What are the ways today that any church, even our own, can be dallying with spiritual fornication?**

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## Isaac and Rebekah

When Abraham was old and no doubt thinking about the promises made to him by God about his posterity (*see Gen. 15:5*), he gave his oldest and most trusted servant a solemn task.

**Read** Genesis 24:1–4. Why was it so important to Abraham that his son not marry “‘from the daughters of the Canaanites’ ” (*Gen. 24:3, NKJV*)?

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However exclusivist his admonition could seem, the issue for Abraham was spiritual, not ethnic; it was theological, not national. Abraham knew very well the moral degeneracy of Canaanite religious practices, not to mention their worship of false gods, and he knew how easy it would be for his son to fall into these practices were he to marry from among them.

Indeed, the story of so much of ancient Israel, and even of the Christian church through the centuries, has been one in which God’s people—who should have been witnessing to the world—get caught up instead in the world and in its false teachings and religious beliefs. Perhaps the greatest example of this sad reality has been the introduction of Sunday, the pagan day of the sun, in place of the biblical seventh-day Sabbath, a reality that will play a prominent role in the last days.

**Read** Genesis 24:57–67. What lessons can we glean about Christ and His church from some details we find in this story? What is there to learn, for instance, about our fallen state from the fact that Rebekah was a distant, separated relative to Isaac?

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We are undoubtedly related to our Creator, having originally been made in His image. We have been separated from Him by sin, and yet, we are still considered to be the right bride for Him though our choices can make the marriage more turbulent than it needs to be.

**Yes, God loves us, His bride, more than we love Him. What are the choices we can make—and should make—every day that can strengthen our love for God? At the same time, what choices will only deaden our love?**

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## The Harlot Is Judged

**Read** Revelation 19:1–9. Two things are celebrated simultaneously: the end of the harlot and the marriage of Christ with His bride. How is it possible that both events are actually demonstrations of God’s righteous and loving character at the same time?

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Infidelity comes with a very painful price tag. The fallout spills over into the lives of children and others. Even the most patient of wronged spouses may eventually discover that there is a moment of no return, past which the marriage can no longer be redeemed. When our world reaches a point where hearts have hardened deeply enough that there will be no more repentance, no point exists in continuing history and allowing the unbridled suffering of sin to continue. Even though there is heartbreak over the lost, those who have suffered under this world’s dispensation of sin can celebrate that it is finally over—and that the world is being restored to the way God originally designed it. This time there will *not* be a turning away from God, because we have learned, the hard way, that God was correct about the devastation that comes from separating ourselves from Him.

**Read** Revelation 21:1–4. What does the marriage imagery here mean, and why is it full of hope and promise? What is our assurance of the hope presented in these verses?

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“Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward the church is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest toward each other.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 46.

Christ suffered unimaginable pain as the human race rejected Him and gave the affection that belongs to Him to other gods. And yet, even then, He gave Himself for us, paying in Himself for our infidelities and adulteries so that, if we repent and turn away from them, we have the promise of eternal life.

**Read 1 Peter 1:18, 19.** What are we told in these verses that gives us the assurance of the end as depicted in Revelation 21:1–4?

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**Further Thought:** Read John 2:1–11, Matthew 22:1–14, 2 Corinthians 11:1–5, and Matthew 25:1–13.

Once you realize how much data is available in the rest of the Bible to help you broaden your understanding of prophecy, it can be tempting to over-apply it. Throughout the centuries, some Christians have emphasized the symbolism and imagery found in Bible stories to the point where they virtually begin to treat the historical narrative as a myth. While layers of meaning are to be found just about everywhere in Scripture, we must always remember that God has a way of taking real events that involve real people and using them to teach us things about His future interactions with the church.

The wedding feast in Cana, for example, may offer insights into the metaphor of marriage used by prophecy, but the wedding was a literal event. “The word of Christ supplied ample provision for the feast. So abundant is the provision of His grace to blot out the iniquities of men, and to renew and sustain the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 149.

Or as she writes here: “‘The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.’ While ‘the secret things belong unto the Lord our God,’ ‘those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever.’ Amos 3:7; Deuteronomy 29:29. God has given these things to us, and His blessing will attend the reverent, prayerful study of the prophetic scriptures.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 234.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Read John 2:1–11. There are many elements in John’s Gospel that foreshadow Christ’s future work, and commentators have noticed the deliberate way in which John moves his readers forward to the Cross. Where do you see various aspects of Christ’s character and future kingdom being demonstrated in this story? What does it teach us about the plan of salvation or about the ultimate marriage feast that has been promised to God’s Son?
- ② The parable of the ten virgins is widely known and much loved by students of the Bible. What does this important story teach us about last-day events? Is it significant that the groom is delayed? What lessons might this parable teach about our individual relationships to Christ versus the way that Christ relates to the church corporately?
- ③ Think about false practices that have entered into Christianity from outside the faith. Besides the obvious one, Sunday, as opposed to the biblical Sabbath, what other false beliefs have come in? How have they come in, and what can we do not only to protect ourselves from them but to help others see what they really are? In what ways are the three angels’ messages an attempt to do just that, to help people see the false beliefs that have entered the faith?

## Big Bucket of Butter

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After someone stole the family cow, Mother got a dog to watch their new cow. Mother also wanted the dog to guard the tithe: a big bucket of butter.

Father, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, was far away in a Soviet labor camp on charges of keeping the Sabbath. The cow was the only source of income for Mother and her two small children in the then-southern Soviet republic of Tajikistan. Mother milked the cow and exchanged the milk for food at a market. Mother also set aside 10 percent of the milk as tithe, churning it into butter and storing it in a bucket. When the bucket was full, she sold it.

One day, Mother milked the cow and told the two children to wait as she went to the market. “Don’t open the door,” she said. She checked that the bucket of butter was near the dog, who was tied up in the yard, and she left.

The children waited and waited. Then the gate opened, and a stranger entered the yard. The dog didn’t bark. The man, who was wearing Muslim clothes, walked over to the dog. It was as if the dog didn’t see him. The man picked up the butter bucket, turned around, and left. Later, the children excitedly told Mother about the man. No one understood what had happened.

Many years passed. Father was freed from the labor camp and resumed his duties as a pastor. He and Mother had five more children. Their eldest daughter, Nina, married and had children of her own. She also got a job, cleaning the offices of a fertilizer company. Now to get paid, Nina had to go to the company’s accountant. One day, as she was waiting for her salary, she told the accountant about the bucket of butter. The accountant listened politely until Nina described seeing the man in Muslim clothes. The accountant blurted out, “When did that happen?” Nina told her. The accountant began to cry. “Do you want to know how the story ended?” she asked. She said she and her four siblings grew up in Siberia. Their parents were killed during World War II, and they lived with their grandmother. Times were tough, and the day came when the food ran out. Grandmother called the five children to pray around the empty table. After praying, a knock sounded on the door. Outside stood a man wearing Muslim clothes. In one hand, he held a bucket of butter. In the other, he held a loaf of bread.

At the fertilizer company, the accountant begged Nina to tell her more about God. In time, the accountant and her daughter gave their hearts to Jesus and joined the Adventist Church.

To this day, no one knows the identity of the mysterious man. But Liubov Brunton, Nina’s daughter, has no doubt that he was an angel.

“For an angel, it took only a split second to transport the bucket of butter from Tajikistan to Siberia,” she said. “I just wonder where the angel found the bread. I can’t wait to get to heaven to hear the rest of the story.”

# The Nations: Part 1



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 10:1–12, Gen. 12:1–9, 1 Sam. 8:4–18, Matt. 20:25–28, Rev. 18:1–4.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed’ ” (*Daniel 7:14, NKJV*).

**T**he book of Revelation shows us God's solutions for our fallen world. In the final chapters, access to the tree of life is restored, the curse is lifted, and we are readmitted into the presence of God. Revelation, in some ways, is the book of Genesis in reverse, which is why Genesis remains an important key to understanding how the world's problems developed in the first place.

One of the key issues in both Daniel and Revelation is worldly government, a succession of human attempts to control a planet that rightfully belongs to God, who will—once this horrible episode of sin and rebellion is forever ended—ultimately rule in righteousness.

It is a very long process that leads to this moment, covering thousands of years of human experiments in self-government. They have never worked; even those expressing the highest ideals have always fallen short, often terribly short, of those ideals. So much of the sad history of humanity through the millennia is nothing but accounts of the tragedy that these failed systems have brought upon us. And it only will get worse until God's “everlasting kingdom” (*Dan. 7:27*) finally is established.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 26.

## Nimrod and Nineveh

Eden was created as the ideal home for the human race. Once sin entered, God had no choice but to separate humanity from the Garden and the tree of life, at least for now.

Outside of the Garden, humans were required to work hard to provide for their own continued existence. Life became harder; we had to live with pain and by the sweat of our brow (*Gen. 3:16–19*). Our first parents trusted that the rightful King would provide a path back into the Garden, and they brought sacrifices to the gates of Eden in faithful anticipation of the redemption that God, right from the start, offered the fallen world.

“The Garden of Eden remained upon the earth long after man had become an outcast from its pleasant paths. . . . Hither came Adam and his sons to worship God. Here they renewed their vows of obedience to that law the transgression of which had banished them from Eden. When the tide of iniquity overspread the world, and the wickedness of men determined their destruction by a flood of waters, the hand that had planted Eden withdrew it from the earth. But in the final restitution, when there shall be ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (*Revelation 21:1*), it is to be restored more gloriously adorned than at the beginning.”  
—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.

Others, however, worked on man-made “solutions” to our newfound problems, and we see the birth of city-states, an attempt to create an easier life, and perhaps to try to recapture what was lost in Eden.

**Read** Genesis 10:1–12. This is where the Bible introduces a number of key political players found throughout the rest of the Bible, including Nineveh and Babylon. Given what we know about the roles of those cities later on, what can we deduce from these texts?

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Some have read about Nimrod and concluded that he is a noble hero, much like the conquering heroes of pagan mythology. But when the Bible describes him as “a mighty one on the earth,” and a “mighty hunter before the LORD,” it is not a compliment. Nimrod is great in his own estimation, and he stands “before” the Lord in the sense that he defies God. What we see in these texts is the spreading of the rebellion against God, a rebellion that will exist until, ultimately, all rebellion will be forever eradicated.

**Why is the sin of rebellion against God more subtle than we might realize? How can we protect ourselves against this very human trait?**



## Abraham's Call

In the tenth chapter of Genesis, we see the birth of various nations. The word usually translated “nations” is *goyim*, which also can refer to Gentiles. Genesis 10 tells us that the human race divided up into lands, languages, families, and “nations” (*Gen. 10:5; see also Rev. 14:6*).

Almost immediately after the introduction of this concept, God calls Abraham out of one of those nations to be different from them and from what they represent.

**Read** Genesis 12:1–9. Why did God call Abram (later Abraham) out from his country of origin?

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God intended to use Abraham to establish a nation that would stand in contrast to human kingdoms. They were not to have a king other than God Himself. The people were to show what would happen if the human race returned to their Creator. Israel was established to be a blessing to “ ‘all the families of the earth’ ” (*Gen. 12:3, NKJV*). God had poured out upon the Israelites light and privileges that had not been seen in the world since, perhaps, before the Flood.

**Read** Deuteronomy 4:5–9. What was the Lord telling the children of Abraham, the nation that had become a fulfillment of the promise God had made to Abraham?

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This was not a single individual bearing witness in a single community; this was an entire *nation* that, by working together and in cooperation with God, could exhibit the glory of His character. Notice, too, in the words spoken to them that it wasn't just “statutes and judgments” that God had given them that made them so special, but their adherence to them that would cause the other nations to say, “ ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’ ” (*Deut. 4:6, NKJV*). However wonderful the truths given to the people, their failure to live up to them, to obey them, would bring curses instead of blessing and death instead of life.

**How does the same principle, that of not just knowing these truths but obeying them, apply to us as Adventists today?**

## Given What You Asked For

As originally established, Israel was not to have a human monarch, the way that other nations did. In time, however, the people's faith faltered, and they found themselves pining for the things that "the nations," the Gentiles, had.

**Read 1 Samuel 8:4–18.** Why do you suppose the elders found the idea of a king appealing? In what ways do we fall prey to similar temptations?

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It is important to notice that the request for a king was a rejection of God's reign over His people. As established, the nation was to answer directly to the Creator, and their relationship to Him was put on display through the sanctuary and its services, among other things. By requesting a king, they would bring the same kinds of suffering on themselves that the Gentile kingdoms experienced: military conscription in the king's wars, confiscation, taxation, and other ills. They would discover that human potentates tend to rule in their own favor instead of benevolently, as God does.

Also, the new arrangement would be permanent: Israel would be given what they asked for, but when they realized that it was a downgrade, they would be stuck with it. " 'And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day' " (*1 Sam. 8:18, NKJV*).

God knows the weakness of His people, and He predicted early on that Israel would request a human king. They did, and so much of sacred history is the story of the consequences of that choice.

Read Deuteronomy 17:14–20. Notice that God does not say, "I will give them a king," but rather, His people decide that they want one. God put safeguards in place to protect His people from some of the evils of human government—though, as the history of the nation and its kings showed, the safeguards often were ignored.

One simply has to look at the history of Israel after they decided to have a king in order to see just how badly things went for them under these kings. Though some kings were better than others, even the "good" ones had done wrong (think of David and Bathsheba). In many cases, the nation lived under the rule of one king after another who did "evil in the sight of the LORD" (*see 1 Kings 11:6, 1 Kings 15:26, 1 Kings 16:30, 2 King 3:2, etc.*).

Back then, or even today, all human governments share one thing in common: sinners governing other sinners. *What possibly could go wrong?*

## The Rulers of the Gentiles

God's dealings with Israel provide rich insights into His dealings with the New Testament church. In fact, in many ways, the nation of Israel served to foreshadow the errors of the church. Far from being able to claim any kind of superiority to ancient Israel, Christians have been, and still are, very much susceptible to the same temptations.

**Read** Matthew 20:25–28. What error did Jesus warn His disciples to avoid in establishing the work of the Christian church?

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Israel asked for a human king, a request that led to the moral downfall of the nation. The kings became progressively more wicked until God allowed the Babylonians to take His people captive as a matter of course correction.

Something similar happened in the history of the Christian church. Even though they were not to structure themselves like a Gentile nation, when Constantine came to power and professed to be a Christian, believers were relieved—persecution was now ended! That in itself was a blessing, but then it occurred to the church that they might be able to leverage the power of the emperor to their own advantage.

Several major disputes broke out among Christians in the fourth century, and when the church found itself incapable of resolving them, appeals were made to the emperor to intervene. From this point forward, the bishop of Rome rose in prominence, where he had once been one senior bishop among equals. The church asked the state to intervene in the religious matters, and once the state had a foot in the door, things went from bad to worse.

Like Israel of old, many of the darkest chapters in Christian history are the direct result of the church compromising with the world. Where Israel turned to idol worship and her kings were corrupted by their appetite for power—to the point of offering children to idols—the church gradually adopted many of the means and methods of a pagan empire to the point that many faithful believers were martyred because they were perceived as threats to the church-state institution.

**In your own culture, your own society, what are the ways in which these same temptations can jeopardize the integrity of our faith?**

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## A Light to the Gentiles

The primary purpose for which God established the nation of Israel was not to condemn the rest of the world but to save it. Certainly, most of us feel condemned when we are confronted by righteous behavior in someone else; so the existence of Israel also served to highlight the sin and selfishness of the nations around it. Believers living in harmony with God highlight His righteous character, which naturally leads to conviction. Ideally, the lives of people who “keep the commandments of God” (*Rev. 14:12*) should showcase His character.

However, had the Israelites acted as they should have and done what they had been told to do, the nations would have come to them in peace, seeking to know more about them and their God. Tragically, as the Babylonian captivity showed, these nations came to wage war instead.

The ultimate showcase of God’s character, of course, was Jesus—the only human who has perfectly demonstrated it. But His perfect example, which certainly brought conviction to hearts, was intended as an invitation (*see John 3:16–21*).

The ultimate purpose for establishing the nation of Israel was the same as God’s purpose in establishing the church: He longs to use His people to draw sinners toward Christ. The call of the three angels’ messages, delivered through His church, goes out, not to a select few but to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). Revelation 18:1 predicts that the whole earth will be lighted up with the glory of God prior to Christ’s return.

**What** do the following passages teach us about God’s intended role for His people in this world? How can we apply these principles to ourselves?

(a) *Num. 14:17–21* \_\_\_\_\_

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(b) *Isa. 42:6, Isa. 49:6, Isa. 60:3* \_\_\_\_\_

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(c) *Rev. 18:1–4* \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read again Revelation 18:1–4, the call for “my people,” that is, God’s people, to come out of Babylon. How is that going to happen? In other words, how can we, as a church that is not in Babylon, be used by God to call out God’s people who are still in Babylon?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Isaiah 44:24–45:13.

“Little by little, at first in stealth and silence, and then more openly as it increased in strength and gained control of the minds of men, ‘the mystery of iniquity’ carried forward its deceptive and blasphemous work. Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and his apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Now the work of corruption rapidly progressed. Paganism, while appearing to be vanquished, became the conqueror. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, ceremonies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 49, 50.

In line with the question at the end of Wednesday’s study, are we not all in danger, especially the longer we are here, of setting “aside the humble simplicity of Christ and his apostles” for the pomp, power, accolades, and temptations of the world? If we think we’re not, we are fooling ourselves.

**Discussion Questions:**

**①** When God exiled His people to Babylon, it was a particularly painful moment. Abraham had been called *out* of Chaldea to establish a covenant people as a light for the planet, and now they were taken away in chains. During their captivity, God showed Israel what might have been if they had been faithful. Nebuchadnezzar, the very head of a system utterly opposed to God, comes to Christ (*Daniel 4*). At the end of the Israelites’ captivity, God raises up a Persian king to serve as a type of Christ, releasing His people from Babylon and returning them to the Promised Land. Cyrus was not an Israelite, and yet God chose him to demonstrate the plan of salvation to the world as he returned God’s covenant people to Jerusalem. What lessons can we learn about how God views humanity from the fact that He was now using people *outside* of Israel to accomplish His goals?

**②** We might not be in Babylon, but how much of Babylon might be in us? How do we recognize this problem, and how can we change?

## Unlikely Church Planter

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

When Sunita got married, her new family assumed that she would automatically become a Seventh-day Adventist. In her Asian culture, the wife does whatever the husband says, so her husband, Manoj, and his parents thought that she would adopt his faith as a matter of course. But Sunita didn't.

When her in-laws saw that she still worshiped images of stone and wood, they tried their best to tell her about Jesus. The extended family lived in the same house, and the in-laws invited her to family worship. But she wasn't interested. No one forced her to come, and she avoided the gatherings.

A year and a half passed, and Sunita and Manoj moved from their small town to a big city. Now Manoj tried to turn his wife away from her worship practices.

"We as a family don't believe in image worship," he said. "It's not right. We should not do it."

But Sunita didn't know any other way of life, and Manoj didn't try to force her to stop. As time passed, Sunita gave birth to two sons. Then she fell seriously ill.

"Let's go to the Adventist church," Manoj said. "You've tried so many pills and other things, but nothing helps. Let's go just once."

Sunita didn't see any way out. She had no hope, so she agreed to go. It was her first time entering an Adventist church—or any church.

Sunita felt very good inside the building. Even though the service was in English and she understood little, she felt the warmth of church members as they welcomed her. The next week, Sunita returned and asked the pastor to add her name to a list of prayer requests made during the divine worship service. After the prayer, Sunita began to feel better. Her health slowly improved, and eventually she made a full recovery.

Sunita regularly attended church for the next four years. When an assistant pastor who spoke her language joined the church, she took Bible studies and was baptized. From that moment, she began to pray, "Let me serve You."

A few years passed, and Sunita was invited to plant churches as a Global Mission pioneer. She happily agreed. Today, she leads a church plant in an impoverished district of her city. She started the church by praying with people. As her prayers were answered, other people heard by word of mouth and came to her to ask for prayers. Fifteen people have been baptized.

"I never thought that I would come out of my faith and get to know the true God," Sunita said before taking Adventist Mission on a Sabbath visit to her church plant. "It was His will to bring me out, and He's using me for His glory."

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*Thank you for your prayers for Global Mission pioneers who, like Sunita, face huge challenges planting churches among unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers on the Adventist Mission website: [bit.ly/GMPioneers](http://bit.ly/GMPioneers).*

# The Nations: Part 2



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 2:9–17; Dan. 2:31–35; Isa. 17:12, 13; Dan. 7:1–3; Rom. 3:10–19; Rev. 12:15, 16; Rev. 10:1–11.*

**Memory Text:** “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (*Psalms 46:10, NKJV*).

Through the centuries, some people have argued that God wanted the Fall, that it was His intention for humans to descend into sin and death and thus lead Him—in the person of Jesus—to the cross. After all, how else could He have so powerfully and graphically displayed the depth of His love for humanity than by dying on the cross for them? In short, the thinking goes, God needed humanity to fall.

That is a horrible and wretched position to take. It was never God's intention for either Satan or humanity to fall. The rebellion of Satan, and then of humanity, was a tragedy of immense consequence, and our joy in Him would have remained complete had our first parents not fallen.

This week, we will continue looking at the problems caused by the Fall and the desire for human government as opposed to God's governance. These truths are powerfully revealed in the book of Daniel, which shows that God was right when He warned His people about what would happen when they turned away from Him and chose earthly monarchs instead. This is exactly what they got: earthly monarchs and sinners lording it over sinners—never a good combination.

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



## The Very First Commandment

The Garden of Eden was a classroom for God's first people, a place where their interaction with the creation would endlessly teach them and their offspring more about the Creator. "The holy pair were not only children under the fatherly care of God," Ellen G. White pointed out, "but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator. . . . The mysteries of the visible universe—the wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge' (*Job 37:16*)—afforded them an exhaustless source of instruction and delight."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 50, 51.

**Read** Genesis 2:9–17. What was the first command, a prohibition, that God gave to humanity, and why was it so important?

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The first use of the root verb *tswh*, "to command," that God gave to humans was in Genesis 2:16, 17, the command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. How can some knowledge be forbidden? Isn't it always useful to experience and to know more?

Not according to Scripture: God was intent on educating His people thoroughly while sparing them from the long-term suffering that some knowledge would cause, such as what would later happen when people chose to rule themselves rather than to be ruled by the Lord Himself.

Millennia later, when Israel asked for a king, the Lord laid out the consequences (as we discovered last week), and He informed His people that the decision to step away from His direct rule would last until the end of time.

As the kings of Israel became progressively more wicked, God's covenant people became so worldly and so removed from their purpose that He gave them even more of what they wanted: human government.

Approaching the book of Daniel with this background in mind can be enlightening. Not only is the march of empires depicted in the book's visions an indictment of "the nations"—the Gentiles—it is also an indictment of Israel's failures, their refusal to follow His *mitsvot* (commandments). Centuries of subjection, instead of the freedom first given in Eden, would become a new classroom in which willing hearts could witness the striking contrast between the kingdoms of this world and God's kingdom.

**Think about the kinds of knowledge, even now, that many of us would be better off not knowing. How does this help us understand what was forbidden in Eden?**

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## Daniel 2

It was during the Babylonian captivity, through the prophet Daniel, that God presented the most compelling descriptions we have of the relationship between His people and the kingdoms of this world. His people were no longer autonomous; they would now be reaping the consequences of their choices. (And, perhaps, learning from them?)

**Read Daniel 2:31–35, which gives a sweeping panoramic view of world history until the end of time. What important truths can we learn from this amazing prophecy?**

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At the end of the nineteenth century, many people were exuding a new confidence in human progress. The Paris Exposition (1900), for example, was a remarkable showcase of optimism about the future. Surely, with all of our technological and scientific advances, many of humanity's worst problems would be at an end! As humanity entered the twentieth century, among many thinkers there was this great optimism that Enlightenment ideals—such as human perfectibility and the power of reason—would usher in a wonderful new era for humanity.

World War I, however, quickly shattered those dreams, and by the end of the twentieth century, we had lost more than 200 million people to warfare. We may have advanced in a technological sense, but certainly not in a moral one. To paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., we have guided missiles but misguided men. And *that's* a very scary combination.

Many students of prophecy have noticed that the metals in Daniel 2 move from most valuable to least valuable: gold devalues to silver, silver devalues to brass, and brass to iron, until we end up with only iron and clay.

Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and other nineteenth-century thinkers attempted to convince us that humanity is somehow tracking upward—that we are evolving biologically and socially. And though in some ways human existence has improved (at least at a physical level), who actually looks ahead to the future of this world, as it is now ruled and governed, with much optimism about peace, security, and prosperity?

**Jesus warned, “‘And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . . For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places’ ” (Matt. 24:6, 7, NKJV). Despite these warnings, how can we draw comfort from knowing that we have been warned beforehand about them?**

## Daniel 7

The dream of Daniel 2 was first presented to a Babylonian king. The vision of Daniel 7, in contrast, was presented to a Hebrew prophet, a member of God's covenant people.

Daniel is shown the same subject as was Nebuchadnezzar but from a different perspective. Instead of a statue, he sees a series of nations rising up out of the sea, the result of wind churning up the water. These nations were in a continual state of strife, causing a perpetual shift in power among them. Such passages as Psalm 65:5–8; Isaiah 17:12, 13; and Jeremiah 46:7, 8 use the analogy of floods and waves to depict the tumult among the nations.

In contrast, the Promised Land existed, at least for a period of time, as an island of peace and safety amid a sea of Gentile kingdoms—a sacred nation established on the solid foundation of God's government, as opposed to the unruly nations around it.

**Read Daniel 7:1–3. There is a lot of movement in this scene. What lessons can we draw from this imagery, such as the beast first arising from the sea?**

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Daniel watches the chaos of Gentile warfare from the shore, when suddenly the beasts start *coming up on the land*—into his territory! Gentile problems had now become his people's problems. They had chosen to live *like* Gentiles, so now they would live with (and under) Gentiles. Starting with Babylonian domination, God's covenant people never again enjoyed complete or long-lasting autonomy.

This loss of autonomy for God's people today will persist until the close of time, when Christ is finally restored to His rightful place as our King. In the New Testament, God's people continued to suffer under the thumb of the Roman Empire and then under the persecutions of the little horn, pagan Rome's successor.

Though, historically, some nations have been better than others, and some eras have been more peaceful than others, the vast majority of the history of nations, peoples, and empires has simply been going from one tragedy to another, from one oppressor to another. And often this is all done under rulers claiming only the best of intentions for their own people. What a contrast to the rule that God had wanted for His people, if only they would have chosen it.

**How does Romans 3:10–19 help explain so much of our world? How does verse 19 especially show why we so desperately need the gospel in our lives?**

## Between Land and Sea

The land and sea imagery in the Bible, especially for prophecy, can be very instructive. Consider the case of the symbols of *land* and *sea* in Bible prophecy, which are contrasted sharply.

“Symbolically, when earth and sea are juxtaposed, *earth* often represents the ordered world, or even the land of Israel, while *sea* refers to the Gentile nations that menace it as the sea menaces the land.”—Beatrice S. Neall, “Sealed Saints and the Tribulation,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, book 1, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), p. 260.

In this thinking, *land* is a place of stability, established on the government of God; *sea* represents the unstable turmoil of nations established on human pride.

**With** the idea expressed above as the background, read Revelation 12:15, 16 and Revelation 13:1, 11. Notice the juxtaposition between water and earth. How are they used, and what can they teach us about how to understand prophecy?

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Notice that the dragon uses *water* to persecute the woman (the church). As we have seen, in prophecy water often symbolizes worldly governments and the turmoil and chaos that often attends them. Hence, we can see how Satan was able to use the masses, prodded by their leaders, to persecute God’s people through much of church history.

Also, Seventh-day Adventists have understood Revelation 12:16 to refer to the migration of persecuted believers to the New World. If our understanding of *land* and *sea* is correct, what does this say about the founding of the American republic?

Could we consider it to be “the earth” in the same way that the “Promised Land” was—a place set aside for God’s people? Could this be why the land beast first appears to be lamblike? Though America has never been the “New Israel” as some of its early founders liked to see it, for a long time it has been a land of religious freedom for millions of the world’s religiously oppressed.

Unfortunately, this lamblike beast will one day speak “like a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11, NKJV*). The United States, so long a beacon of religious freedom for the persecuted, will become the dominant religious persecutor! This is another example of what happened when humanity chose to rule itself instead of being ruled by God.

## Prophecy Again

The remnant church was born in the New World, precisely where those seeking religious liberty had fled during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Given the long-standing religious and political obstacles that existed elsewhere, it is doubtful that the launch of this movement would have been as swift or powerful in some other location as it was in the new land that became the United States.

**Read** Revelation 10:1–11, which describes the birth of the movement. Look for some of the elements we have studied, such as “the nations,” the land, and the sea. Applying appropriate caution so that you do not read too much into the passage, what potential insights can you find in this account?

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The angel cries with a loud voice, much as the three angels of Revelation 14 and the angel of Revelation 18 do. This is an urgent moment in history when the work of the remnant church is established for the sake of “ ‘many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings’ ” (*Rev. 10:11, NKJV*).

The angel holds a “little book”—likely the book of Daniel (*see Dan. 12:4*)—which is open for the first time in many generations. He has one foot on the sea and another on the earth. This might be in reference to the idea that the message covers the globe, both the Old World and the New. It might also be a reference to the idea that this message is for *all* nations: those who live on the land and those who live in the “Gentile” sea.

The world, at long last, will be lighted up with the glory of God, and the final messages of Revelation 14 are carried to *everyone*. As with Israel, our mandate as a church is to preach the gospel “ ‘in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’ ” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*).

God is pushing human history toward its grand conclusion: the end of human empires and the permanent enthronement of Christ. Read Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45. The Bible makes it perfectly clear, without any ambiguity, that all these worldly kingdoms will be eradicated, without a trace of them and their ugly legacies left, and will be replaced by God’s eternal kingdom, where sin, suffering, sickness, evil, and death will never rise again.

**Look at how accurately the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 predicted the rise and fall of all these worldly empires. Why should that accuracy, amazing if you think about when Daniel was written, help us trust Him on the promise of God’s final and eternal kingdom?**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Tower of Babel,” pp. 117–124, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“ ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.’ Revelation 21:1. The fire that consumes the wicked purifies the earth. Every trace of the curse is swept away. No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin.

“One reminder alone remains: our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, upon His side, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought. Says the prophet, beholding Christ in His glory: ‘He had bright beams coming out of His side: and there was the hiding of His power.’ Habakkuk 3:4, margin. That pierced side whence flowed the crimson stream that reconciled man to God—there is the Saviour’s glory, there ‘the hiding of His power.’ ‘Mighty to save,’ through the sacrifice of redemption, He was therefore strong to execute justice upon them that despised God’s mercy. And the tokens of His humiliation are His highest honor; through the eternal ages the wounds of Calvary will show forth His praise and declare His power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 674.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① In the end, all earthly accomplishments, no matter how grand, no matter how great, no matter how awe-inspiring and glorious, will be turned to dust, to ashes, and ultimately vanquished forever. That includes whatever great and glorious earthly things you might have accomplished or are accomplishing now. Why is it always important to keep this perspective in mind? How should this perspective help you keep your priorities straight?
- ② Have a careful look at the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–10. In what ways is this beast the natural consequence of the mindset of Babel? It is clearly the sum total of all human “nations,” from Babylon through to the little horn power. What characteristics of each empire have you noticed that have persisted throughout time? In what ways does the world still reflect the values of Babylon or Rome, for example?
- ③ How do we as Adventists strike the right balance between following the Lord and obeying the laws of whatever nation or government we live under? What happens when obedience to one leads to disobedience to the other?

## Part 1: A Girl's Religion

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

When she was 12, Diana began drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, and listening to hard rock music. Amid the partying, her thoughts turned to God.

God hadn't been much of a part of Diana's early childhood. Her father spent a lot of time overseas as a sailor in the Navy, and the family, like many military families, moved every two or three years. A few times, her mother took her and her sisters to church on Sundays when they were very young and lived in Florida.

Diana had the chance to attend Vacation Bible School, at the age of 10, while living in Norfolk, Virginia. A bus came around her neighborhood from the Baptist church and picked her and her older sister up. She memorized John 3:16 and the books of the Bible. She learned about missionaries and respecting the unchangeable Word of God. She chose to be baptized. The church gave her a spiritual foundation. Outside of church was a different story. Diana was being molested, and the trauma would impact her for years.

Then the family moved again when she was 12, this time to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Many of the neighborhood children used alcohol and drugs, and Diana joined them.

At 14, Diana moved with her family to Monte Vista, Colorado. While smoking marijuana with her new friends, she sometimes spoke about God. When she was 16, many of her friends were required to take religious classes. Wanting a deeper relationship with her friends, Diana attended the classes with them. During one class, the priest declared that the authority of their church was above the authority of the Word of God because the church had changed God's day of worship from the biblical seventh day, Saturday, to the first day, Sunday.

Diana was shocked and concerned. She remembered learning that God's Word could not be changed. She wondered, "Why do people worship on the first day when the Bible clearly says to worship on the seventh day?" Diana decided to finish the religious classes but not to attend the church.

She kept on drinking, using drugs, and listening to hard rock music. Over time, they became her identity, her life, her religion.




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*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.*



# Understanding Sacrifice



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 1:2–15, Heb. 10:3–10, Exod. 12:1–11, 1 Cor. 5:7, Hag. 2:7–9, Isa. 6:1–5, Rev. 4:7–11.*

**Memory Text:** “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation’ ” (*Revelation 5:9, NKJV*).

When Jesus came toward him, John the Baptist declared: “ ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ” (*John 1:29, NKJV*). This was an unmistakable reference to the idea of animal sacrifice, all of which pointed to Christ’s substitutionary death in behalf of all humanity.

In the Bible, we cannot escape the theme of animal sacrifice; it runs like a scarlet thread throughout its pages and plays a central role in the grand scene in Revelation, where John is escorted into God’s throne room (*Revelation 4 and 5*). The fact that Jesus appears in this pivotal scene, looking like a slain lamb (*Rev. 5:6*), is an important key to understanding the entire prophetic episode.

This week we will look at some of the themes of sacrifice that inform our understanding of Jesus, the slain Lamb, the clear protagonist of the throne room scene. He is accepted as worthy, where no one else is, and His unique worthiness speaks volumes about what the Lord was doing through the sacrificial system. It reveals Him as a God of infinite love who made the ultimate sacrifice, an act that we, and the other intelligences in the universe, will marvel at for eternity.

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

## Futile Sacrifices?

Sometimes contrasting two ideas can be very instructive. Much can be learned about the nature of sacrifice in the biblical perspective from when God actually *rejected* the sacrifices of His people.

**Compare** Isaiah 1:2–15 with Isaiah 56:6, 7 and Psalm 51:17. What important lessons about sacrifice are taught here?

This tragic episode in Israel's history was not the first time that God rejected a sacrifice; something similar happened near the beginning of salvation history, when Abel's sacrifice was approved and acknowledged by God, and Cain's was not. That early episode gives us another opportunity to contrast acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices. (See *Gen. 4:3–7* and *Heb. 11:4*.)

In Isaiah's time, Israel was going through the motions, mentally checking off religious boxes in a minimal attempt to appease God, all while living as they pleased. Their sacrifices were anchored in self, just as Cain's were, and not in an attitude of surrender and submission to God.

It is the same spirit that animates the kingdoms of this world: the spirit of self-sufficiency. Cain would live as he pleased and render mere ritual to God on his own terms. One can only assume that he viewed God as an inconvenience, a roadblock to setting his own course, but he feared God just enough to go through the motions.

Abel, however, offered the sacrifice God had requested, the sacrifice that exhibited the promise God had made of a coming Messiah (*Gen. 3:15*): a lamb, pointing forward to the saving act of Christ at Calvary.

"Abel grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself a sinner, and he saw sin and its penalty, death, standing between his soul and communion with God. He brought the slain victim, the sacrificed life, thus acknowledging the claims of the law that had been transgressed. Through the shed blood he looked to the future sacrifice, Christ dying on the cross of Calvary; and trusting in the atonement that was there to be made, he had the witness that he was righteous, and his offering accepted."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 72.

**How crucial that we protect ourselves from simply going through the motions! How can each one of us experience what it means to depend totally upon the death of Jesus as our only hope of salvation?**

## The Blood of Bulls and Goats

Some have criticized the entire concept of sacrifice, claiming that it is cruel, harsh, and, in a sense, unfair. Yet, that's precisely the point. Christ's death was cruel, harsh, and unfair—the innocent dying for the guilty. That's what it took to solve the sin problem. And Christ's death was what all these harsh, cruel, and unfair sacrifices pointed to.

**Read** Hebrews 10:3–10. What does this passage teach us about the sacrifices God's people offered in the Old Testament? If sinners could not actually be saved by them, why offer them at all?

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The lambs and other sacrificial animals were mere symbols pointing forward to the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. They were acts of faith, giving sinners a tangible way to express faith in the work of the coming Messiah. We often refer to these kinds of symbols as *types*, which are fulfilled by an *antitype*, or the appearance of the thing or event they foreshadowed. Some have even described the sacrifices as “mini-prophecies” of the death of Jesus on the cross.

The rituals associated with sacrifice were a little like paying for a trip. When you purchase a train, bus, or airplane ticket, you do not immediately receive the journey you paid for. Instead, you are given a ticket or boarding pass, a symbol or promise of the journey to come. You can sit on that piece of paper all you want, but it will not convey you to any destination. Once you have boarded and the journey begins, however, you have received what you paid for, and the paper ticket becomes unnecessary.

So it was with the sacrificial animals. They had an important role to play, but once the real sacrifice was made, they became meaningless—a reality depicted when the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the earthly sanctuary was rent asunder at the death of Jesus. “Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (*Mark 15:38, NKJV*). The whole sacrificial system, temple and all, pointed forward to the death of Jesus on the cross. Once Jesus fulfilled His promise at the cross and rose victorious over death, the types became unnecessary.

**Think about just how bad sin must be that only the death of Jesus, the incarnate Word (see John 1:1–3, 14), could atone for it. What should this tell us about what our attitude toward sin must be?**

## The Passover Lamb

The book of Revelation refers to Jesus as “the Lamb” nearly 30 times. From the earliest days in the plan of redemption, God’s people have used lambs as a symbol of the coming Messiah. Abel offered “the firstborn of his flock” (*Gen. 4:4, NKJV*), and before the Israelites departed Egypt for the land of promise, they were instructed to redeem every firstborn person or animal with a one-year-old lamb (*Exod. 12:5*).

**Read** Exodus 12:1–11; Isaiah 53:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 5:7; and Revelation 5:6. What do these verses teach us about Jesus as the Passover sacrifice? What does that mean for each of us?

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Years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Peter reflected on what had transpired, and he wrote, “Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19, ESV*).

Jesus lived the one human life that satisfied the holiness of God; the rest of us have sinned, and the way we live our sinful lives quite literally tells lies about the nature of our Maker.

Jesus, however, became the “last Adam” (*1 Cor. 15:45*). Where we had failed, He lived perfectly. In His humanity, He was everything the human race was supposed to be. He reflected God’s glory perfectly. “If you have seen me,” He told Philip, “you have seen the Father” (*John 14:9, CEV*).

Jesus, meanwhile, was crucified on Passover, further demonstrating that He is the antitypical Lamb. In John 18:19, 20, Jesus said that He “spoke openly” (*NKJV*) of His doctrine. In a parallel way, regarding the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:5, 6, the children of Israel were instructed to choose a lamb for Passover, and “keep it,” or put it on display during the days leading up to the sacrifice. When the high priest questioned Jesus about His teachings, Jesus made reference to the fact that He Himself had been on open display in the temple for everybody to consider. His life, His works, His teaching—all revealed who He really was. He is the Lamb without blemish, the most powerful expression of God’s righteousness and glory.

**How can we can better reflect the perfect character of Jesus in our own lives?**

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## Jesus at the Temple

There is tension throughout the entire story of salvation. God wishes to restore the communion that we once enjoyed with Him and longs to draw close to us. But bringing sinners into His presence would destroy them. “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,” David writes, “nor shall evil dwell with You” (*Ps. 5:4, NKJV*). At the same time, David also writes, “But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple” (*Ps. 5:7, NKJV*).

**Read Haggai 2:7–9.** As the second temple was being constructed, the prophet Haggai made an astonishing promise: the new temple would be more glorious than the previous one. What was meant by that prophecy?

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When the first temple was dedicated by Solomon, the Shekinah glory—the presence of God that had accompanied the children of Israel en route to Canaan—filled the temple, and so the priests could not remain to complete their work of ministry (*1 Kings 8:10, 11*). When the second temple was dedicated, the ark of the covenant, representing God’s throne, was missing because some faithful men, upset at the nation’s sins, had hidden it. The literal presence of God did not fill the temple this time. It was heartbreaking. How could Haggai’s promise possibly come true?

It was in the second temple that Jesus, the incarnation of God, appeared in Person, in flesh and blood. God Himself had stepped out from behind the veil to become one of us and to join us in this broken world. Because the Son of God was now the Son of man, we could see His face, hear His voice, and witness, for example, when He touched an unclean leper and made him whole (*Matt. 8:3*). Instead of bringing us closer in *His* direction, God brought us closer to Him by moving in *our* direction. He came down, personally, to us. No wonder the Bible said about Jesus: “ ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’ ” (*Matt. 1:23, NKJV*). Think about what this means: the Creator of the cosmos condescended not only to live among us but to die for us.

**The Cross is by far the greatest manifestation of God’s love. What are other ways we can see and experience the reality of God’s love?**

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## For You Created All Things!

On a handful of occasions, prophets have been brought close enough to God in vision that they were permitted to see God's throne. Ezekiel saw it above the firmament (*Ezek. 1:26*); Isaiah visited the temple in heaven to see it (*Isa. 6:1*); and in one of the most explicit descriptions provided to us, John was escorted there in vision in Revelation 4 and 5. The Old Testament types in the sanctuary service indicated that there was only one path by which humanity could enter God's presence: the blood of Christ. (*See Lev. 16:2, 14, for example.*)

**Read** Isaiah 6:1–5 and Revelation 4:7–11. What elements of these two visions are similar? Pay attention to the order of events: What subject is presented first? What comes next? What truth about God is being stressed in these visions?

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In each of these throne room visions, the first thing that happens is that heavenly beings underscore the holiness of God. In Isaiah's vision, the scene is impressive: the temple is filled with smoke, and the "posts of the door" were shaken as seraphim proclaim the holiness of God. In John's vision, cherubim make the same announcement, "Holy, holy, holy." (See Ezekiel 10:14, 15 to find the living creatures described as *cherubim*.) Each prophet was shown a dazzling scene of God's glory.

Then we are shown the prophet's reaction to the scene. Isaiah cries out that he is a man of unclean lips (*Isa. 6:5*), and John weeps because he is faced with the tragic truth that no one worthy can be found (*Rev. 5:4*). When we are directly presented with the worthiness of God, we then finally begin to comprehend the human situation: we are utterly *unworthy*, and we need Christ as our Redeemer.

Satan has hurled many accusations against God, arguing that He is arbitrary, selfish, and severe, but even a brief moment in God's throne room exposes Satan's lies. It is in seeing Christ for who He truly is, "the Lamb who was slain" (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*), that enables us to see the Father as He truly is. How comforting to know that by seeing Jesus, we see what the Father is like (*John 14:9*). And the greatest revelation of what the Father is like is seen in Jesus dying on the cross for us.

The cross, then, should show us two things: first, just how much God loves us that He would sacrifice Himself for us; second, it should show us just how sinful and fallen we are that only through the cross could we be saved.

**Further Thought:** The Scriptures make it clear that Christ is the *only* One worthy to secure our salvation. His life was the only sinless human life, the only example of a life that rendered perfect satisfaction to the glory of the Father. He is the *spotless* Lamb of God, and now He stands at the head of the human race as our eternal security. At the same time, He took our guilt on Himself, satisfying the judgment that is God’s response to wickedness. As John witnesses the incredible scene of heavenly beings gathered around God’s throne, he is told to stop weeping because “ ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has prevailed’ ” (*Rev. 5:5, NKJV*).

Think, too, just how bad sin is, and just how fallen the human race really is, that only the death of Jesus, God Himself, would suffice to solve the problem of sin. No doubt, if there were some other way that God could have saved us, without violating the principles of His divine government, surely He would have done it.

“The broken law of God demanded the life of the sinner. In all the universe there was but one who could, in behalf of man, satisfy its claims. Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin—sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and His Son. Christ would reach to the depths of misery to rescue the ruined race.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① John sees the Lamb enter the throne room looking as though He had been “slain.” Revelation 13:8 informs us that Jesus has been “slain” since the foundation of the world. What can we learn about God through the fact that the plan of salvation was already in place before we needed it?
- ② Many atheists believe that we are alone in a cold, uncaring universe. In contrast, the Bible talks not only about God but about how He loved the world so much that He came down *to* it and even died *for* it. How differently should we view the world and our place in it, in contrast to those who don’t believe in God at all? In other words, how should the reality of the Cross impact all that we do?
- ③ Why was the life, death, and resurrection of Christ the *only* means by which the human race could be saved? Again, what does such a cost tell us about how bad sin must really be?

## Part 2: A Cry for Help

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Diana's party lifestyle began taking a heavy toll on her by the end of the summer after her high school graduation. One day, alone in a park in Monte Vista, Colorado, Diana looked up into the leaves of the trees and saw sunlight gleaming through. At that moment, she heard a voice say, "*If you don't leave here, you will die here.*" Diana knew that the voice was saying that her way of living would lead to an early death and that she needed to get away if she wanted to live.

She spoke with her mother about the future, and her mother asked, "Have you ever thought about the Navy?" Diana was annoyed at what she thought was a silly question, but, three months later, she was enlisted and training in Orlando, Florida. After that, she sailed the world. She saw many things that repulsed her. Every seaport had prostitution, gambling, and worse.

In rapid succession, Diana met and married a sailor, was honorably discharged from the Navy, and gave birth to three sons. They moved to Monte Vista, Colorado, but Diana's husband wasn't happy with family life.

Diana became depressed and began idolizing death. At first, she wished to fall ill and die. Then she thought about taking her own life. In desperation, she prayed, "God, I believe You are real, but I don't know where You are."

Strangely, over the next week, she had conversations with people from four different faith groups. First, two young missionaries came to her door. When she let them in, one missionary opened a book and read a text that said people with dark skin could not enter the highest heaven because they were cursed. Diana was offended. As a child, she had been the only white student in her class during a period of desegregation in Virginia. She knew God loved everyone and told the missionaries, "You have to leave." She wondered, "Why did they read that text to me?"

The next day, three women came to her house. During their visit, Diana asked them about the Sabbath. "We worship God every day," a woman said. Diana thought that made sense, and she agreed to see them again.

Then a tiny old woman knocked on her door on a stormy Friday night. She was collecting funds for a disaster-relief charity. Although the family had very little, Diana gave her the money that she was saving in a tip jar from her job at Pizza Hut. She never saw the woman again.

That same weekend, Diana was invited by a friend to another church. She felt an evil presence upon entering, and she fled after the service.

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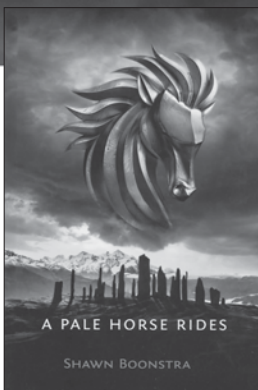
*This mission story offers an inside look at how God miraculously worked in the life of Diana Fish, development director of the US-based Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, which received the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in 2021. Thank you for supporting the spread of the gospel with this quarter's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



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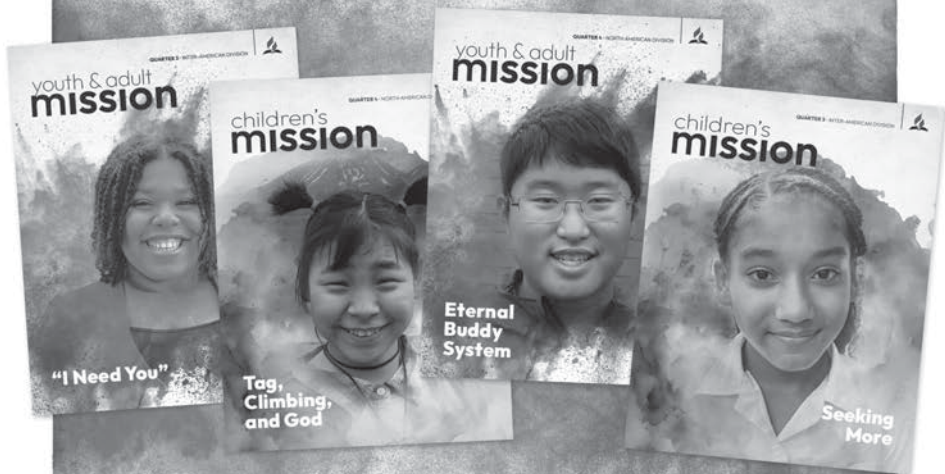


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# Foundations *for* Prophecy



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 6:6–8, Gen. 3:21–24, Ezek. 1:4–14, Rev. 4:1–11, Num. 2:3–25, Isa. 14:12–14.*

**Memory Text:** “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (*Isaiah 6:8, NKJV*).

God's right to rule the universe is founded upon His position as the Creator of all things (*Rev. 4:11*) and also upon His character. It is in discovering God's righteous character that we begin to understand how and why sinful human beings fall short of the glory of God (*Rom. 3:23*).

This week, we move further into the vision of the throne room and consider how the human race relates to a holy God and how the sacrifice of Christ restores us and brings us close to the throne. God plans to restore us, not just as individuals but also as a race, so that we once again reveal His glory to the rest of creation. By searching through the rest of the Bible, we can find important clues that help us understand and begin to appreciate the high calling that God has extended to us, a race of forgiven and redeemed sinners.

Human rebellion, ultimately and forever, will be ended. And, more than that, God's loving character, His self-denying and self-sacrificing character, will shine even brighter than it did in His original design for humanity. Though God never intended for humanity to fall, through the Cross, God's loving character has been put on display in a remarkable way.

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

## Here I Am, Send Me

Years ago, a church decided to renovate an outdated basement to create a new fellowship hall. One of the first things they did was to install new lights, believing that they would make the space seem more beautiful. Once they were installed, however, the space looked even *worse*, because bright lights have a way of revealing flaws.

Isaiah’s stunning vision of God’s throne left him painfully aware of his shortcomings. “ ‘Woe is me,’ ” he lamented, “ ‘for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts’ ” (*Isa. 6:5, NKJV*). We would feel the same if we were suddenly escorted into the presence of the Lord. The light is bright enough to remove all of our excuses. In God’s presence, we sense that we are lost. Isaiah was in for the surprise of a lifetime.

**Read** Isaiah 6:6–8. Isaiah knew that sin means that we are “undone.” The wages of sin is death. But instead of leaving us to the consequences of sin, a God of love pulls us closer. What was the outcome of this meeting, and why is it important?

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Isaiah was purged of his sin when a seraph took a coal from the altar and touched his mouth with it. This was likely the altar of incense, where intercession was made by and for God’s people (*see Rev. 8:3, 4*). His sins were forgiven, and he was now considered fit to stand in God’s presence—but, more than that, he was also commissioned to represent God to the world.

Interestingly enough, the word “seraph” means “the burning one.” Notice Jesus’ description of John the Baptist’s ministry in John 5:35—“ ‘He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light’ ” (*NKJV*). Though, of course, John himself was a sinner in need of grace and salvation, his ministry pointed to the only One who could bring grace and salvation.

Jesus came as the perfect representation of the Father’s glory—and God sent a prophet, a sinner, who performed a similar task as one of heaven’s seraphim.

**Only after Isaiah knew that his sin was purged, did he say, “ ‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (*Isa. 6:8, NKJV*). How can each one of us, our sins purged by the blood of Jesus, respond as Isaiah did here?**

## The Two Cherubim

As soon as our first parents were expelled from the Garden, God offered the hope of Messiah (*Gen. 3:15*). Then He established a powerful symbol at the gates of Eden: two cherubim with a brilliant flashing light between them. It should not be lost on us that this scene so closely resembles the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's throne (*Exod. 25:18*).

**Read** Genesis 3:21–24. What job were the cherubim tasked with—and why?

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While the cherubim were certainly given the responsibility to keep sinners from accessing the tree of life (*Gen. 3:22*), they also were a symbol of hope, of promise, that one day humans would be restored to Paradise. “The Garden of Eden remained upon the earth long after man had become an outcast from its pleasant paths. The fallen race was long permitted to gaze upon the home of innocence, their entrance barred only by the watching angels. At the cherubim-guarded gate of Paradise the divine glory was revealed. Hither came Adam and his sons to worship God. Here they renewed their vows of obedience to that law the transgression of which had banished them from Eden. . . . But in the final restitution, when there shall be ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Revelation 21:1), it is to be restored more gloriously adorned than at the beginning.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.

The wording in Genesis 3:24 is also interesting: the Bible indicates that God “placed” the cherubim to the east of Eden, and the original Hebrew word used is *shakan*, the root word for the sacred “tabernacle” (see *Exod. 25:9, Num. 3:26*), where the presence of God dwelt among His people. Though the common term *Shekinah*, for the presence of God, does not appear in the Bible, it, too, is based on this word often translated “tabernacle.” A literal translation of *shakan* could read, “God *tabernacled* cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden.”

In the Bible, cherubim are associated with the presence of God (see *1 Chron. 13:6, Ps. 80:1, and Isa. 37:16*), in particular with His throne, which is the place where His name is proclaimed. We should not fail to notice that the 24 elders who attend God's throne in Revelation 4 and 5 sing His praises and declare His right to rule as the One who created all things (*Rev. 4:11*). This can help us understand the throne room scene and our role as forgiven sinners in relationship to our Maker.

## Like Burning Coals of Fire

Cherubim, either as living beings (*Ezek. 10:8*) or the gold symbols of them (*Exod. 25:18*), appear all through the Old Testament. They are often depicted as standing immediately next to God's throne, radiating His glory to the universe. Cherubim also are embroidered into the curtain before the Holy of Holies (*Exod. 26:1*). In the book of Psalms, God's supreme power over creation is poetically pictured as God being borne through the air by cherubim (*Ps. 18:10*). God commanded that the ark of the covenant be topped by two solid gold cherubim with their wings extended toward one another (*Exod. 25:18–20*).

**Read** Ezekiel 1:4–14. What similarities do you see between this passage and the scenes depicted in Isaiah 6:1–6 and Revelation 4:1–11?

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Ezekiel is presented with an impressive display of God's power. It is a confusing scene to begin with, matching the predicament that God's people found themselves living with at the moment: the chosen people not in the land of promise but in Babylonian captivity. As Ezekiel studies the scene placed before him, he looks up and sees God's throne above it all.

Notice the important similarities with other "throne" visions. The living creatures that Ezekiel witnesses have the same faces as the living creatures in John's vision: a lion, an eagle, an ox, and a man.

The mysterious creatures with four faces are not specifically named in Ezekiel's initial description; later, in another throne room scene (*see Ezek. 10:1–21*), they are called "cherubim," and we also find the burning coals from Isaiah's vision of the seraphs. They share the faces of the living creatures mentioned in John's vision.

Whenever we see God's throne—whether in the typical ark of the covenant, which served as God's meeting place with Moses (*Exod. 25:22*), or the breathtaking visions of the prophets—the cherubim are *always* there. They are intimately tied to the throne of God. All of God's creatures were designed to reflect His glory—whether we are talking about the human race made in His image or the angelic beings who are posted immediately next to His glorious throne.

***Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.*** How do you measure up in contrast to the holiness that Ezekiel witnesses here? What does your answer tell you about your need of the gospel?

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## God Among His People

Following the leading of God's presence in the cloud, the Israelites would stop in their journey to the Promised Land, set up the tabernacle, and then the tribes would pitch their camps around it—three tribes on each side. The Presence of God would descend into the Most Holy Place and take up residence in the midst of His people.

**There** was one dominant tribe on each of the four sides of the tabernacle. According to Numbers 2, who were these four dominant tribes?

*Num. 2:3 (East):* \_\_\_\_\_

*Num. 2:10 (South):* \_\_\_\_\_

*Num. 2:18 (West):* \_\_\_\_\_

*Num. 2:25 (North):* \_\_\_\_\_

Notice that each dominant tribe flew its own “standard,” or special flag, to designate who they were. While the Scriptures are not explicit in describing what was on each flag, there is an interesting tradition—loosely based on the tribal characteristics described in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33—that assigns one of the four faces to each of the four compass points. “According to rabbinical tradition, the standard of Judah bore the figure of a lion, that of Reuben the likeness of a man or of a man’s head, that of Ephraim the figure of an ox, and that of Dan the figure of an eagle; so that the four living creatures united in the cherubic forms described by Ezekiel were represented upon these four standards.”—Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), vol. 1, p. 660.

It is possible to read too much into tradition, of course, but it is still interesting to compare this ancient tradition with the Bible’s description of the New Jerusalem. An interesting pattern emerges: there are gates representing three tribes on all four sides of the city (*Rev. 21:12, 13*).

The descriptions of both the camp of Israel and the New Jerusalem underscore one crucial fact: God intends to pull humanity close to His throne. The book of Revelation teaches us that “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (*Rev. 21:22, NKJV*).

**Of course, we don’t live in the camp of Israel. But how can we, in our own lives now, draw close to the presence of God?**



## The Fall of Lucifer

It seems incomprehensible that Lucifer once held the position of covering cherub, occupying an exalted position next to the throne of God. Surely his existence would have helped reveal the glory of God to the universe. Instead, he began to consider his own glory, not the glory of his Creator; or, to be more precise, he started to imagine that he was not being given the deference due to *him*.

**Read** Ezekiel 28:11–17 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What led to Lucifer’s downfall? Compare these passages with Revelation 14:1–12. How does the contrast between Lucifer’s fall and humanity’s high position in Christ inform your understanding of what takes place in Revelation 14?

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Notice how Lucifer was removed from the holy mountain, while the redeemed stand on Mount Zion with the Lamb of God. Lucifer is said to have been in Eden; the human race was also once there, but in contrast to Satan’s fate, humanity is being restored to Paradise through Christ. (*See Rev. 22:1–3.*)

In this context, the following quote from Ellen G. White is very instructive: “Heaven will triumph, for the vacancies made in heaven by the fall of Satan and his angels will be filled by the redeemed of the Lord.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 29, 1900.

And they are there, in heaven, only because of the gospel. In fact, the theme of the gospel, of redemption, is found in a graphic manner in the throne room in Revelation 4 and 5. For instance, the angels cry out: “ ‘ “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God, persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” ’ ” (*Rev. 5:9, NIV*). What a picture of the gospel: the death of Jesus for the redemption of humanity!

Notice, too, how the language reflects the first angel’s message, in which we are called to preach “the everlasting gospel . . . to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). What a powerful representation of the fullness of what Christ has done for the world. There is not a human being in all earth’s history for whom Christ has not died. Each person just needs to learn about it and choose to accept it.

**What role do we have as a church, and as individuals, in letting people know about what Christ has done for them?**



**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 669–671, 676–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

Satan, once a covering cherub, sought to destroy confidence in God’s throne. God has allowed fallen angels to continue in their rebellion to show the universe the depths of wickedness that come from self-exaltation—and while Satan managed to deceive the human race into joining his war against God, Christ utterly defeated him at the cross, securing a place for humanity where fallen angels once stood. Sinners, in Christ, publicly turn against Lucifer’s claims. The final scenario is, in some ways, an even greater revelation of God’s goodness and love than had existed prior to Lucifer’s fall. Though God never ordained that evil should exist, and it’s a tragedy with eternal consequences, when it’s all done, the goodness and love of God will be revealed in ways they otherwise never would have been.

Christ “looks upon the redeemed, renewed in His own image, every heart bearing the perfect impress of the divine, every face reflecting the likeness of their King. He beholds in them the result of the travail of His soul, and He is satisfied. Then, in a voice that reaches the assembled multitudes of the righteous and the wicked, He declares, ‘Behold the purchase of My blood! For these I suffered, for these I died, that they might dwell in My presence throughout eternal ages.’ And the song of praise ascends from the white-robed ones about the throne: ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’ Revelation 5:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 671.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Imagine standing before God with every flaw, every character defect, every wrong act, every wrong thought, every wrong motive fully exposed before Him! What would you rightfully and fairly deserve? What, then, is your only hope? Why must we have “the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (*Rom. 3:22, NKJV*) covering us now, and in the judgment, when we need it most? In short, why do we need the gospel?
- ② As we have seen, John the Baptist played the role of a seraph—a burning and shining lamp. (*See John 5:35.*) He was, of course, the forerunner to Christ, heralding the Messiah’s first appearance. How do God’s last-day people hold a similar prophetic role?

## Part 3: Attempted Suicide

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Diana's husband grew angry when three women persisted in visiting the house to study their religious books. On their wedding day, he had told Diana, "Don't ever try to get me to go to church." Now he opposed the presence of the three women and threw out the books they gave her.

The women invited Diana to their church's evening meetings. However, Diana worked nights at Pizza Hut to make ends meet. One woman pressured her into getting a day job at a newspaper so she could come to the meetings.

As Diana studied, she learned that the women believed Jesus was a created being and not eternal. Reading their literature, she saw that their Jesus didn't match the Jesus whom she had learned about in the Bible as a girl.

Then Diana and her husband separated, and she moved with their three sons to Santa Fe, New Mexico. With no child support, friends, or family, she worked full-time to pay the bills and care for the boys, who were one, three, and five years old. Falling into an abusive relationship, she started thinking about suicide again. One day, after dropping her sons off at day care and school, she went to a gun shop and bought a gun. She knew how to use it from her Navy days.

Sitting on her couch at home, she loaded the gun's chamber, pulled back the hammer, and pressed the gun against her chest. An all-too-familiar accusing voice rang in her head. "*You're a terrible person,*" it said. "*You're a terrible mother.*" Diana firmly gripped the trigger. She felt her heart pounding in her head. Then a calming voice interrupted her.

"*What about your children?*" it said.

Before she could respond, the accusing voice countered, "*They will be better off without you.*"

"*They need you,*" the calming voice pleaded.

Diana thought about how her death would affect her children. She became enraged. She had come up with a plan to end her pain, but now she couldn't go through with it. "I can't do this anymore! It's too hard!" she cried out.

"*You don't have to,*" the calming voice said. "*I'll do it for you.*"

With those words, Diana put down the gun, collapsed onto the floor, and cried until she couldn't cry anymore. Then she called a trusted coworker. Together, they drove into the desert to fire off the gun. Later, when Diana tried to return the gun, the gun-shop owner refused, saying, "It's been used."

"But you have to take it back," Diana insisted, explaining that she had given a bad check. The owner reluctantly took back the gun and didn't report her to the police. Diana believed that he sensed what had happened.

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*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.*

# In *the* Psalms: Part 1



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Heb. 9:11–15, Psalm 122, Psalm 15, Psalm 24, Exod. 33:18–23, Psalm 5, Ps. 51:7–15.*

**Memory Text:** “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (*Revelation 14:1, NKJV*).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are used to searching for the symbols of Revelation in the stories of the Old Testament to help us understand those symbols. These narratives, though far from the only good source, are found all through the Old Testament.

One particularly rich source of information is the book of Psalms, a collection of sacred poetry that explores many human experiences and possible interactions with God—ranging from despondency over sin and suffering to unbridled joy in His presence and His repeated promises for forgiveness and salvation.

A careful reading of the Psalms yields details that make the book of Revelation come alive, especially Revelation 14, which describes the final work of God’s remnant church on earth. God’s last-day people have been given the same assignment as Israel of old: we are to be a light to the nations, a final merciful call to all people to worship and obey their Maker.

Some details provided in God’s songbook can give us new ways to understand and appreciate our role in the final moments of earth’s history.

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

## Our High Priest

When Moses oversaw the construction of the tabernacle, he was not permitted to use just any design he wished. God gave him a blueprint to follow. “ ‘See to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain’ ” (*Exod. 25:40, NKJV*). We discover in the book of Hebrews that the pattern used was that of a higher reality, the heavenly sanctuary.

**Read Hebrews 9:11–15, about Christ as our High Priest in heaven’s sanctuary. What does this teach about what He is doing for us?**

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The earthly sanctuary foreshadowed Jesus in astonishing detail, from the priest and the offerings to the furniture and other design details. *All* of it speaks of Jesus.

The book of Revelation, of course, is very rich in sanctuary imagery. We find the sanctuary lampstand in the opening verses, the ark of the covenant explicitly mentioned in chapter four, and numerous other allusions to the temple. Without an understanding of the Old Testament sanctuary, it becomes impossible to grasp what John is driving at in his descriptions of his visions. The experiences of Israel, Paul writes, “happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (*1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV*).

There is much we can learn from studying the details of the temple. In the book of Psalms, we find an important component for understanding some of these details: how God’s people personally related to the temple. We catch glimpses of how David related to the sanctuary and its services, and we see the heart response of God’s people to what the Messiah would do for them. It is not just the patterns that help us see Jesus; we also can mine the personal experiences of those who understood what God was teaching us through the sanctuary and draw lessons for ourselves and for our own experiences with God.

**Read Psalm 122. Though we cannot go literally to the earthly “house of the LORD” (it’s not there, and even if one were built in the same place, it would be meaningless), what elements are found in this psalm that can encourage us about what Christ has done for us? Notice the themes of peace, security, praise, and judgment.**

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## On Mount Zion

In Revelation 14, we find God's people standing on Mount Zion. The original Mount Zion was located just west of the old city of Jerusalem today and was thought of as the seat of God's throne, or presence, among His people. In time, the temple mount, located on Mount Moriah, came to be identified with Mount Zion, as well.

In other words, this important depiction of God's last-day remnant is presented in sanctuary language, as with most of the key scenes in the book of Revelation. Thanks to the Lamb, God's people are on His holy hill!

**Read** Psalm 15 and Psalm 24, in which David asks an all-important question: "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Compare his reply in these psalms with the description of the people standing on Zion in Revelation 14:1–5. What parallels do you find? How does one join this group? What is the significance of the fact that the Father's name is inscribed in their foreheads? (*Rev. 14:1*).

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The description found in David's psalm of those permitted into the presence of God is a pretty tall order for mere sinners to fulfill. Who among us can honestly say that we have always walked uprightly? Or have always spoken the truth in our hearts (*Ps. 15:2*)? None of us can say that we "shall never be moved" (*Ps. 15:5, NKJV*). If we say that we have never sinned, the Bible teaches that we have no truth in us (*1 John 1:8*).

We can come to no conclusion other than it is the Lamb who enables us to stand on Zion. The Lamb is not mentioned in David's psalm, but He suddenly appears in the description found in Revelation 14. It is almost as if Revelation 14 is answering David's question. Now that the Lamb of God is established on Mount Zion, in the sanctuary, we can also be present there because of His perfect righteousness credited to us by faith. We can have the "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh" (*Heb. 10:19, 20, NKJV*). Without His blood, what hope would we have? None, actually.

**Think about all the Bible promises of victory over sin. Why, even with those promises, do we still find ourselves falling short of the perfect example Jesus has set for us, and why do we need His perfect life as our substitute?**

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## Law in Our Hearts

The remnant gathered on Zion have a name engraved on their foreheads: the name of the Father and the Lamb. (Whether this is two different names is doubtful; Jesus is the very image of the Father!) A “name” in the Scriptures signifies more than a label by which people address each other; it stands for *character*. To this day, many cultures still say that someone has a “good name” when people think highly of their character.

**Read** Exodus 33:18–23, Exodus 34:1–7, and Psalm 119:55. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, what did God promise to show him? Then when God proclaimed His name to Moses (*Exod. 34:5*), what followed?

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Some picture God’s glory as an unapproachable, brilliant light, which is certainly an apt description. But God’s glory is more than simply a visual display; His glory is His character. The same is true with God’s name.

When the Bible describes a remnant with God’s name inscribed in their foreheads, it is not a matter of having literal letters written there; it is a matter of having God’s character inscribed in your mind, your heart, and so now in our lives we reflect the love and character of God. You have been pulled close to God, and you love Him for who He is and what He has done for you.

How interesting, too, that when God describes Himself to Moses, He does it in conjunction with Moses’ receiving another copy of the Ten Commandments, which is also a transcript of His character. Likewise, the people who have God’s “name” in Revelation 14 are described as those who “keep the commandments of God.” Then notice the words found in Hebrews: “ ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’ ” (*Heb. 10:16, 17, NKJV*). What an expression of the gospel: though God’s law is reflected in our lives, we still need our sins to be remembered “no more.”

God’s name is His character. His moral law is a transcript of His character. And those who are gathered on God’s holy hill in the last days are infused with a love for God, a love manifested by obedience to His law.

**If we are saved by faith and not by the law, what then is the importance of God’s law?** (*See 1 John 5:3.*)

## Psalm 5

**Read** Psalm 5. In this work, David draws sharp contrasts between those who are lost and those who have been redeemed. Compare this psalm with the language of Revelation 14:1–12. What similarities do you find, and how does this inform your understanding of what it means to be a part of God’s last-day remnant movement?

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It is instructive to note that David insists that evil “may not dwell” with God (*Ps. 5:4, ESV*). The point of the tabernacle was that God might dwell among His people, and the same will be true in the kingdom of Christ (*see Rev. 21:3*). Those who would approach the throne of God must be *redeemed*.

It is also noteworthy that David describes an act of worship in Psalm 5:7, which is the core issue at stake in the great controversy. Revelation 13 mentions “worship” five times, and the three angels’ messages call the world to “worship Him who made.” David tells us that he “fears” God, and the message of the remnant calls the world back to “ ‘fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

Also notice how the redeemed of Revelation 14 are said to have “no deceit” (*Rev. 14:5, NKJV*) in their mouths; they are truth-tellers whose words and deeds reflect the righteous character of God. The wicked, according to David, have “no truth in their mouth” (*Ps. 5:9, ESV*).

It is an astonishing scene that John presents in this key part of Revelation: mere sinners have been pulled back from death and are privileged to stand in God’s presence. They did not earn this right; it is granted to them by the fact that the Lamb of God—the righteous Son of man—stands there with them. They are forgiven, redeemed; they no longer have to bear their own guilt (*compare with Ps. 5:10*), because the Lamb of God has borne it for them (*compare with Isa. 53:12 and 2 Cor. 5:21*).

Once God’s name is inscribed in your heart, it is hard to remain silent. God’s people deliver one final offer of mercy with a “loud voice” (*Rev. 14:7*). “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You” (*Ps. 5:11, NKJV*).

**Imagine standing before a holy and perfect God in judgment, with every deed you have ever done fully exposed before Him. What does this prospect tell you about your need of Christ’s righteousness?**

## Teach Transgressors Your Way

After the Lord had appeared to Isaiah in the throne room scene of Isaiah 6:1–8, and after Isaiah had been told that his “iniquity is taken away” and his “sin purged,” he then answered God’s call by saying, “ ‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (*Isa. 6:8, NKJV*). That is, once he knew that he was right with God, and despite knowing his faults, he was ready to work for the Lord.

Is it not the same with us? How can we proclaim salvation to others if we don’t have it ourselves? And we can have it, by faith in Jesus and what He has done for us.

**Read Psalm 51:7–15. What does David promise to do after he has been pardoned and purged from his sin?**

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To be called *into* God’s presence is, ultimately, to be sent back out. In His wisdom, God has commissioned the redeemed to serve as His primary voice to a fallen world. At some point, the impact of His people on earth is going to be powerfully felt. Revelation 18:1 tells us that His final plea with the fallen planet will illuminate the whole world.

“No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell. Like Philip when he found the Saviour, we shall invite others into His presence.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

In Revelation 14, the three angels’ messages are founded on the “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*). That is, even before the proclamations go out about worshiping the one “ ‘who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) or about the fall of Babylon (*Rev. 14:8*) or about worshiping the “beast and his image” (*Rev. 14:9*), the foundation of the gospel, of salvation in Jesus, is proclaimed. And that is because the warnings and messages of the three angels mean nothing apart from the hope and promise that those who proclaim these messages have in Jesus and what He has done for them. Apart from the “everlasting gospel,” we really have nothing of any value to say to the world.

**Dwell more on the fact that, even before the proclamation of the three angels’ messages begins, we are pointed to the “everlasting gospel.” What should this tell us about how foundational this truth is to all that we believe?**



**Further Thought:** “The psalms of David pass through the whole range of experience, from the depths of conscious guilt and self-condemnation to the loftiest faith and the most exalted communing with God. His life record declares that sin can bring only shame and woe, but that God’s love and mercy can reach to the deepest depths, that faith will lift up the repenting soul to share the adoption of the sons of God. Of all the assurances which His word contains, it is one of the strongest testimonies to the faithfulness, the justice, and the covenant mercy of God. . . .

“‘I have sworn unto David My servant . . . with whom My hand shall be established: Mine arm also shall strengthen him. . . . My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him: and in My name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto Me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. Also I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him.’ Psalm 89:3–28.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 754, 755.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The human race has been a miserable failure in keeping up our end of God’s covenants with us. David, the “man after God’s own heart” despite some big mistakes, was still used powerfully to communicate the terms of our salvation to us. In what sense does David foreshadow Jesus, who *did* keep God’s covenant perfectly in our behalf? And why is what Jesus did in our behalf our only hope?
- ❷ What passages in the Psalms have you found particularly helpful or meaningful in that they reflect the kind of experiences that you have gone through yourself?
- ❸ Why do the Psalms make such frequent reference to the temple? What can we learn from David’s love for the sanctuary? How can this help us appreciate what we have in Jesus, as our heavenly High Priest “who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (*Rom. 8:34, NKJV*)? Why do we, even as redeemed people, need Christ interceding for us in heaven?
- ❹ Based on the Ellen G. White quote above, what has been your own experience with how God has lifted your “repenting soul to share the adoption of the sons of God” after the “shame and woe” of sin?

## Part 4: Ex-Adventist Boyfriend

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Diana's thoughts returned to God after the calming voice stopped her from committing suicide. That Sunday, she took her three children to a small church in Santa Fe, New Mexico. They sat in the pew until the church musicians began to play. She didn't like the music she heard coming from the platform. It reminded her of a bad part of her life. She walked out of the church with her children.

Diana's life seemed to go from bad to worse. Thieves broke into her apartment and took what little she had. She became pregnant by her abusive boyfriend, and his only response was, "I'll pay for the abortion." One night, after the children were asleep in bed, she sat in the dark in her living room, filled with shame and self-hatred. She cried out in anger to God, "Is this what You saved me for?" The anger turned to sobbing as she remembered her years of struggles. "Jesus," she pleaded, "I need You." Instantly, she felt an intense rush of energy fill her. The room was pitch-black, but it seemed to be filled with light. It was as if she were being hugged by God from heaven. An overwhelming sense of joy, peace, and love filled her whole being. Shortly after, she fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. In the morning, the intense feelings were gone, but she sensed something was different.

A few months later, she met a strange and peculiar person. Loren Fish was a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. His father was a pastor and church planter. But during Loren's first year of college, he had wandered away from God, started drinking, and eventually dropped out. He met Diana at a dance club in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and he asked her for a ride home. Diana found the stranger annoying, but she gave him a ride. After that, Loren wouldn't leave her alone. He found out where she worked and visited her there. Diana wasn't interested in getting into another relationship. She hadn't left the bad one that she was in. Moreover, Loren was four and a half years younger, and he seemed naïve and immature. In truth, she didn't want him to know what a mess she was and didn't want to get hurt again. So, she pushed him away. Loren left Santa Fe and settled down near Chicago.

Then one night, Loren called after Diana's boyfriend turned violent, slashing her car tires and attacking her in the parking lot of the newspaper where they both worked. Diana was happy to hear his voice, and she remembered feeling safe with him. "You can come visit me any time you want," she told him. Loren arrived that weekend, and he never left.

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*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.*

# In the Psalms: Part 2



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Psalm 46, Jer. 4:23–26, Ps. 47:1–4, 1 Thess. 4:13–17, Psalm 75, Rev. 14:6–12.*

**Memory Text:** “Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth. Selah” (*Psalm 67:3, 4, NKJV*).

When thinking of final events, we tend to focus on the beasts and the powers of Revelation. And, of course, they have a big role—an important one, too. Otherwise, God would not have put them in the Bible for us to understand them (*see Rev. 1:3*).

Prophecy, however, also deals with key issues associated with sin and suffering, judgment, the battle between good and evil, the nature of justice and injustice, persecution, and more.

The Psalms also deal with these issues in great depth, exploring nearly every possible human emotion—from dark despondency to unbridled joy. We see Israel preparing for battle against the forces of darkness. We read about individuals wrestling with the question of why doesn't God address evil more directly and immediately, a question that no doubt we all have asked. We are directed to the sanctuary for answers, and there also are repeated appeals to God's status as Creator. Are these not issues and questions that we, in our context today, wrestle with, as well?

Of course, this is why we will continue unpacking the book of Psalms in order to learn more about these crucial truths.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.

## A Very Present Help in the Time of Trouble

**Read** Psalm 46. What message of hope can we take from this amid the turmoil of life now and what we know is going to come upon the earth in the last days as the great controversy plays out here?

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Psalm 46 appears to touch on a theme that we find in the book of Hebrews: *that of something better*. Jesus is *better* than the earthly high priest, His sacrifice is *better* than all the animal sacrifices, and the heavenly sanctuary is *better* than the types that existed on earth.

This psalm takes a different approach, however. The author is not taking good things and contrasting them with better things; he is contrasting a world in rebellion—and the terrible consequences it has brought—with promise of the better things that God is planning for us.

Indeed, this psalm is filled with hope and promise that, even amid the desolation and trial and suffering and wars that we face, ultimately we are to “be still, and know that I am God” (*Ps. 46:10*) and to rest in the assurance that one day all of this is going to end and that God “will be exalted in the earth” (*Ps. 46:10*).

Notice, too, what is written here. “Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (*Ps. 46:2, NKJV*).

One cannot help but be reminded of the scenes that will take place at the Second Coming: “Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place” (*Rev. 6:14, NKJV*). And this: “Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (*2 Pet. 3:12, NKJV*). Our present world, with all its attendant evils, isn’t going to last forever, and what comes afterward promises us something that our minds now can barely fathom. For now, though, we just need to hold on, persevering in faith and clinging to the revelation of God that we have, especially in Jesus on the cross.

**However bad things are in this world (and we know they are going to get worse), what hope should you draw from your knowledge of the goodness, power, and character of God (think: the Cross)?**

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## Hope Amid Turmoil

Much of the language in the book of Psalms is symbolic, but when it comes to the language that points forward to the ultimate resetting of our planet, we have little reason to believe that it is *merely* symbolic. Psalm 46 reminds us that the physical earth will be deeply affected by Christ's return. But it is not merely the rocks and ocean that will be affected; the grand climax of earth's history will mean the breakdown of worldly kingdoms—the miserable systems of human government that have caused so much suffering over the millennia.

In the end, all these powers, and all the evil and suffering that they have brought upon humanity, will come to a complete end.

**Read** Jeremiah 4:23–26. What is this telling us about the fate of this world, at least until there's a “new heaven and a new earth” (*Rev. 21:1*)?

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Bible prophecy shows us what will happen to this world. The vision of Daniel 7, for instance, shows us a stormy sea from which the nations of the world arise. The winds of strife and warfare blow across the Gentile sea (the earth), producing one worldly kingdom after another, and not one of them can solve the very real problems that beset the human race. The worldly leaders we dare to trust almost always prove to be as sinful and selfish as the rest of us.

None of the kingdoms shown to Daniel proved to be a secure home for God's people (though some were better than others). But we know that we have citizenship in the kingdom of God (*Phil. 3:20*), and, high above the chaos of this planet, there is a throne that cannot be moved (*see Ezek. 1:26*). Jesus taught that the world will move into deeper disorder as we approach the moment of Christ's return (*Matthew 24*), but we can hold out in faith, regardless of the condition of our planet, because we know that God has not lost control, and that He will fulfill His promises: “The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (*Ps. 46:6, 7, NKJV*). Short term, things are not going greatly nor will they. Long term? That—thanks to Jesus—is a whole other matter.

**No question, our world seems chaotic and out of control. How should the prophecy of Daniel 7, for instance, help us see that ultimately things will work out well for us if we remain faithful?**

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## Under His Feet

**Read** Psalm 47:1–4. What does it say about our place, ultimately, in Christ’s kingdom?

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Long term, the future is bright. Until then, humanity ceded dominion over the planet to Lucifer, and by the time Satan appeared at the heavenly council in Job, he boasted that this earth belonged to him.

“ ‘From where do you come?’ ” God asked.

“ ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it,’ ” he replied (*Job 1:7, NKJV*).

Satan was declaring *ownership*; the foot was used in antiquity to represent ownership. “ ‘Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land,’ ” God instructed Abraham, “ ‘for I will give it to you’ ” (*Gen. 13:17, ESV*).

**Compare** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 and Zechariah 14:4, and pay attention to Christ’s feet. What differences do you find between these passages, and what do they teach us about these two different, though related, aspects of Christ’s ultimate sovereignty of this world?

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Talking about what Christ does at the end of the millennium, Ellen G. White wrote: “Christ descends upon the Mount of Olives, whence, after His resurrection, He ascended, and where angels repeated the promise of His return. Says the prophet: ‘The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with Thee.’ ‘And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof, . . . and there shall be a very great valley.’ ‘And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one.’ Zechariah 14:5, 4, 9. As the New Jerusalem, in its dazzling splendor, comes down out of heaven, it rests upon the place purified and made ready to receive it, and Christ, with His people and the angels, enters the Holy City.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 662, 663.

**Look at the hope we have been given in Jesus. Think about how hard life would be if everything ended, forever, with death. It would all be futile, would it not?**

## Wine and Blood

**Read** Psalm 75. Read also Matthew 26:26–29 and Revelation 14:9–12. What does this psalm reveal about some of the issues at stake in the judgment, and how do these other texts help us understand these issues?

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There is some thought that this psalm would have been sung upon the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's army (*2 Chronicles 32, 2 Kings 19*)—a story that appears to point forward to the final destruction of the wicked in Revelation 20. The people of God are inside the Holy City with their righteous king when the armies of evil come up and surround them, and then they are destroyed by God Himself.

One of the things that God corrects in the judgment is the misappropriation of power that has taken place in our fallen world. Fallen humans no longer live for others or for the glory of God but for self. Today, in many ways, we are living with the consequences of choosing to believe that there is no meaning or objective moral standard in the universe. If there is to be a meaning, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche insisted that we must invent it for ourselves and pretend as if the universe exists for our benefit. Each individual, in effect, behaves as if he or she is a god.

(One might justifiably ask: *How well did this philosophy work out for Nietzsche himself?* Not too well, actually. He went insane, collapsing on a street in Italy after trying to stop a man from beating a horse. He then spent the next 11 years of his life in a semi-catatonic state before his death in 1900.)

However bad the problems are, as believers we are reminded to live with hope and not to judge the future by current events. It is easy to despair as we see the pillars of civilization being steadily eroded by the hearts and minds of the godless or by those whose views of God are not found in the Bible. We are currently living in a period in which moral values, even things as basic as human gender, male and female, have come under assault, at least in some parts of the world. Certain types of immorality, things that many people would have been ashamed to talk about, even privately, are now lauded and applauded publicly. That's how bad things are getting.

**Though we must do our part now to try to make life better for others, why is it always important to remember that it's going to take the total destruction of this present world and the supernatural re-creation of it before all things are, ultimately, made right?**

## That Your Salvation May Be Known

**Read** Psalm 67. How does this hymn of praise inform your understanding of the role of God's people in Revelation 14:6–12?

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Engineers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have created a new black coating that renders objects painted with it nearly invisible. Created from nanotubes, it is many times darker than any black material previously created. This new material can absorb 99.995 percent of all visible light. Even the brightest light fails to make objects covered in this coating visible.

Psalm 67 begins with an appeal for God to “cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth” (*Ps. 67:1, 2, NKJV*). In the plan of salvation, God has provided a way for sinners to be readmitted to His immediate, glorious presence without being destroyed by His glory; and even now, in this life, the cross of Christ makes it possible for God's face to shine on us.

But there is more: God intends that we reflect His light to the rest of the world. This was the task given to Israel: the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations: “ ‘Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (*Isa. 56:7, NKJV*).

In this psalm, David reminds us that God wants His “way [to] be known on earth, [His] salvation among all nations” (*Ps. 67:2, NKJV*). Tragically, God's people have often failed in this task. Israel's record in the Old Testament contains some dark chapters, as does the record of the Christian church during the past two millennia. It is as if we have painted our hearts with an ultra-dark substance, content to absorb God's light without reflecting it.

Sometimes, we treat God's last-day movement as a kind of privileged departure lounge reserved for spiritual frequent flyers, and we seem quite content that the rest of the world must sit in the noisy, uncomfortable gate lounge, unprepared for the journey ahead. The remnant church of Revelation 14, however, is not content just to stand on Zion with Christ, basking in His presence. Instead, they fly across the face of the earth, urging the world to join them on God's holy mountain.

**What obligations should we as a church, and as individuals, feel toward teaching others the truths that we love so much?**



**Further Thought:** Read Psalm 133, Acts 1:4–9, and Revelation 5:4–7.

“During the patriarchal age the influence of the Holy Spirit had often been revealed in a marked manner, but never in its fullness. Now, in obedience to the word of the Saviour, the disciples offered their supplications for this gift, and in heaven Christ added His intercession. He claimed the gift of the Spirit, that He might pour it upon His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

The disciples were instructed to bear witness to Christ “‘to the end of the earth’” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*), a work that would herald the return of Christ (*Matt. 24:14*). We are to continue what they started.

When Christ told us to carry the gospel to the world, He did not leave us alone to figure out how it might happen. The work is directed from heaven’s sanctuary. Our work is intimately wrapped up in Christ: He guides and empowers us. This is *His* work, not ours: we are asked to follow His lead. You will notice this is how it worked with Israel: God asked them to follow His instructions, and then *He* made the impossible happen. The Spirit is already at work in the hearts of our neighbors; we are asked to be there when the moment of decision arrives so that we can invite them to join God’s people as they stand with the Lamb on Zion. We do not have to invent new means and methods because we have never been in charge of the work.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ There are lots of unreached people, even though the three angels’ messages have gone all over the world. In class, discuss how we as a church can better fulfill the task that Christ is using us to fulfill. How can we learn not to despair when we think of all the people who still have not heard of these truths for the last days?
- ❷ In Revelation 5, John witnesses the sealed scroll being given to the Lamb because He is worthy. When the seals on the scroll are opened in Revelation 6, we see the history of the New Testament church clearly predicted down to the end of time. From this description, what lessons can we learn about the way God intends to finish the work?
- ❸ What are the present events we see in the world that could easily lead to what we know is coming in Revelation 13 and 14? What obstacles remain?

## Part 5: Love and Marriage

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Diana and Loren were planning to get married in Santa Fe, New Mexico, when they found out that they were expecting a baby. Diana postponed the wedding because she didn't want the baby to be the reason for marriage.

After the baby was born, the couple moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where Diana's parents were living. They had had enough of life in Santa Fe.

Although Diana and Loren weren't living as Christians, Loren wanted to get married in a church. He chose an Adventist church and contacted its pastor. He also asked his father, an Adventist pastor living near Chicago, to perform the ceremony. This presented a dilemma for both pastors because Diana wasn't a church member and the couple wasn't living a Christian life. But after much prayer, they said they felt impressed to "err on the side of love." Loren's father gave premarital counseling over the phone.

On their wedding day, Diana was surprised to see church members whom they didn't know in attendance. *Who attends a wedding of strangers?* she thought. Her surprise grew when the church members gave them gifts.

Unpacking at home, Diana came across a small book titled *Happiness Digest*. She thought it was a book from the three persistent women who had visited her in Colorado. She began reading it, and she couldn't put it down. When Loren came home from work, she excitedly said, "This is truth!" He said, "Oh, that's *Steps to Christ*, written by a prophet named Ellen White." The idea of a prophet confused Diana, but a desire sprouted in her heart to visit the Adventist church and learn more about what she had been reading.

When Diana showed up in church, members didn't say a word. They accepted her as she was and even took care of her children so she could listen. When she overheard the head elder talking about Bible studies, she told him, "I want to study." Loren interrupted, "I can tell you whatever you want to know." He was embarrassed that he hadn't studied with her. "No, I want to study the Bible for myself," she said.

The elder, Lorell Herold, and his wife, Carol, came to their home every week for 28 weeks. As Diana studied, her worldly appearance began to change. No one spoke to her about it. No one preached about it. She simply lost interest in worldly things as church members loved her and as she learned about God's love that was poured out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Her enthusiasm for the Bible surprised Loren. He wondered what he had missed growing up and began studying the Bible on his own. The two decided to get baptized together.

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# 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).

**T**he 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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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?

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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.)**

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**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.

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# Ruth *and* Esther



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ruth 1:1–5; Ruth 2:5–20; Job 1:6–11; Matt. 4:8, 9; Esther 3:1–14; Rev. 12:14–17.*

**Memory Text:** “So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter” (*Esther 5:2, NKJV*).

**T**his week we continue to explore stories that prefigure last-day events. By using real-life events and people, God helps us to see things from His perspective and helps us understand how to interpret the prophecies that come later, which are given to help strengthen our faith.

Our attention turns to two important women whose stories have touched the hearts of countless generations: Ruth and Esther. One is a dispossessed widow who finds hope after meeting the kindly Boaz, her kinsman redeemer. Their marriage has become a favorite love story for Christians because of the way it reflects Christ's love for us. The other is a young girl living in a foreign land who becomes aware of a plot to destroy her people and finds herself thrust onto the main stage in the drama that unfolds to save them.

In prophecy, of course, a woman is a powerful symbol for God's church, shedding much light on how God regards His people. Let's look at the biblical accounts of these two women, whose life circumstances have been immortalized in the Word of God, and seek to draw whatever lessons we can from their experiences.

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

## Famine in “The House of Bread”

Critics of the Christian faith have often pointed to the brutal reality of living in this world as evidence that: (a) God does not exist, (b) He is powerless to intervene when bad things happen, or (c) He doesn't care when we hurt. Many of the stories of the Bible, however, provide abundant evidence that none of these assumptions are correct. True, God is allowing the human race to reap the consequences of rebellion against Him. But without violating our free will, He is always present, always working in human history, always moving us toward the ultimate resolution of the problems of sin and suffering. The story of Ruth provides one such example.

**Read** Ruth 1:1–5. What hardships fell on Naomi and Ruth, and what caused them? How does this reflect the situation that the entire human race now faces?

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There is irony to be found in the opening statement of this story: there was a famine that affected Bethlehem, a town whose name means “house of bread.” One is reminded of the abundance of Eden, where God told Adam and Eve, “ ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’ ” (*Gen. 2:16, NKJV*). The human race began its existence in abundance, under the care of a generous Creator, but then exchanged its role as caretakers of creation for the slavery of sin. “ ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground,’ ” God told Adam (*Gen. 3:19, NKJV*).

Like Naomi, we have been dispossessed from the inheritance that God originally planned for us to have, and our lives have become a hardship. Eden was given as a gift, but not unconditionally: humans were free to rebel, but that would mean they would have to take responsibility for their own well-being. Originally, we were meant to “subdue” the whole unfallen world under God's blessing, but now we are faced with the task of subduing a fallen one. Selfish human beings competing for scarce resources leads to much heartache and suffering.

The tragedy is unspeakable: the earth still produces abundantly, a powerful testimony to God's love. But between human greed and the ravages of sin, the world at times seems to subdue us more than we subdue it. One day, however, all this will end.

**Even after six thousand years of sin and death, how does the earth still reveal the wonders of God's love and creative power?**

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## Ruth and Boaz

Naomi asked that her name be changed to *Mara* because of the bitterness that had fallen over her life (*see Ruth 1:20*). Our relationship with our Creator has been irreparably damaged by sin, forcing us into spiritual poverty. Our prospects are dim, and we spend our lives gleaning what we can from the edges of the field, living on the scraps of joy that can still be found in a broken world. But it all changes the moment we make a remarkable discovery: God has not forgotten us.

**Read** Ruth 2:5–20. Why is this such a pivotal moment in the story? Why do you think Naomi’s discovery of the benefactor’s identity was such good news?

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Naomi could not take possession of her husband Elimelech’s land without obtaining assistance from her husband’s family. She hopes that Ruth can marry a close relative of her deceased husband and bear a child in Elimelech’s name. God had made provision in Israel for individuals to reclaim their inheritance in the Promised Land: a close relative was needed to redeem Elimelech’s inheritance. Boaz was not just a kind farmer; he was a kinsman of Elimelech who could redeem the land.

The discovery that Boaz was not only kindhearted and generous but a *relative* was the best possible news: the poverty in which these two women existed did not have to last forever.

Christians have long understood Boaz to be a type of Christ, who is not only our Creator but chose to become our kinsman—a real, flesh-and-blood human being, one of the reasons why, again and again, He called Himself “the Son of man” (*Matt. 12:8, Mark 8:31, Luke 22:22, John 3:14*).

Far too many people think of God in harsh terms—e.g., “Perhaps He will let us into heaven if we check all the correct boxes on a moral inventory, but He will do so grudgingly because we have scraped by on a technicality.” The picture of Christ revealed in Boaz completely displaces such notions. God not only notices us, but, in spite of our deep spiritual poverty, He wants us as His bride.

**Try to wrap your mind around not only the Creator’s becoming part of His own creation but then dying for it. How should this astonishing truth impact how we view our own existence?**

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## Boaz as Redeemer

Boaz falls deeply in love with Ruth and wishes to marry her, but there is a significant barrier: there is a closer relative who also has a claim on the woman and the land. If we consider Boaz to be a type of Christ, this situation may reveal an issue at stake in the great controversy. Christ loves us, but there is a “closer relative” who also has a claim: Satan.

**What** do the following passages reveal about Satan’s claim on humanity? (*Job 1:6–11; Matt. 4:8, 9; Jude 1:9; Luke 22:31*).

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When Satan appeared in the heavenly council, he told God that he had been “ ‘going to and fro in the earth’ ” (*Job 1:7*), and when God asked him if he had noticed the righteous Job, Satan laid claim to him as one of his own, suggesting that Job’s heart did not *really* belong to God. *That is, he really follows You only because You are good to him. Stop being good to him and see who truly has Job’s allegiance.*

In Jude, we see a brief reference to a story that was well known in Israel: after Moses had been buried by God (*Deut. 34:6*), he was later resurrected. Though we are not privy to the details, the text itself, which says that they disputed over the body of Moses, implies that Satan was making some kind of claim on it.

“For the first time Christ was about to give life to the dead. As the Prince of life and the shining ones approached the grave, Satan was alarmed for his supremacy. With his evil angels he stood to dispute an invasion of the territory that he claimed as his own. He boasted that the servant of God had become his prisoner. He declared that even Moses was not able to keep the law of God; that he had taken to himself the glory due to Jehovah—the very sin which had caused Satan’s banishment from heaven—and by transgression had come under the dominion of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 478. Obviously, Christ refuted Satan’s claim, and Moses was resurrected (*see Matt. 17:3*).

In Ruth 4:1–12, Boaz travels to the gate of Bethlehem—the town where Christ would enter our world as our close relative. The elders gather, and finally a sandal (a symbol of ownership) is exchanged.

The gate of a village is where cases were decided: this is a type of judgment scene. It reflects the judgment scene of Daniel 7:13, 14, 22, 26, 27. We must not miss this critical aspect of judgment: judgment is in “favor of the saints” but only because Christ paid the price for us, just as Boaz did for his bride.

## Haman and Satan

In the story of Esther, we meet Haman, who is hungry for position and power. He is given a great degree of prominence in the empire, above all the other princes (*Esther 3:1*).

If we read Ezekiel 28:11–15 and Isaiah 14:12–15 about Lucifer, we can find some parallels with Haman, an evil antagonist to God’s chosen people, who refuses to bow to God’s supremacy. Satan’s overarching intentions are revealed in the story of the temptation of Christ, where he takes Jesus to a high place to show Him the kingdoms of the world (*Matt 4:8–11*). Christ, as we have seen, came to redeem the world and claim it as His own—and He did it as one of us. Jesus is the kinsman redeemer, and the price He paid to redeem the world was exceedingly high.

In the book of Revelation, we see that Satan’s lust for power and worship brings this world to its final crisis. His deceptions convince the world to “marvel” and follow the beast (*Rev. 13:3, 4, NKJV*), except for notable exceptions who refuse to worship him. With these people, he resorts to force.

Haman notices that Mordecai—one of God’s chosen people—would not defer to him or acknowledge what he believed to be his right to “worship.” He is “filled with wrath” (*Esther 3:5, 6, NKJV*), and he becomes determined to eliminate all of Mordecai’s people from the face of the earth.

**Read** Esther 3:1–14, Revelation 12:14–17, and Revelation 13:15. What parallels do you find between these passages? How is John’s description of God’s remnant church like Haman’s description of God’s people?

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The devil has laid claim to this world, but the presence of people who stay loyal to God—who keep His commandments—disproves his claim of complete supremacy. “When the Sabbath shall become the special point of controversy throughout Christendom, the persistent refusal of a small minority to yield to the popular demand will make them objects of universal execration.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 22, 1910.

**Think about the “small” things that test your faith now. If you compromise on them, the “small” things, how will you do when the big test comes?**

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## For Such a Time as This

There is an unfortunate tendency among some Christians to dwell on the hard things of Bible prophecy. We see that trying times lie ahead, and the study of prophecy can become fear-based, focusing on hardship instead of the promised resolution to the story. While God does not sugarcoat the future, and He is honest about the events that will transpire between now and the close of the great controversy, it is important always to read the story to the end.

There is a general pattern in prophecy in which God reveals the truth about the mess created by our human rebellion, and He shows us the consequences. But then He always holds out hope. Some have looked at the predictions of a final crisis—the “time of Jacob’s trouble”—with fear and trembling. Undoubtedly, the closing moments will not be easy ones for God’s people. But just as the prediction of hard times is reliable, so is the promise of deliverance.

In Revelation 12, the devil pursues Christ’s bride with hateful vengeance, but God intervenes to save her. The story of Esther also has a beautiful queen playing a central role in the drama, and God uses her powerfully to save His people.

**Read** Esther 4:13, 14; Esther 5:1–3; and Esther 9:20–28. What lessons can we draw from these passages regarding our plight in the closing moments of earth’s history?

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God raised up His remnant church for a specific moment in history. As the 1,260 days of the Dark Ages drew to a close, God brought His bride out of hiding (*compare with Rev. 12:14*) to carry His final message of mercy—the three angels’ messages—to the world. We are here “for such a time as this” (*Esther 4:14*).

Esther discovered she was not alone in facing the persecution being unleashed on her people by Haman: she found favor from the king, and her people were ultimately delivered. Neither are we alone as we enter the final moments of earth’s history—the King is on our side, and God’s people will be delivered, as well.

**Things worked out well, at least in this story, for God’s people. It doesn’t always happen that way, though, does it? Why, then, must we always take a long-term view of things in order to maintain the hope that we have in Christ?**



**Further Thought:** “The First King of Israel,” pp. 605, 606, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Satan will arouse indignation against the minority who refuse to accept popular customs and traditions. Men of position and reputation will join with the lawless and the vile to take counsel against the people of God. Wealth, genius, education, will combine to cover them with contempt. Persecuting rulers, ministers, and church members will conspire against them. With voice and pen, by boasts, threats, and ridicule, they will seek to overthrow their faith. By false representations and angry appeals, men will stir up the passions of the people. Not having a ‘Thus saith the Scriptures’ to bring against the advocates of the Bible Sabbath, they will resort to oppressive enactments to supply the lack. To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. But those who fear God, cannot accept an institution that violates a precept of the Decalogue. On this battlefield will be fought the last great conflict in the controversy between truth and error. And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 605, 606.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why do you think God allows His people to pass through trying times? What is the point of allowing it?
- ❷ How does a believer prepare himself or herself for any potential hardship that may come with loyalty to Christ? Where do you find hope in the midst of difficult circumstances?
- ❸ Why do you think we tend to dwell on the harder things of prophecy and allow them to eclipse the bigger picture that provides good news?
- ❹ A friend comes to you after reading the book of Revelation and confides that she finds it “terrifying.” What approach would you use to help her understand more clearly and find peace of mind?
- ❺ Someone says, “I’m not convinced that God loves me or wants me. If you knew what I’ve done, you would understand why.” What response would you give? How do the stories of Ruth and Esther inform your approach?

## Part 7: “We Need One of Those!”

By DIANA FISH

Diana and Loren Fish had their dream jobs. She was working in development at the Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Orlando, Florida, and he had a successful counseling practice. But something was missing. They prayed.

On a whim, Diana attended a North American Division Women’s Ministries conference. In the exhibition hall, she stopped at the Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School booth to admire student-made pottery. When a woman at the booth learned that Diana worked in development, she excitedly said that the school was looking for a development director. Diana dismissed the idea that God might be calling her to work at the school in Arizona.

Six months later, Loren decided at the last minute to attend the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas. In the exhibition hall, he found himself at the Holbrook booth. When a woman at the booth learned he was a licensed clinical social worker, she excitedly said, “We need one of those!” She asked about his wife’s job, and he responded that she worked in development. “We need one of those, too!” the woman said, waving at her husband, who happened to be Holbrook’s principal.

Weeks later, the couple visited Holbrook after a vacation to see family in Colorado. They spent nine hours talking with staff about the school’s mission to provide a safe place for American Indian children to learn and grow. They learned that the staff dreamed of having Christian counseling available around the clock for students dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues. Diana tossed and turned that night in the school guestroom. In the morning, she noticed two identical books on a bookshelf. They looked familiar. Reaching into her backpack, she pulled out the same book, which Loren had gotten at the General Conference Session. It was titled, *Follow: Anytime, Anywhere, at Any Cost*, by Don MacLafferty. Immediately, Diana knew God was calling them to Holbrook. She prayed, “You’ll have to put the same impression on Loren’s heart.”

Several days later, back in Florida, Loren told Diana that he had been praying and sensed God calling them to Holbrook. That evening, they submitted their résumés and began packing. Two weeks later, they were offered the positions. They have worked at the school for the past 10 years. “God is so amazing,” Diana said. “He has shown me every step of the way that He is working in my life. Before I knew Him, He knew me and had a plan.”

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*This mission story shows 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 the school next week.*

# Precursors



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 2:31–45; Dan. 3:1–12, 17, 18; Rev. 13:11–17; Rom. 1:18–25; Acts 12:1–17; Matt. 12:9–14.*

**Memory Text:** “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

**T**his week, we will look at two more Bible stories that foreshadow last-day events in remarkable detail.

First, we will examine the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which has obvious allusions to the issues portrayed in Revelation 13. Then we will turn to the New Testament, where we find that the experience of the early Christians also can help us understand what to expect between now and the return of Christ.

Both examples highlight remarkable courage and provide keys to finding peace of mind under the most trying of circumstances.

Again and again, Jesus said such things as “Do not fear,” and “Why do your thoughts trouble you?” It is important to remember that the focus of prophecy is Christ, and, as such, we must be able to find the same counsel throughout the scenes portrayed in earth’s closing moments. “ ‘Let not your heart be troubled,’ ” He taught His disciples, “ ‘you believe in God, believe also in Me’ ” (*John 14:1, NKJV*).

In other words, yes, last-day events will be difficult and trying for those who seek to stay faithful to God. But ultimately, we should view these events with hope, not fear.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.

## Daniel 2 and the Historicist Approach to Prophecy

One of the most powerful prophecies in all Scripture is Daniel 2. Writing more than five hundred years before Christ, the prophet set out world history, starting from his time in Babylon and then through Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the breakup of Rome into the nations of modern Europe as they exist today.

In fact, talking about these European nations, one text says that “ ‘they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay’ ” (*Dan. 2:43, NKJV*). This prophecy has been amazingly fulfilled. That is, despite all sorts of intermarriage between the people (from princes to plebes) of these nations, they remain divided.

For example, the British monarchy is called the House of Windsor, a nice English name. However, that name is a relatively recent development—1917, actually. Before then, the family was called Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a distinctly German name, because many of the British royalty—through mingling “with the seed of men”—were blood relatives with the Germans. However, those blood ties were not enough to keep them from war, and so, during World War I, wanting to dissociate themselves from their hated enemies, they changed the name to the House of Windsor.

**Read Daniel 2:31–45. What was Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and how did Daniel interpret it?**

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The apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel all follow the foundation set in Daniel 2. That is, the rest of these prophecies, like Daniel 2, follow the sequence of one world empire after another until God establishes His eternal kingdom (*see Dan. 2:44; Dan. 7:13, 14*). In other words, the prophecies go through history in *an unbroken sequence of empires*, starting in antiquity and ending in the future, even to our time. This is the historicist approach to interpreting prophecy and is what the texts demand. This use of the historicist approach is crucial for understanding last-day events, particularly as they are depicted in the book of Revelation.

**How does Daniel 2 prove to us that not only does God know the future but that He is, ultimately, in charge of it?**

## Worshipping the Image

However much fealty Nebuchadnezzar, impressed by what Daniel had done, at first paid to Daniel and to his God (*see Daniel 2, especially vv. 46–48*), it didn't last.

**Read Daniel 3:1–12. What significance can be found in the fact that the statue was all gold and that the king demanded that it be worshiped?**

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The king underscored his defiance of God's message by constructing a statue made *entirely* of gold. The message? Babylon will never fall, and Nebuchadnezzar will always be king. And anybody who dared to challenge that idea would be put to death. It serves as a powerful reminder that our human desire for self-determination can quickly blind us to the truth about how the great controversy will most certainly play out.

In some ways, Nebuchadnezzar displays characteristics of Lucifer: he was ambitious, self-important, and prideful enough to rebel openly against God's authority. In other ways, of course, there are marked differences: Nebuchadnezzar eventually came to faith in the true God, and it is likely that we will meet him in the kingdom he originally fought so hard to defy.

**Read Daniel 3:17, 18, the words of the three Hebrew boys in defiance of the king. What does this teach us about faith and what at times it could demand of us?**

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Think how easily these three men could have rationalized their way out of this dangerous situation. After all, were they not being fanatics, willing to be burned alive over merely bowing down? Couldn't they have just faked it, bowing to tie their shoelaces while praying to their own God? Was it really worth what they were facing? Obviously, they thought so, even though their words showed that they knew that they might not escape with their lives.

**How can we avoid the easy rationalizations that present us with opportunities to compromise on our faith? What does this text say that addresses a similar temptation: “ ‘He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much’ ” (*Luke 16:10, NKJV*)?**

## Worshipping the Image, Again

Bible students have long seen the connection between Daniel 3 and what Revelation teaches about last-day events. And with good cause, too, because Daniel 3—with the command, punishable by death, to “worship the image” (*Dan. 3:15*)—reflects what Revelation teaches about the command, punishable by death, to worship another image. “He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

**Read** Revelation 13:11–17; Revelation 14:9, 11, 12; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; and Revelation 20:4. What contrast is present here that pits the commandments of God against the commandments of men?

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God’s people are called to worship “ ‘Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’ ” That is, the Creator, as opposed to the beast and its image. The three Hebrew boys, facing a similar threat, refused to worship anything other than the same Creator God. Hence, however different the circumstances between what happened on the plain of Dura, with the command to worship the image, as opposed to the Creator and what will happen worldwide with the call to worship the image as opposed to the Creator—the principle is the same.

**Read** Romans 1:18–25. (Notice the link between Romans 1:18 and Revelation 14:9, 10 about “the wrath of God.”) In what way is the issue over worshipping the image just another manifestation of this same principle regarding to whom humans ultimately give their allegiance?

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Worship doesn’t necessarily mean bowing and offering incense, though it can. We worship whatever holds our ultimate allegiance. When you consider who God is, our Creator and—after what He has done for us in Jesus—our Redeemer as well, then of course He alone should be worshiped. Anything else is idolatry. Perhaps this helps explain Jesus’ hard words here: “ ‘He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad’ ” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). Final events are simply going to be a dramatic manifestation of this truth.

## Early Church Persecution

It's not just the Old Testament that gives us precursors to final events; the New Testament does, as well. Life was not easy for first-century Christians. They were hated by many of their own fellow religionists, who saw them as a threat to the faith of Moses. They also faced the wrath of the pagan Roman Empire. "The powers of earth and hell arrayed themselves against Christ in the person of His followers. Paganism foresaw that should the gospel triumph, her temples and altars would be swept away; therefore she summoned her forces to destroy Christianity. The fires of persecution were kindled."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 39.

There is a story in the book of Acts that demonstrates, quite powerfully, what God's people might expect as we head toward the scenario found in Revelation 13.

**Read** Acts 12:1–17. What elements of this story might foreshadow last-day events?

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James had been beheaded, and Peter was to be next; there was a death penalty against Christians. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of this story can be found in the fact that Peter is *sleeping* on what should be the worst night of his life—so soundly that the angel actually has to strike him to wake him up!

Peter, of course, was miraculously set free and found his way to a meeting of believers who had trouble believing that he had really been delivered, even though they had been praying. The Bible says they were *astonished*—which makes one wonder how often we pray and scarcely dare to believe that God will actually answer us.

Some believers were spared; others were killed. As we approach the end time, the same thing will happen. Even Peter, though spared then, eventually died for his faith. Jesus Himself even told him how: " 'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me' " (*John 21:18, 19, NKJV*).

**Notice that Jesus, after telling Peter how he would die, nevertheless still says to him, " 'Follow Me.' " What should this tell us about why even the threat of death should not keep us from following the Lord?**

## The Mark of the Beast

As the years have passed and final events—such as the death decree and the enforcement of the mark of the beast—have not yet happened, some have expressed doubt, even skepticism, about our interpretation of final events, including how Sabbath and Sunday could be central to the final conflict.

The book of Revelation is clear: we either worship the Creator or the beast and its image. And because the seventh-day Sabbath is the foundational sign—going back to Eden itself (*see Gen. 2:1–3*)—of God as Creator, it should not be surprising that, in an issue about worshiping the Creator, the Sabbath would be central. Also, it is no coincidence that the beast power is the same power that claims to have changed the Sabbath commandment from the biblical day to Sunday, which has no sanction in the Bible. With this background in mind, the idea of Sabbath and Sunday being involved in the issue of worship—again, either the Creator (*see Rev. 14:6, 7*) or the beast—makes good sense. And we have in the New Testament a precursor to the issue of the seventh-day Sabbath versus human law.

**Read** Matthew 12:9–14 and John 5:1–16. What issue caused the religious leaders to want to kill Jesus?

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In Matthew 12, after Jesus healed on the Sabbath the man with a withered hand (*Matt. 12:9–13*), how did the religious leaders respond? “But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (*Matt. 12:14, NIV*). *Death because of the seventh-day Sabbath?* In John 5:1–16, after another miraculous healing on the seventh day, the leaders “persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath” (*John 5:16, NKJV*).

Death because of human tradition (nothing in the Bible forbade healing on Sabbath, just as nothing in the Bible has put Sunday in place of Sabbath) versus the seventh-day Sabbath? Though the specific issue here with Jesus isn’t the same as in final events, it’s close enough: human law versus God’s, and, in both, the contested law centers on the biblical Sabbath.

**Dying over one of the commandments of God? How could one easily seek to rationalize one’s way out of that?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

“In all ages, God has wrought through holy angels for the succor and deliverance of His people. Celestial beings have taken an active part in the affairs of men. They have appeared clothed in garments that shone as the lightning; they have come as men in the garb of wayfarers. Angels have appeared in human form to men of God. They have rested, as if weary, under the oaks at noon. They have accepted the hospitalities of human homes. They have acted as guides to benighted travelers. They have, with their own hands, kindled the fires at the altar. They have opened prison doors and set free the servants of the Lord. Clothed with the panoply of heaven, they came to roll away the stone from the Saviour’s tomb.

“In the form of men, angels are often in the assemblies of the righteous; and they visit the assemblies of the wicked, as they went to Sodom, to make a record of their deeds, to determine whether they have passed the boundary of God’s forbearance. The Lord delights in mercy; and for the sake of a few who really serve Him, He restrains calamities and prolongs the tranquillity of multitudes. Little do sinners against God realize that they are indebted for their own lives to the faithful few whom they delight to ridicule and oppress.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 631, 632.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Read 2 Timothy 1:7. Discuss the things in prophecy that have worried you most. How do we shake off the spirit of fear and find God’s message of hope even amid the prophecies that talk about persecution for our faith?
- ② Though right now it might be hard to see how Sabbath and Sunday could become front and center in final events, look at how quickly the world can change. What should this truth teach us about not basing our faith on current events, which can change in an instant, but only on the revealed Word of God?
- ③ Think about Daniel 2 (and even 7). All the empires came and went exactly as predicted. Today, looking back over history, we can see that they did, as predicted. From our perspective today, only one more kingdom is to come. Which one is that, and why can we be assured that it will, indeed, come as predicted?

## Epilogue: A Daily Battle

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Seventeen-year-old Anders complained of hearing voices at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School in the US state of Arizona. The school counselor, Loren Fish, met with him and determined that it wasn't a mental health issue. Staff members prayed.

But then Anders started acting like a possessed person. While at home during school break, he had attended a traditional ceremony. Back at school, the slightly built teen began to exhibit superhuman strength at times, and Holbrook's staff had trouble controlling him. Other times, his eyes rolled back in his head. After an attack, he'd sleep for hours. When he awoke, he acted normal, but he was scared. One day, he asked the boys' dean, "What does Legion mean?" He'd heard the word "Legion" in his head. The dean remembered how Jesus, before healing a possessed man, asked the demon for his name, and the demon replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many" (*Mark 5:9, NKJV*). The registrar, who was mentoring Anders, asked if he would like for the school staff to pray over him. The boy said yes.

In the school's conference room, staff gathered around Anders and began to pray for him. Suddenly, the boy groaned and fell to the floor. No one was sure about what to do. Several people prayed out loud while others sang hymns. Still others urged Anders to pray, "Jesus, help me." Anders could not get the words to come out of his mouth. It was complete chaos. Then Anders started to laugh at the staff. It was a strange, unnatural laugh.

The school's development director, Diana Fish, felt embarrassed. *The devil knows that we don't know what to do*, she thought. Pulling out her cellphone, she googled, "How to help a possessed person." She found a paper titled, "Ellen White on Confrontation with Evil Spiritual Powers" by Marc Coleman on the Andrews University website. "Listen," she said. "We need to be united. We need to command the spirit to leave in Jesus' name."

Immediately, a staff member commanded the spirit, "Come out in the name of Jesus!" Then Anders gasped, "Jesus, help me!" All of the staff exclaimed in unison, "Praise God!" A loud screech came out of the boy. The school's business manager felt something like a strong whirlwind fly past her and out of the room. Then there was peace. Anders lay, weeping, on the floor. Two staff members brought in a cot, and the boy slept for rest of the afternoon. After that, Anders was better—until he went home again. When he returned, the harassment resumed, and the student left the school.

"We're still praying for him," Diana said. "We know it's a spiritual battle, and it's not over. We deal with the great controversy daily with our students."

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*This mission story offers an inside look at a previous Thirteenth Sabbath project, Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Anders is a pseudonym. Thank you for supporting the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on June 28.*

# Images of the End



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 12:38–42; Jonah 3:5–10; Rev. 18:4; Dan. 5:1–31; Rev. 16:12–19; 2 Chron. 36:22, 23.*

**Memory Text:** “So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ ” (*Jonah 1:9, NKJV*).

This week will be our final look at accounts that help elucidate our understanding of last-day events. This time we will look at the mission of Jonah to Nineveh; the fall of Babylon; and the rise of Cyrus, the Persian king who liberated God's people and enabled them to return to the Promised Land.

As with the other stories we've examined, these historical accounts have held profound meaning for every generation. But they also have *special* relevance to the final generations living before Christ returns. That is, we can mine from these historical accounts various elements that can help us better understand what we call “present truth.”

At the same time, we must remember one thing concerning all these stories that appear to foreshadow last-day events: we must be careful to look at broad themes and allusions and not try to parse every detail to the point of creating prophetic absurdities. As in the parables of Jesus, we should look for the major points and principles. We should not milk every detail in hopes of finding some hidden truth. Instead, we should look for the outlines, the principles; and from these we can discover elements relevant for the last days.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.

## The Reluctant Prophet

The story of Jonah (*see Jonah 1–4*), while brief, delivers considerable impact. Many believers have found reflections of themselves in this reluctant prophet. The story also contains remarkable overtones of future events.

**Read** Matthew 12:38–42. Which parts of the story of Jonah does Jesus refer to as He addresses the scribes and Pharisees? What lessons about the judgment are found in His statement?

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Jesus declared that He was greater than Jonah. He knew that coming to this world would mean the Cross, and still He came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (*Luke 19:10*). Jonah spent three days in the great fish because of his own sins; Jesus spent three days in the tomb because of ours. That’s what it took to save the lost.

Today, we know Jonah as a reluctant prophet, unwilling to go to Nineveh. From a human perspective, it is easy to understand—the Assyrians ran a brutal regime. Assyrian murals are replete with scenes of unusual cruelty; conquered peoples were put to death by the most cruel methods imaginable. Who would want to face the prospect of preaching repentance in their capital city?

There is an important moment in the story that may point forward to the last-day remnant movement. When Jonah is asked who he is, he responds, “‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’”—a statement much like the first angel’s message (*Jon. 1:9, NKJV; Rev. 14:7*). Indeed, his emphasis on the Lord as the One “‘who made the sea and the dry land’” is, of course, pointing to Him as the Creator. This fact is foundational to why we should worship Him, and worship is central to last-day events.

At the same time, we, too, have been charged with preaching a potentially unpopular message in spiritual Babylon. To say “come out of her, my people” (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*) is to tell the world they must repent—a message that has almost always provoked a negative response from many people, even when delivered in the kindest way possible. Who of us when witnessing has not received negative, or even hostile, responses? It just comes with the job.

**How much of Jonah do you find in yourself? How can you move beyond this wrong attitude?**

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## A Work of Repentance

Jonah had a very distinct message for the people of Nineveh. “And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ” (*Jon. 3:4, NKJV*). It seems pretty clear: the place was doomed. After all, was that not a word directly from a prophet of the Lord?

Yet, what happened to Nineveh?

**Read** Jonah 3:5–10. Why was this prophecy not fulfilled?

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Yes, the whole city repented, and the prophesied doom was averted, at least for a time. “Their doom was averted, the God of Israel was exalted and honored throughout the heathen world, and His law was revered. Not until many years later was Nineveh to fall a prey to the surrounding nations through forgetfulness of God and through boastful pride.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271.

Can we expect something like this in the last days, with the final message to the fallen world? Yes—and no. That is, there will be, all over the world, many people who heed the call, “ ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’ ” (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*). All over the world, people will take their stand and, in defiance of the beast, will “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*). These people, like those in Nineveh, will be spared the judgment that falls upon the lost.

Some prophecies, such as God’s announcement that Nineveh would be destroyed, are conditional. (Ninevah would be destroyed *unless the people turned away from their evil* [see *Jer. 18:7–10*].) Yet, some prophecies don’t come with these conditions. They are going to be fulfilled, no matter the human response. The Messianic prophecies of Christ’s first and second comings, the mark of the beast, the outpouring of the plagues, end-time persecution—these are not conditional; they will take place regardless of what humans do. What humans do, and the choices they make, will determine instead what side they will be on as final events, foretold by the prophets, unfold.

**What choices are you making now that could help determine what choices you will make when the issue of worshipping God or the image breaks upon the world?**

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## Belshazzar's Feast

After the city of Nineveh had been humbled (612 B.C.) by a coalition army that included both Medes and Babylonians (led by Nebuchadnezzar's father), the city of Babylon experienced a revival, the likes of which the city had not seen since the days of Hammurabi, their great lawgiver. Under Nebuchadnezzar, who was now free from the problem of Assyrian raids, the city of Babylon grew in wealth and influence to the point where the neighboring nations had little choice but to grudgingly acknowledge her dominance. She was queen of the world, and nations who wished to prosper declared their loyalty to her.

Meanwhile, as far as we can tell, Nebuchadnezzar died as a believer, professing that Daniel's God was, indeed, the rightful ruler of all nations (*Dan. 4:34–37*). The next account that Daniel provides is that of his successor, the vice-regent Belshazzar.

**Read Daniel 5:1–31. What important spiritual messages can we take from this account? What ultimately tripped up Belshazzar?**

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Perhaps the saddest, most tragic part of this account is found in Daniel 5:22. After recounting to the king the downfall and then the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel says to him, “ ‘But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this’ ” (*NKJV*). That is, though he had the opportunity to know truth, though he might have even witnessed firsthand what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, he chose to ignore these events and, instead, embarked on the same course that brought his predecessor so much trouble.

As Nebuchadnezzar had done by erecting the golden statue, Belshazzar was openly defying what Daniel's God had predicted. By using the temple vessels in a profane manner, he was likely underscoring the fact that Babylon had conquered the Jews and now possessed their God's religious articles. In other words, they still had supremacy over this God who had predicted their demise.

It was, indeed, an act of total defiance, even though Belshazzar had more than enough evidence, proof, to know better. He had enough head knowledge to know the truth; the problem, instead, was his heart. In the last days, as the final crisis breaks upon the world, people will be given the opportunity to know the truth, as well. What determines their choice, as with Belshazzar, will be their hearts.

## The Drying of the Euphrates

One of Babylon's strengths was the way that the Euphrates River flowed underneath its walls, providing the city with an unlimited supply of water. It also proved to be its weakness. Nitocris, an ancient Babylonian queen, had created earthen works along the river to develop it as a route to the city. In the process, she had diverted the river into a swamp to allow crews to work comfortably. Cyrus realized that he could do the same thing: dry up the Euphrates enough that he could comfortably march his troops under the wall. Once inside the city walls, he found the defensive walls that followed the river through the city unguarded, and the city fell in a single night. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells us that "those who lived in the centre of Babylon had no idea that the suburbs had fallen, for it was a time of festival, and all were dancing, and indulging themselves in pleasures."—Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Tom Holland (New York: Penguin, 2015), p. 94. Can there be any doubt that this is the same feast as portrayed in Daniel 5?

**Read Daniel 5:18–31 and Revelation 16:12–19. What parallels do you find between some of the plagues of Revelation and the story of Babylon's fall?**

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In explaining how to discern the signs of the times, Jesus warned His disciples, " 'Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into' " (*Matt. 24:42, 43, NKJV*). Just as in the fall of Babylon, the sudden appearance of Christ will catch modern Babylon by surprise. It does not need to be this way, however; we have been given ample evidence of the soon coming of Jesus in a multitude of detailed prophecies.

The world will not be caught by surprise merely because it is ignorant of what God has predicted; it will be surprised because it has chosen not to believe what God has said would happen.

**Read Revelation 16:15. Even amid these end-time warnings, what gospel message is found there? What does it mean to not "walk naked"?**

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## Cyrus, the Anointed

When Cyrus sacked the city of Babylon, the years of captivity for God's people were over, and the Persians permitted the Jews to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple. Under Cyrus, the Persian Empire became the largest in history, with what historian Tom Holland calls "the largest agglomeration of territories that the world had ever seen."—*Dominion* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), p. 25.

As was the custom among the Persians, Cyrus was even called "the Great King" or "King of kings."

Cyrus foreshadows what will happen when Christ returns for His church: He is the King who comes from the east (*compare with Matt. 24:27*), waging war against Babylon, and liberating His people finally to escape from Babylon and return to the Land of Promise. (*See Rev. 19:11–16.*) This is why God refers to Cyrus as "His anointed" (*Isa. 45:1, NKJV*); not only did this famous Persian liberate God's people, but his campaign against Babylon is also a type of Christ's second coming.

**Read 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23. In what ways does the story of Cyrus parallel that of Nebuchadnezzar? In what ways does it differ? What is the significance of the decree? After all, how did it impact the whole first coming of Jesus centuries later?**

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The original order of Old Testament books has been changed in our day to end with Malachi, but originally, this is where the Old Testament ended—with this declaration from Cyrus. The next episode in the canon of Scripture would be Matthew, which begins with the birth of Christ, the antitypical Cyrus. Cyrus would orchestrate the rebuilding of the earthly temple; Jesus would inaugurate His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, leading up to His return and our liberation.

Cyrus, of course, was not a *perfect* representation of Christ; no type lines up perfectly with antitype, and we must be careful not to read too much into every tiny detail. Nevertheless, he broadly functions as a type of "Savior."

**How fascinating that God would use a pagan king in such a marked manner to do His will. Despite how things appear to us on the outside, how can we learn the truth that, long term, the Lord is going to bring about end-time events as prophesied?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Unseen Watcher,” pp. 535–538, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that the fact might be determined whether it would fulfill the purposes of the Watcher and the Holy One. Prophecy has traced the rise and progress of the world’s great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with the nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed. While nations have rejected God’s principles, and in this rejection have wrought their own ruin, yet a divine, overruling purpose has manifestly been at work throughout the ages.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 535.

In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah observes a potter doing what a potter does: molding and shaping whatever he is working on. It is this imagery, that of a potter molding his clay, that God uses to explain the principle of conditionality in biblical prophecy. And just to make sure we understand, the Lord speaks through Jeremiah, saying: “ ‘The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it’ ” (*Jer. 18:7–10, NKJV*).

### Discussion Question:

- ❶ Think about Jesus’ statement that the judgment will be easier for Nineveh than for the people of God who had strayed from the truth. (*See Matt. 12:39–42.*) What lesson can God’s church derive from this warning?
- ❷ Notice Ellen G. White’s statement that with each succeeding empire, “history has repeated itself.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 535. What do you see as common threads among all the empires listed in prophecy? In what ways did they follow the same prophetic path? How is our current world following them, as well?
- ❸ Think through the idea that it’s not often the mind, the intellect, that keeps people from faith, but the heart. How might this knowledge impact how you witness to others?

## “Let’s Make a Deal”

By LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN

Maria was happy when a homeowner invited her in to look at the books that she was selling in a non-Christian country in Southeast Asia. Maria pulled several health books from her bag, but the man stopped her.

“I see what you’re doing,” he said. “You’re bringing out the lighter, more neutral books first, and after I drop my guard, you’re going to bring out the Christian books that you really want me to see. I know your intentions, so share the Christian books first.”

Maria sent up a silent prayer. “Lord, please help me,” she said. “I don’t know what to say.” Out loud, she said, “I have several books on health and religion. I want to share whatever people want to see. If they have an interest in health, I share those books. If they have an interest in religion, I’m happy to share those books, too.”

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

Maria felt anxious. She took a deep breath and said, “I’m not wise enough to answer anything that you ask. I need help. May I pray first?”

The man agreed. Maria prayed out loud. She asked for wisdom and knowledge, and she ended the prayer in the name of Jesus.

Immediately, the man asked, “We say Jesus was a prophet, but you say He is a God. Why do you say that? How can a mere man become God?”

Without pausing, Maria said, “Many people think that Jesus only started to live when He was on earth as a baby, but He was around years before that. Jesus was part of the Godhead, and God sent Him to this earth in the form of a baby as a regular human being. Then Jesus was called to be a prophet, then He was called to be a sacrifice, and then He was called to be a high priest. So right now, He is interceding for our sins. Jesus is not just a prophet. He was called to be more than a prophet. He is a high priest—not just for me but for all who accept Him.”

The man put his head in his hands. “That is about the nicest thing I’ve ever heard,” he said.

That was his first and only question. With tears in his eyes, he bought every book that Maria had. As they bid each other goodbye, he said, “You really explained to me what I wanted to know. Now I look forward to reading all your books.”

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*Pray for Maria and other missionaries seeking to reach unreached people groups in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, where this story took place. Maria is a pseudonym. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath that will help spread the gospel in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.*

The God revealed in Exodus is the loving Lord, who, at the appointed time, brought deliverance to His people. The Exodus from Egypt and the Red Sea crossing were pivotal and unique events—God’s spectacular and marvelous acts. No greater or more glorious events ever happened in the Old Testament. It’s the gospel but according to Moses.

God demonstrated His care and protection for the Hebrews despite their backslidings. This series of divine interventions was the beginning of their renewed journey with God from Egypt that led to Canaan.

Exodus, our study this quarter by Jifí Moskala, is a book about the God of love who ultimately went to the cross for us. By studying Exodus, we will get a unique look at what God is really like.

The events in the book should serve as a warning and a source of unforgettable instruction for us now. We should study and learn from them because no matter how different the circumstances, the spiritual principles behind them remain the same.

May the Lord bless us as we study this pivotal book, which reminds us of how God wants to lead His people from slavery to sin, from death to life, and from the wilderness to the New Jerusalem (*Heb. 12:22*).

## Lesson 1—Oppression: The Background and the Birth of Moses

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **God’s People in Egypt** (*Exod. 1:1–7*)

MONDAY: **The Historical Background** (*Gen. 37:26–28*)

TUESDAY: **The Hebrew Midwives** (*Exod. 1:9–21*)

WEDNESDAY: **Moses Is Born** (*Exod. 2:1–10*)

THURSDAY: **A Change of Plans** (*Exod. 2:11–25*)

**Memory Text**—*Exodus 2:23–25, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** God hears the cry of the oppressed, sees their struggles, notes their tears, and, moved by their agony, comes to help.

## Lesson 2—The Burning Bush

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Burning Bush** (*Exod. 3:1–6*)

MONDAY: **The Angel of the Lord** (*Exod. 3:7–12*)

TUESDAY: **The Name of the Lord** (*Exod. 3:13–22*)

WEDNESDAY: **Four Excuses** (*Exod. 3:11, 13; Exod. 4:1, 10*)

THURSDAY: **The Circumcision** (*Exod. 4:18–31*)

**Memory Text**—*Exodus 3:7, 8, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** It is true that we can be useful to God in many ways, but following God’s call in our lives, and doing what He leads us to do, is surely the path to the most satisfying existence.

**Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind** The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: [services@christianrecord.org](mailto:services@christianrecord.org); website: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).