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## The Three Angels' Messages



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A coincidence that all these events happened in 1844? One should not think so.

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

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

And this, the three angels' messages, is our study for the quarter.

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

# How to Use This Teachers Edition

**“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”**

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

**Final thought:** What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

# Jesus Wins—Satan Loses



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**Memory Text:** “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

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

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

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

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

## The Battle in Heaven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Satan's Attack

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

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

**Dragon** \_\_\_\_\_

**Woman** \_\_\_\_\_

**Male Child** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rod of Iron** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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## Accepting Jesus' Victory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Woman in the Wilderness

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

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

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

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

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

## God’s End-time Remnant

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confident and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 34, 35.

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Run to Jesus

By ALICIA MARIE HARDING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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Our study this week focuses on the great controversy between good and evil down through centuries. Revelation 12 presents four great episodes in this conflict. They are Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, his attempt to destroy the infant Jesus, his attack on God's people during the Middle Ages, and his final attack on God's remnant people in the last days. In each of these conflicts, Christ is revealed as our victorious Lord, our triumphant Redeemer, and our mighty Conqueror.

The key thought in our lesson this week is that, despite Satan's vicious attacks on God's people and his attempts to destroy them, Jesus wins, and Satan loses. This thought is vital in preparing us to understand Revelation's end-time message, found in Revelation 14:6–12. Although God's people will face oppression, persecution, and imprisonment, as well as an economic boycott and a death decree, they have the absolute assurance that, on the cross, Jesus triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell. Satan is a defeated foe. The same Jesus who never lost a battle with Satan will not lose the final battle either. Jesus will see His people through to victory in earth's final conflict.

There are challenging times ahead. God's people will face their greatest test in the final days of earth's history, but we can face our future trials with the supreme confidence that in Jesus, through Jesus, and because of Jesus, we too can be victorious.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Revelation 12 could rightly be called the hinge upon which the entire book of Revelation pivots. Chapter 12 is at the heart of the Bible's last book and transitions from all that has gone before to all that will come. Chapter 12 links the previous chapters in Revelation with the future chapters. Revelation 1 begins with the glorious picture of Christ as our Creator, Redeemer, High Priest, and coming King. Then the book of Revelation proceeds to introduce three sequences of sevens—the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets. Each of these sequences ends in victory for Christ and His church.

The purpose of these early chapters is to clearly reveal how Christ finally aborts Satan's successive attempts to destroy God's people and to show the ultimate triumph of Christ Jesus in the cosmic conflict between good and evil. The revelation of Jesus Christ in each of these chapters paves the way in Revelation 12:17 for the revelation of Jesus in His people. Leading up to this revelation, in each successive sequence of seven, we see that there are those faithful believers who "overcome," those who do not yield to the

oppressive forces of evil, those who are loyal to Christ, and those who worship with the faithful of all ages before His throne (*Rev. 7:9–12*).

In the last of these sequences of seven, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, saying with a loud voice, “ ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’ ” (*Rev. 11:15, NKJV*). The first 11 chapters of Revelation give us the assurance that the Christ who triumphed over the powers of hell down through the ages will triumph in earth’s final conflict. Although truth has been trampled on, God’s people persecuted, and tens of thousands martyred, Satan has never been able to stamp out God’s truth or to destroy His people completely.

The candle of truth may have flickered, but it has never been snuffed out. There has always been a light in the darkness. Eventually, the entire earth will be lightened with the glory of God (*Rev. 18:1*). The American writer James Russell Lowell states it well in the poem “The Present Crisis”:

Truth forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the throne—  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow,  
Keeping watch above His own.

### **Key Verse (Part 1): Revelation 12:11**

Although Revelation 12 is packed with significance, two verses are extremely meaningful and worthy of our special attention. The first verse is Revelation 12:11: “ ‘And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’ ” (*NKJV*). The word “overcome” implies victory, triumph, and conquest. It is used 17 times in the book of Revelation. God’s people overcome. They are not overcome.

The question is—how do we overcome? How is it possible to triumph over the temptations of the evil one? Revelation 12:11 answers this question by declaring, “ ‘They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.’ ” The expression “ ‘by the blood’ ” can also be translated as “because of the blood” or “on the basis of the blood.” In the words of one old hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

We do not overcome by our willpower. The devil is a cunning foe. He knows our weak points of character. He knows where we have fallen before. He knows our most vulnerable points. Our hope is anchored in Christ and His righteousness. There are two very powerful statements commenting on Revelation 12:11 by Ellen G. White in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 974:

“All who will can be overcomers. Let us strive earnestly to reach the standard set before us. Christ knows our weakness, and to Him we can go daily for help. It is not necessary for us to gain strength a month ahead.

We are to conquer from day to day (MS 28, 1886).”

It is only as we trust Jesus completely and go to Him daily for help that we can be overcomers. Not only does Satan know our weaknesses, but so does Jesus. By His grace and through His power, Jesus delivers us from the guilt and grip of sin. Through His blood we are released from sin’s condemnation and freed from its domination. Ellen G. White’s second comment clarifies this point: “We become overcomers by helping others to overcome, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. The keeping of the commandments of God will yield in us an obedient spirit, and the service that is the offspring of such a spirit, God can accept (Letter 236, 1908).”

The essence of sin is selfishness. When we come to the cross, Christ’s grace transforms us. His love motivates us to serve and bless others. The “word of our testimony” refers to our witness. Not only does our witness bless others, but we ourselves are blessed when we serve. Christ’s power to overcome flows from heaven’s sanctuary to those who trust Jesus completely, who are redeemed by His grace, and who give their lives to His service.

### **Key Verse (Part 2): Revelation 12:17**

The last verse of Revelation 12 is one of the key verses in the entire Bible. The dragon (Satan) is angry with the faithful remnant people of God and makes war with this last-day movement, “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Rev. 12:17, NKJV*). In Revelation 13, the devil calls on his two allies to assist him in earth’s final war. The allies are represented as the beast from the sea (*Rev. 13:1–10*) and the beast from the land, also known as the false prophet (*Rev. 13:11–18; compare Rev. 16:13, Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:10*).

Seventh-day Adventists understand that these two beasts represent the Papacy (the Roman Catholic Church state power) and the United States, respectively. Furthermore, so closely aligned is spiritualism with Satan that the dragon is a symbol for both. Under the auspices of this threefold union—the dragon (spiritualism), the beast from the sea (the Papacy), and the beast from the land, also known as the false prophet (apostate Protestantism under the auspices of the United States of America)—Satan will make war on the remnant people of God.

The term “remnant” is used throughout the Bible to describe God’s faithful people. The Old Testament uses the word “remnant,” or its derivative, in at least three ways. First, there is the concept of preservation. Members of Jacob’s family were preserved from the devastating famine through Joseph’s intervention. Genesis 45:7 speaks of these family members as Jacob’s posterity or, literally, as “the remnant.” The emphasis here is on the fact that Jacob’s descendants were preserved. Likewise, God’s end-time remnant are preserved from the attacks of the dragon and his

allies, the beast and the false prophet. In the same way that God sent Joseph to Egypt to “‘preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance’” (*Gen. 45:7, NKJV*), God sends His last-day remnant people ahead of His second coming to warn the world and to save many people from impending destruction by the seven last plagues.

Second, in 1 Kings 19:14, 18, the word “remnant” is used to signify “that which is left over.” Elijah cries to the Lord, “‘I alone am left’” (*1 Kings 19:14, NKJV*).

And God responds, “‘I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal’” (*1 Kings 19:18, NKJV*). Here the word “remnant” conveys the idea of those who remain faithful and have not surrendered to the surrounding corruption of false worship.

Third, in some instances in the Old Testament, the word “remnant” is used to signify those who escape the captivity of Babylon (*Jer. 23:3, Jer. 31:7*). Putting these verses together helps us to form a more comprehensive picture of God’s end-time remnant movement in Revelation 12. In summary, this remnant people can be identified by their loyalty to all of God’s commandments. They also are endowed with the “testimony of Jesus” (*Rev. 12:17*), which, according to Revelation 19:10, “‘is the spirit of prophecy.’” In addition to the manifestation of the prophetic gift in their midst, the remnant is identified as those who are preserved by God as faithful to Him, who escape the corruption of this world, and who, through their commitment to Christ and their obedience to His Word, are delivered from the false teachings of spiritual Babylon.

### *Part III: Life Application*

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**For Personal Reflection:** Revelation 12 provides multiple practical lessons for twenty-first-century Christian living. First, Revelation 12 assures us that, amid the trials of life, Christ is always there. This chapter reminds us that Satan is a defeated foe. It gives us the confidence that in our fiercest battles with Satan, Christ has already won the victory. Reading Revelation 12 gives us the assurance that we serve a mighty God who is greater than our adversary.

An example of God’s provision in times of trouble is found in two specific verses—Revelation 12:6 and Revelation 12:14. Both verses speak about the same period but have a slightly different emphasis. The context of these verses is the persecution of God’s people during the Middle Ages, from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. Revelation 12:6 reads, “Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (NKJV). Revelation 12:14 says that the woman, or the church, was “nourished” in the wilderness. The encouraging eternal truth of these verses is that in our times of trial, tribulation, and testing,



God always has a place prepared for us. He nourishes us in trial. In the trials of life, He is there to strengthen, sustain, and support us. In life's greatest trials, His Spirit nurtures us and draws us closer to God's side.

The two great lessons for your students to take away from this week's study are:

1. Christ has never lost a battle with Satan, and at the end time, His people will be victorious.
2. Whatever trials we face, God is there to carry His people through triumphantly.

**Discuss:**

- 1. In what ways is Revelation 12 full of hope for the people of God at the end time?**

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- 2. Considering this hope, what reasons do we have to rejoice in Christ's victory over the principalities and powers of hell?**

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# A Moment of Destiny




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, now is the time to prepare.

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

## Eternal Choices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Son of Man Returns

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

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

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

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

*Matt. 16:27* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Matt. 24:27, 30* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Matt. 25:31, 32* \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## The Heavenly Judgment

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Victor's Crown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Every Seed Produces a Harvest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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



## 700 Former Rebels Baptized

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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




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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The book of Revelation is a book of contrasts. Each of these contrasts calls us to make eternal choices. We will worship either the dragon or the Lamb. We will receive either the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Either we will fall for the cunning deceptions of the woman in scarlet—Satan’s counterfeit movement—or we will walk with the woman in white—God’s true church. Either we will accept the deceptive teachings of spiritual Babylon, or we will rejoice in the truth that flows from the New Jerusalem.

This week, we will especially study the two harvests in Revelation 14:14–20. They are the harvest of golden grain gathered into the garner of God and the harvest of gory grapes, tread in the winepress of His wrath.

Throughout the Bible, God uses the symbolism of the harvest to describe the completion of the work of God’s grace in the soul. When that work is complete and the gospel is proclaimed to all nations, “the end will come” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*). The Gospel of Mark puts it this way: “‘But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’” (*Mark 4:29, NKJV*). Jesus adds, “The harvest is the end of the world” (*Matt. 13:39*). Before the return of Jesus, every human being on planet Earth will have a reasonable opportunity to respond to His love, receive His grace, and walk in His truth. This week we will study earth’s final harvest and discover how we can be part of the harvest of “golden grain” and not “the gory grapes.”

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Revelation 14:14–20 describes the result of the proclamation of the three angels’ messages, blazoned with a loud voice to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*) in verses 6–12. The second coming of Christ happens only after these messages have been promulgated. The preaching of these messages prepares the world for the coming of Jesus. Thus, these messages are of eternal significance. To accept these messages means eternal life. To reject them results, ultimately, in the second death, an annihilation whose results are irreversible and permanent.

In Revelation 14:14, John declares, “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man” (*NKJV*). Throughout Scripture, clouds represent the presence of God. During the Exodus “the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way” (*Exod. 13:21, NKJV*). At Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments, the record states, “A cloud covered the mountain” (*Exod. 24:15, NKJV*). God’s glory rested upon Sinai, and “the cloud covered it six days” (*Exod. 24:16*).

When the ancient sanctuary in the wilderness was dedicated, the presence of God was revealed as a cloud resting at the door of the sanctuary. When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, God's presence was also made known by His appearance "in the cloud above the mercy seat" (*Lev. 16:2, NKJV*).

In the magnificent judgment scene described in Daniel 7:9–14, Daniel beholds "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!" (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*) to His Father, the Ancient of Days. At His ascension, Jesus ascends in a cloud (*Acts 1:9*). Jesus ascended in the clouds, and when He comes again in glory, He will descend in the clouds (*Rev. 1:7*).

"The Son of Man" is Jesus' favorite title for Himself. It is used more than 80 times in the four Gospels. It is fascinating to observe that no one except Jesus uses the title Son of Man to identify who He is. Jesus uses this title to reveal His total identity with our humanity. He is "one with us." He is our Savior who is exceedingly near. He understands our weaknesses, has experienced our trials, and has known our sorrows. As the book of Hebrews so eloquently puts it: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (*Heb. 2:14, NKJV*).

It is the Son of Man who returns in clouds of glory to take us home. It is the same Jesus who walked the dusty streets of Galilee. This same Jesus healed the sick. He cleansed the lepers. He opened blind eyes. He unstopped deaf ears. He delivered demoniacs from the power of Satan and his legions of evil angels. Jesus forgave adulterers, thieves, self-righteous Pharisees, and faltering disciples. This Christ who came once is coming again. John uses Jesus' favorite title for Himself, the Son of Man, to reassure each one of us that those who have been redeemed through the Cross, accepted His grace, and have been transformed by His power will look up on that glorious day with rejoicing and experience the fullness of Isaiah's promise: "And it will be said in that day: 'Behold this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation'" (*Isa. 25:9, NKJV*).

### **The Concept of the Harvest**

What does it mean that the harvest is fully ripe? Specifically, what does the angel mean when he says to the Son of Man, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (*Rev. 14:15, NKJV*)? Most farmers wait until their crops are ripe before they harvest them. In the same way, Jesus, the Divine Harvester, will not return until the crop is fully ripe. Revelation 22:11, 12 describes this harvest in another way: "He who is unjust, let him

be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work'” (*NKJV*). The preaching of God’s last-day message leads men and women to make eternal decisions. The Holy Spirit brings conviction to their hearts. Their choice to accept or reject Jesus’ love, grace, and truth settles their eternal destiny forever. Thus, they make their final, irrevocable decision.

When these conditions are met, the harvest will now be ripe for the harvest. At that time, there will be only two classes upon the earth: those that are fully, unreservedly committed to Christ—nothing can shake their loyalty to Him—and those that have compromised their integrity and have sold out to the devil. At this point, the entire universe will see the character of Christ revealed in the redeemed and the character of Satan revealed in the lost.

It is the purpose of the message that we are studying this quarter to produce the glorious harvest for the kingdom of God. Commenting on the harvest principle in Mark 4, Ellen G. White writes, “ ‘When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.’ Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 69.

Here is the incredibly good news. Jesus will complete what He has started in the lives of His people. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (*Heb. 12:1, 2*). As the apostle Paul declares to the church at Philippi: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6, NKJV*). Grace is greater than sin, for “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*).

It may be difficult to understand how Jesus will produce a final harvest in these sin-polluted lives of ours, but it is all accomplished by grace through faith. And though we are always, and only, saved by Christ’s imputed, credited righteousness for us, by grace through faith, we accept His sanctifying power in our lives as well, and we daily grow in our spiritual walk with Him.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Personal Reflection:** Our study this week clearly reveals that Jesus will complete the work He has begun in this world. “ ‘This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world **as a witness** to all the nations, and then the end will come’ ” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). The word “witness” in this verse is especially significant. A witness gives a testimony under oath in a court of law. The evidence submitted by the witness proves the veracity of his or her statements. Thus, the final proclamation of the gospel will be more than a mere verbal proclamation of gospel truth, but it will be a living demonstration, as attested by the divinely transformed lives of Jesus’ followers, of that truth to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” before the return of our Lord (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). This “witness” will cause one of two reactions: either acceptance or rejection of the claims of Christ by the people on earth. Their response, in turn, will lead to the final harvest.

Here is the good news. History is not an endless cycle of events. It is not an infinite circle of time going nowhere. All of history is catapulting toward one climactic event: earth’s final harvest and the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There can be no neutrality in earth’s final hours. Men and women will either be saved by His grace, transformed by His righteousness, filled with His Spirit, and witnessing to the glory of His name or wrapped in the self-centeredness of their uncommitted lives, controlled by the power of demons. The seriousness of our times and the reality of the eternal choices before us lead us to ask some life-changing questions, as outlined below.

**Instructions to Teachers:** Read aloud the questions to your students. Ask them to ponder the questions in their hearts as you read them aloud. Pause between the questions to give your students time to reflect internally on their answers.

- 1. Is there anything in your life that keeps you from being totally committed to Jesus in these last, climactic hours of earth’s history? If so, what are these things?**

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2. Read Hebrews 12:15. All roots produce fruits, whether good or evil. Are there any roots of bitterness, jealousy, anger, resentment, lust, or selfishness in your heart?

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**Closing Prayer:** As you close class, invite your students to take a moment to reflect on their own lives, asking God, by His grace, to give them victory over anything that would keep them from being ready for His return. Before you pray, ask for a student to read this encouraging promise to the class: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, *NKJV*).

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# The Everlasting Gospel



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**Memory Text:** “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Revelation 14:6, NKJV*).

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

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

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

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

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

## A Grace-Filled Book of Hope

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The “Everlasting” Gospel

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

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

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

Notice four points in these passages in Romans:

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

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

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

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

## A Story of Grace

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Into All the World

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Mission Movement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

- ① “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 1, 1890. What relationship does justification by faith have to the three angels’ messages?
- ② Dwell more on the phrase “everlasting gospel.” What is everlasting about the gospel?
- ③ What does it mean that Seventh-day Adventists are in so many countries of the world? What does it say about how God, so far, has blessed our efforts? At the same time, how can your local church, even your local Sabbath School, play a larger role in “finishing the work”?

## Pink Hair and God

By Andrew McChesney

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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




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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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In this week's study, we begin a detailed study of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12. Throughout Scripture, angels are portrayed as messengers of God. In the book of Revelation, angels flying in midair represent a heavenly message of divine origin, swiftly carried to the ends of the earth. These messages, of course, are to be proclaimed by God's last-day people.

Just before the coming of Jesus, the message of the everlasting gospel, in the context of the judgment, speedily spans the globe. One of the focal points of this week's study is to discover the depths of the gospel message. What is the gospel? Why is it called everlasting? Why must every human being on planet Earth be given the opportunity to respond to the gospel? Why does the salvation of each person, living in the last days of this earth's history, depend upon his or her response? This week's study will answer these questions and provide an in-depth understanding of the expression "the everlasting gospel."

A second feature of this week's study will be bettering our understanding of Christ's mission to His last-day church. The angel flying in midheaven with the everlasting gospel proclaims this end-time truth to "every nation, tribe, and tongue, and people" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). There is a largeness to this message. It calls us to give our best for the kingdom of God. It invites us to cooperate with Christ in His final appeal to humankind. This message appeals to us to place priority on God's mission of redeeming lost humanity because that is where His priority is.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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God places His identifiable stamp of approval on His people to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. In the days of ancient Israel, when the heathen nations around them were polytheists who worshiped multiple gods, Israel's clear, identifiable, powerful statement of faith was found in Deuteronomy 6:4, also known as the Shema.

Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, Jewish families repeated: " 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!' " (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*).

" 'Hear, O Israel.' " Throughout the centuries of their exile, the chanting of the Shema reminded Jews of the spiritual vision and path that united them as a people. The chanting of the Shema also strengthened the people's resolve to resist the various attempts to force them to abandon their spiritual vision and path.

Deuteronomy 6:4 was one of the first verses that a Jewish child in ancient Israel was taught as soon as he or she learned how to speak. In addition, Jewish mothers continually taught their young children to chant the Shema before going to sleep.

There is an amazing example of the power of this faith identity point that took place immediately after the Second World War ended in 1945. Some leading rabbis visited Christian orphanages in search of Jewish children. During the war, many Jewish parents in Europe had placed their children in Christian orphanages to save them from the Nazis. It was the hope of these parents that they would later be reunited with their children after the war. If they (the parents) did not survive, they hoped that surviving relatives or friends would find their children.

After the war, most of the priests and nuns who ran these orphanages were unwilling to release the Jewish children back into the custody of their families. The priests and nuns often denied that they had any Jewish children in residence. During one visit, a leading rabbi asked the priest in charge of an orphanage to allow him to return in the evening when the children were going to sleep. The priest reluctantly agreed to the rabbi's request. When the rabbi returned, he entered the children's room, and as he walked through the aisles of beds, he chanted the Hebrew words of the Shema. One by one, children burst into tears and cried out, "Mama!" Many repeated the words of the Shema. The priests were caught completely by surprise. They were unable to erase these children's memories of their Jewish mothers putting them to bed every night with the Shema on their lips. The head priest had no choice but to admit that he was "mistaken"; thus, these lost children of Israel were able to return "home" to their people and to their Torah.

Burned into the consciousness of these children, indelibly impressed upon their minds, were those words that confirmed their Jewish identity. " 'The LORD our God, the LORD is one!' " (*Deut. 6:4, NKJV*).

### **The Three Angels' Messages: Our Rallying Point**

For Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels' messages in Revelation 14 are our Shema—our rallying point. They are our identifying statement of faith. They define who we are as a people and describe our mission to the world.

We find our unique prophetic identity outlined in Revelation 14:6–12, and it is here that we find our passion to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. Ellen G. White puts it this way: "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second,



and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19.

These messages are urgent, eternal, and universal. At their heart is the everlasting gospel. What is the gospel? It is the eternal good news of Christ's life, death, resurrection, high priestly ministry, and soon return. It is the good news that Jesus saves us from our sin and empowers us to overcome. To understand the gospel is to grasp the significance of God's undying, unfathomable, exhaustless love for us. The gospel begins in the heart of God. Before we have reached out to Him, He is reaching out to us. Before we ever sought Him, He was seeking us. Before we ever made one move toward Him, He was drawing us to Himself through the power of His love. The apostle John attests to this truth in these memorable words: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (*1 John 4:10, NKJV*). In Romans 5, the apostle Paul adds, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*).

In the gospel, God, in Christ, takes the initiative in our salvation. Christ lived the perfect life we should have lived, died the death we should have died, draws us to Himself through the Holy Spirit, and, through His love, grace, and power, transforms our lives. Through the Cross, sin's hold on our lives is broken. By receiving God's grace, accepting His sacrifice, and believing His promise of eternal life, we become His sons and daughters.

This message of the everlasting gospel is at the heart of the three angels' messages. These end-time messages are all about Jesus. They lead us to abandon all human pride and self-righteousness. They compel us to trust Jesus completely for our salvation. They lead us by faith to accept His righteousness in the place of our unrighteous behavior. The perfection of Christ's life is ours when we receive Him as our crucified Redeemer. The gospel invites us to come to Jesus just as we are, but it does not leave us there. In response to Jesus' love, we will desire to live godly lives. His grace not only covers our past, but it also works as a dynamic principle in our lives, empowering us to obey. The apostle Paul makes this point clear in Romans 1:5: "Through Him [Jesus] we have received grace and apostleship for obedience" (*NKJV*). The grace of God teaches us that we should "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (*Titus 2:12, NKJV*). This is the incredibly good news of the gospel.

When we are saved by His grace, charmed by His love, and changed by His power, our natural response is to share with others what Christ has done for us. Our Christian witness is the overflow of a heart filled

with God's love. When the gospel breaks our hard, sin-polluted hearts, we long to tell the story of His grace. Understanding the everlasting gospel is the very foundation of our witness to the world. The gospel of Revelation 14:6 that is proclaimed to the ends of the earth is a gospel that each one of us has experienced personally in our own lives. The heart of this week's study is understanding the gospel, experiencing the gospel, and sharing the gospel in the context of Christ's soon return.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Personal Reflection:** As you have studied this lesson together with your students, it is possible that many of your class members have wondered about their own salvation. Perhaps they have lacked the assurance that their sins are forgiven. Maybe they have experienced some deep sorrows in life and asked, "Where was God when we were going through the dark valleys?" Or is it possible that your students are struggling with some hidden habit or negative attitude that they seem unable to overcome?

Remind your students that the gospel is for everyone. The Christ that died for others, died for them too. His love is for each of His children. So is His grace and His power.

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud this quotation from Ellen G. White: "Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 52. This is the beauty of the gospel. We need not fear. Jesus does not stand with the whipping belt of guilt to condemn us. He stands with arms wide open to encircle us in His love, to forgive us, empower us, and send us out as mighty witnesses for Him in these last days to testify of the glory of His grace.

Ask your students to privately reflect on the following questions in class and throughout the coming week:

- 1. Do I have the assurance of salvation right now at this moment? If yes, why? If not, what is keeping me from believing that Jesus is waiting to bind up my wounds and encircle me in His arms of love?**

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2. How have I served this week as a witness to others of God's forgiveness, mercy, and love? What else can I do to share His grace with people in my sphere?

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




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Fear God

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hence, we must take heed.

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

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## Fearing and Obeying God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Living a God-Centered Life

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Giving Glory to God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Revelation's Overcomers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Praying for New Friends

By DMITRY BAGAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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




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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The three angels' messages comprise, collectively, a divine, heaven-sent message whose purpose is to prepare the world for the second coming of Jesus. These messages are designed by God to have a practical impact on our lives. They reveal Jesus' plan for end-time living. The three angels' messages are much more than theoretical doctrines that have little impact on our lives. Although they carry a solemn warning to the unconverted that cannot be ignored, their major purpose is to draw us closer to Jesus.

This week's lesson focuses on two phrases of the first angel's message: first, the expression "fear God," and second, "give glory to Him." As we shall discover in our study this week, fearing God refers to respect, awe, and wonder at His infinite wisdom, His incredible power, and His amazing grace. Fearing God also is a state of mind, one that is loyal to God. In an age of self-inflated importance, consumerism, and self-centeredness, the first angel calls us to live a God-centered life rather than a self-centered life. Giving glory to God refers to how we live. Giving God glory impacts every area of our lives, from what we eat and drink, to what we take into our minds, and to the places we go. Giving glory to God influences the things we read and what we view on the internet or television.

Our lesson will examine closely these two phrases to discover the impact they have on our lives in the twenty-first century. We will explore together how understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ enables us to both "fear God" and "give glory to Him."

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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To "fear God" means to live a God-centered life. Rather than being restrictive, short-circuiting our joy and limiting our happiness, making God the center of our lives is the very foundation of authentic identity, true purpose, and genuine joy. Jesus clearly links knowing and doing His will with our happiness.

In John 13:17, He states, " 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' " (*NKJV*). A life wrapped up in self is a very small package. Being locked in the prison of our own self-centered behavior is a miserable way to live. Knowing Christ, obeying Christ, and living for something bigger than ourselves brings life's greatest joy. The One who made us has designed us to live, really live, for the delights of His kingdom. Psalm

16:11 puts it this way: “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (*NKJV*).

*The SDA Bible Commentary* makes this insightful observation regarding the expression “fear God” in Revelation 14:7: “The message to fear God is especially timely in the period represented by the preaching of this angel, for men are worshipping gods of materialism and pleasure and many others of their own devising.”—Volume 7, p. 827.

“A series of studies . . . published in the journal *Motivation and Emotion* [T. Kasser et al., “Changes in Materialism, Changes in Psychological Well-being: Evidence From Three Longitudinal Studies and an Intervention Experiment,” *Motivation and Emotion* 38 (2014), pp. 1-22] showed that as people become more materialistic, their sense of well-being and purpose is reduced and if they become less materialistic, it rises. While materialism is good for the economy, fueling growth, it can have a negative impact on a personal level, leading to anxiety and depression. Consumerism can also damage relationships, communities, and the environment.”—Kirstie Pursey, “How Consumerism and Materialism of Modern Society Make Us Unhappy, Lonely, and Unconfident,” <https://www.learning-mind.com/consumerism-and-materialism-unhappy/>.

The appeal of Revelation 14:7 to “fear God” is an appeal to find our true happiness in doing God’s will. Revelation 14:7 is an appeal to find in Christ our highest delight and deepest joy. When we surrender our lives to Jesus, obedience springs naturally from the heart. Duty becomes a delight and sacrifice for the cause of Christ a pleasure.

Ellen G. White states it this way: “All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

To “give glory” to God means to honor God in our lifestyle. Giving God glory involves the recognition that we are ambassadors for Christ. We are the light of the world—the salt of the earth. The word used for “glory” in Revelation 14:7 is *doxa*. This word is used regularly in the New Testament. It may have two distinct meanings. The first meaning indicates honor, fame, or recognition. In this sense, to give God glory would mean to give Him the honor or recognition He deserves. Rightly so, for He created us. He redeems us. Daily He sustains our lives, and He is coming again for us. At the same time, there is another aspect of the word *doxa* that is often overlooked. In some instances, in the New Testament, *doxa*

can signify brightness or glorious appearance. According to the apostle Paul, the glory of God shone forth in the face of Jesus Christ (*2 Cor. 4:6*). “As this glory of God revealed in Christ shines forth from the gospel into the heart and mind of the believer, it transforms him into ‘light in the Lord’ (*Eph. 5:8*). Thus ‘we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory’ (*2 Cor. 3:18*).”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 503. To embody this twofold meaning, honoring God and guarding His reputation while letting the brightness of His glory shine through our lives, ought to be the goal of each Christian.

This twofold meaning leads us to a few basic questions. Can we give God glory if we fail to care for our bodies? Is it possible to honor God when we are willfully violating His principles of health? What relationship do our physical lifestyle habits have to our spiritual health?

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, the apostle Paul provides an answer to these questions: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (*NKJV*).

The apostle adds to our understanding of what it means to glorify God: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (*1 Cor. 10:31, NKJV*). When we surrender our lives to Christ, our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit. An unbeliever certainly may become impressed by the Spirit, convicted by the Spirit, and moved by the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of the committed believer. Our bodies become the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. This tenancy is indeed an awesome thought: the Third Person of the Godhead takes residence in the lives of believers. Thus, to defile our bodies and willingly violate the laws of health is to dishonor our Maker. We are Christ’s because He created us and has redeemed us.

There is another reason it is vitally important to God that we give Him glory in our health practices. Spirituality and health are closely aligned. The Holy Spirit communicates with us through the spiritual faculties of our brains. If the brain is nourished by a poor quality of blood because of poor health habits, we will be less capable of discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit. Our understanding of the plan of salvation and Bible truth will be obscured and compromised. If we are destroying our bodies because of our willful neglect of our health, our witness to the world certainly will not be one that gives God glory. This principle applies not only to our health habits but also to the things we watch on television and read in magazines and books, the content that occupies us on the internet, and a host of other lifestyle practices.

To fear God is an invitation to live a God-centered life, giving Him

glory in all that we do. This invitation is the call of the judgment hour, a call that will prepare a people for the coming of Jesus. Through His grace and by His power, we can give glory to Him, honor His name, and shine as lights in this world of darkness. Such a life is our calling and our destiny.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**Read and Reflect:** Several years ago, Pastor Mark Finley was helping an older woman quit smoking. They studied the Bible together, counseled, and prayed together, but nothing seemed to work. She just did not have the motivation to quit smoking. In fact, she enjoyed smoking and only half-heartedly desired to quit. One day when Pastor Finley visited this elderly grandmother, she had a big smile on her face and exclaimed, “Pastor Finley, I quit, I quit! I haven’t smoked for a number of days!” Eager to discover what made the change, the pastor asked, “What motivated you?” She simply responded, “My little seven-year-old granddaughter.” She explained, “One evening I was sitting in my favorite chair, smoking away, and my granddaughter climbed up on my lap and said, ‘Grandma, when I get big, I want to smoke just like you.’ That was it, pastor. I quit for her sake.”

If a grandma can quit smoking for her granddaughter’s sake, can we not, by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit, give up any habit not in harmony with His will for Christ’s sake? The devil says that it is impossible to overcome our evil habits and sinful tendencies. Jesus says, “ ‘To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life’ ” (*Rev. 2:7–10, NKJV*). Jesus promises us the strength to be victorious in the battle with evil.

#### **Ask your students:**

- 1. How is the message of the three angels both a call to obedience and a call to godly living in this crisis hour of earth’s history?**

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2. In what ways does Jesus, our Savior and Lord, provide us with both the motivation and power to overcome?

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# The Good News of the Judgment




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Significance of the Judgment Hour

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## God’s Mercy and Judgment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## A Magnificent Scene

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Glimpse of Heaven

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

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

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

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

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

We see a throne set in heaven with God sitting upon it. There are heavenly beings around the throne, and soon all of heaven begins to sing, and the crescendo of praise builds higher and still higher: “ ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created’ ” (*Rev. 4:11, NKJV*).

## Jesus Is Worthy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## A Guy on a Bicycle

By ANTHONY KENT

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

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

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

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

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

who shared *The Great Controversy* with his family and neighbors.

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



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



## ***Part I: Overview***

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When many Christians consider the judgment, they tend to be filled with fear. They envision God in His celestial courtroom sitting as the Supreme Judge of the universe, weighing their good deeds against their bad deeds. They have this vague notion that if their good deeds outweigh their bad, they will be saved. If, perchance, their bad deeds outweigh their good deeds, they will be lost.

In this week's lesson, we will discover that this view of the judgment is not only false, but it is also one of the devil's deceptions to distort the character of God. Satan desires to picture God as a vindictive judge, some sort of wrathful tyrant, who wants to punish His creatures for every sin they have ever committed.

Our Sabbath School study this week reveals a God of unending love who is doing everything He can to save us. He wants us in heaven even more than we want to be there. The judgment attests to the divine reality that heaven has done everything it can to save all humanity. If we are lost, it will be because we have continually resisted the claims of divine love. In the judgment, our good deeds are important because they reveal our response to the unconditional, exhaustless love of God as revealed in Christ on the cross. Our good deeds testify to the fact that our faith in Jesus is genuine. Our recognition of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will continue to do leads us to desire to serve Him forever.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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The book of Revelation announces that “ ‘the hour of His judgment has come’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). Revelation does not indicate either the nature of the judgment or the exact time that the judgment begins. But Daniel does. Daniel 7–9 is interconnected and clearly reveals both the nature and timing of the judgment. The prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation belong together. Understanding Daniel helps us understand Revelation. When Daniel describes the nature of the judgment in Daniel 7, he describes it in the context of Christ's victory over the despotic powers of this world. Earlier in Daniel 7, four beasts march across the landscape, oppressing the people of God. According to Daniel 7:17, 23, these beasts represent kings or kingdoms. The key words in Daniel 7 are “kingdom” and “dominion.”

There is a battle for control of this world. Finally, a “little horn” power arises as a religio-political power that attempts to change God's law and seeks to rule over the earth. Our attention is then turned from earth to

heaven. The Ancient of Days, our heavenly Father, convenes heaven's judgment hour. The Son of man, Jesus, joins the Father. In the judgment, it is revealed that Christ is the rightful ruler of the universe. Daniel states, " 'I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. 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' " (*Dan. 7:13, 14, NKJV*).

In the judgment, in front of the entire universe, Christ is revealed as its rightful ruler. Satan's kingdom is fully exposed as evil, deceptive, selfish, and destructive. Heaven reveals that the Godhead did everything possible to save all humanity at the cross. The little-horn power (papal Rome) and all earthly powers are condemned in the judgment. Judgment is passed in favor of the people of God. As a consequence, the work of judgment also is entrusted to them during the millennial reign with Christ in heaven after the Second Coming. For committed Christians loyal to Christ, trusting His grace, and clothed in His righteousness, the judgment is good news, not bad news.

Daniel 7 was written during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. According to Siegfried Horn, PhD, archaeologist, and former teacher at Andrews University, "The Babylonians had a very pessimistic outlook about the hereafter. Their underworld, the realm of the deceased, was a dark land, full of dust, where the bread was bitter and the water brackish and where the dead wore garments of feathers to protect them from the cold. During the night their needs for light, food, and drink were thought to be supplied by the sun god."—*Ministry*, December 1981 (vol. 54, no. 12), p. 25.

Horn goes on to state, "There is a marked difference between the Egyptians and Babylonians regarding judgment in the hereafter. While we know little of what the Babylonians thought concerning their fate in the hereafter, the Egyptians have left numerous records of their beliefs. These mortuary texts range from the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom via the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom to the Books of the Dead of the New Kingdom. In the course of nearly 3,000 years their beliefs did change in some respects, as illustrated by these various texts. . . . These describe in great detail, both in word and picture, what a person could expect to experience after death and how he could ensure a favorable outcome of his trial before his divine judges."—Page 27.

The Egyptian Books of the Dead graphically portray the Egyptian concept of the judgment during the era of the New Kingdom. This idea is most fully developed in the section on the Hall of Judgment, where the destinies of the dead are determined. "Osiris sits in the Hall of Judgement [sic], the scales of justice before him, and waits to assess the deceased. Those who fail this test will be destroyed. . . . This complex, and lengthy, text contains

the Negative Confession in which the deceased asserts (first to Osiris and then to forty-two other judges) that they are worthy by listing the crimes and offences [sic] they have not committed. Then the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Ma'at."—Ancient Egypt Online, "The Judgement [sic] of the Dead," <https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/judgement-ofthedead/>.

If the individual's bad deeds outweighed their good deeds, the balance scales would tip in favor of eternal gloom, and the heart would be thrown to a monster-like figure waiting to gobble it up. The Egyptian texts also reveal that almost no one could win an argument against the gods. The gods of Egypt appear to be callous, unloving, and ready to devour.

It is important to notice the contrast between the ancient pagan concepts of judgment and the biblical concept, as outlined in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation. Revelation 14:7 states, "The hour of His judgment has come" (*NKJV*). This hour is not only the time of God's judging this world, but it is also the hour of the revelation of God's love and grace before the universe. When Christ died on the cross, the entire universe beheld the love of God. There can be no greater revelation of God's love than Calvary. The Cross settles it: God is love.

Yet, there are still questions to be answered in the cosmic conflict between good and evil. How does God's love apply to each person? Has every person on planet Earth had sufficient evidence to make an eternal decision? Has God done everything possible to save every human being? Is there anything more that God could have done? To secure the universe forever and to enshrine, beyond a shadow of doubt, divine love within the hearts of the unfallen worlds and the redeemed of all ages, these questions must be answered, and they will be answered.

At the consummation of the judgment, the entire universe will joyfully sing, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (*Rev. 15:3, 4, NKJV*). Both the saved and the lost, the redeemed and the wicked, will acknowledge that God is just, righteous, and loving in His actions toward us. The universe will be secure forever because His love has been revealed both on the cross and in earth's final judgment.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Personal Reflection:** This week's lesson contains rich spiritual lessons for our daily lives. The first important principle to be gleaned from our study

this week is that we are living in a unique hour of earth's history; the hour of God's judgment has come. The destinies of all humans are to be decided. Just as the Day of Atonement in the Jewish religious calendar was also a day of judgment when all of God's people gathered at the ancient sanctuary, confessing their sins and examining their hearts, so today the call of the judgment hour is a call to confession, repentance, and the forsaking of sin. The judgment-hour call is an appeal from God to humans to be totally committed to Christ at the climax of earth's history.

The second vital truth in this week's study is that, in Christ, we need not fear the judgment. We can have the assurance that our loving Lord will see us through. Jesus is not only our Judge, but He is also our defense attorney (*John 5:22, 1 John 2:1*). In earthly courts, if one's judge is also one's defense attorney, there would be a serious conflict of interest, but in heaven's courtroom, the balance scales are tipped in our favor. If there is any way Jesus can save us, He will.

The third Bible truth from our study this week is that, in the final analysis, Christ will be honored, Satan will be exposed, and the righteous will be redeemed. Understanding Revelation's judgment gives us confidence that one day the entire universe will bow in worship before our Creator, Redeemer, and triumphant King.

**Discuss:**

- 1. How does it comfort you to know that your Judge is also your defense attorney?**

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- 2. What does it mean to be totally committed to Christ during the judgment hour at the climax of earth's history?**

TEACHERS COMMENTS

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*Notes*

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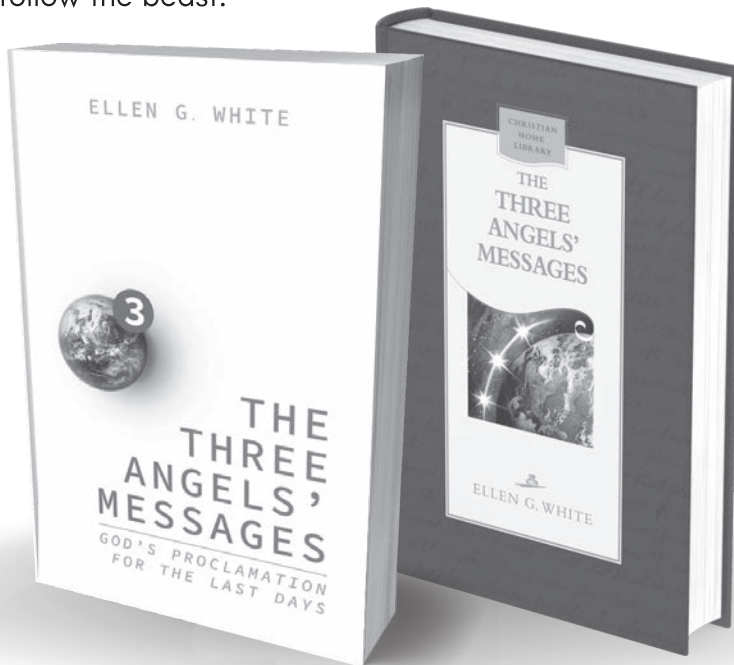
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# The Hour of His Judgment




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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



# The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The 2,300 Days and the End Time

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Angel's Instruction to Daniel

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

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

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

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

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

## The Messiah “Cut Off”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Year 1844

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

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

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

## Ukrainian Miracle

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

*Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that support Seventh-day Adventist education around the world.*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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Mathematics is an exact science. In the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation regarding the judgment, the Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets very specific mathematical proof that the Word of God can be trusted. In this week's lesson, we will examine some of this evidence.

Daniel 9 is one of the most remarkable chapters in all the Bible. It clearly reveals the time for the baptism of Jesus, His death on the cross, and the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. These prophecies are not merely given in vague or broad terms. When confronted with the accuracy of these prophecies, many skeptics, upon understanding their significance, have become committed followers of Jesus.

Daniel 9 is a response to Daniel's vision in Daniel 8:27: "I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it" (*NKJV*). The vision in Daniel 8 is the vision of the domination of Greece over Media-Persia, depicted as the collision of the ram and the he-goat. A little horn (papal Rome) then arises and dominates the political and religious landscape. This little-horn power eventually distorts the truth about Jesus and, according to Daniel 8:12, casts "truth down to the ground" (*NKJV*). Then Daniel hears the angel ask, "How long . . . ?" (*Dan. 8:13*)—that is, how long would error triumph? How long would evil reign? When would the truth be restored to its rightful place among God's people? When would righteousness reign and wickedness end? The answer is found in Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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The Hebrew word for "cleansed" in Daniel 8:14 is *nisdaq*. Translators have rendered this word in a range of meanings, including "restored," "made right," "purified," "cleansed," "justified," and "vindicated." The Hebrew word *nisdaq* likely includes the full range of meanings listed here.

A free-flowing translation of Daniel 8:13, 14 might read: "At what point will the sanctuary be restored to its rightful place, when will it be cleansed or purified of sin, when will God's name be vindicated, His truth exalted, and all things be made right again?" The angel answers, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (*Dan. 8:14*). The complete answer to this question is not found in Daniel 8. At the end of the chapter, as the angel is explaining the vision to Daniel, the prophet faints (*Dan. 8:27*). Years pass. Then, in Daniel 9, the prophet prays for understanding, and the angel



returns to explain the unexplained portion of the vision (*Dan. 9:20*). In Daniel 9:24, the angel states, “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people.”

The 70 weeks of Daniel 9 are “determined” from the longer prophecy of the 2,300 days, in Daniel 8:14. The Hebrew word for “determined” appears only here in the Hebrew Old Testament. It can be literally translated “cut off.” The rabbis used this word to describe something severed, or amputated, from a longer period. Severance is precisely the meaning here. The future of the Jewish people, the temple, and Jerusalem are also outlined in this prophecy. The 70 weeks were to be a time of probation to restore Israel to full favor with God. During this period, the Messiah would come to “bring in everlasting righteousness” (*Dan. 9:24*).

The question may be asked, What evidence do we have in the text itself that the 70 weeks are not literal weeks or 490 literal days? The Hebrew expression for “weeks” here is also used as a group of days and can be translated as 70 sevens. Because the events prophesied take place in a much longer period than 490 literal days and, in fact, span centuries—this time period must be understood in the context of the day/year principle (*Ezek. 4:6, Num. 14:34*); that is, one prophetic day equals one literal year.

Gerhard Pfandl of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute makes this insightful comment on Numbers 14:34: “God deliberately used the day for a year principle as a teaching device: ‘According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know my rejection’ (*Numbers 14:34*). And in an acted-out parable the prophet Ezekiel was told to lie 390 days on his left side and 40 days on his right side, ‘I have laid on you a day for each year’ (*Ezekiel 4:6*). However, Numbers 14 and Ezekiel 4 are not apocalyptic texts. God, therefore, spells it out—one day stands for one year. In apocalyptic texts this is never stated, it is an underlying principle.”—*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no. 1 (2012), p. 9. This principle applies in the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. When you apply the principle that one prophetic day equals one literal year, the prophecy is unlocked. The events predicted on the prophetic time line fall into place.

The 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24, 25 compute to 490 prophetic days or 490 literal years. This 70-week period begins with the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. When Babylon was defeated by the Medes and the Persians, eventually the new rulers passed three separate decrees, allowing the Jews to return from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. The first two decrees, issued by Cyrus (*Ezra 1:1–4*) and Darius (*Ezra*

6:1–12), respectively, did not fully include each of the following: the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the restoration of the temple, and the legitimization of Israel as a judicial system. The last of the three decrees, issued by Artaxerxes in 457 B.C., not only allowed the Jewish people to return to their homeland, but it also provided provisions for them to do so and mandated the city of Jerusalem as their civil, judicial, and religious center.

### **A Prophetic Time Line**

Beginning in 457 B.C., the prophecy carries us down the centuries for 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 years, to A.D. 27. According to the prophecy, this prophetic period would culminate in the coming of Messiah the Prince. “Messiah” means “the anointed one.” In A.D. 27 (the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar), Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was baptized, or anointed, for His ministry (*Luke 3:1–3, 15, 16, 21, 22*), exactly as prophesied.

### **Messiah to Be Cut Off in the Middle of the Week**

Daniel predicted hundreds of years in advance the exact date for the baptism of Christ. Gabriel’s explanation to Daniel about Christ continues. As this week’s lesson clearly reveals, the Messiah would be “cut off,” or crucified, in the middle of the last week of the 70-week prophecy. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 31, just as Daniel’s prophecy predicted.

According to Gabriel’s explanation to Daniel, God’s covenant specifically with the Jewish nation itself, as a nation, would cease at the end of the 70 prophetic weeks, A.D. 34. The covenant was now offered to everyone—to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile (*see Rom. 1:16; Rom. 2:6, 10*)—who accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Meanwhile, the sanctuary services were object lessons, illustrating the sacrifice of Jesus and the plan of salvation. When He died, the sanctuary services were no longer relevant. They had served their purpose. Now, sinners no longer needed to sacrifice a lamb in the temple; they could come directly to Jesus and accept His blood to cover their sins. Jesus is God’s Lamb, slain for us, exactly on time, as Bible prophecy predicted.

### **The Remaining Portion of the 2,300 Years**

As you will recall, the 70 weeks are only the first 490 years of the 2,300 years of Daniel’s prophecy. This portion relates to the Jewish people and nation. The remaining portion of the 2,300 years extends to the time of the end. The events connected with the first part of the prophecy came true with amazing accuracy. Such accuracy gives us assurance that the

events of the remaining part of the prophecy will also be fulfilled exactly as predicted.

The entire prophecy begins with the decree to “restore and build Jerusalem,” in 457 B.C. (*Dan. 9:25*). If you begin at 457 B.C. and move forward 2,300 years on history’s time line (including the move from 1 B.C. to A.D. 1, which does not include a year 0), you arrive at A.D. 1844. This date ushers in the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven and the work of judgment, prefigured by the Day of Atonement.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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Ask your students to reflect on the following question: Why is it significant that we are living in the day of judgment, the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the antitypical day of atonement?

Invite class members to reflect on the following three important truths from their study this week:

**First:** The Bible can be trusted. It is mathematically precise. It is accurate in all its details. It reveals precise dates on the time line of history, convincing even skeptics of its veracity. Thus, prophecy bolsters our confidence in the trustworthiness of God’s Word.

**Second:** The judgment-hour message is an appeal to our hearts to strive for a deeper commitment to Jesus as Lord of our lives. During this time of the end, God’s people will examine their hearts, asking God to forgive their sins and cleanse them from any attitude or practice in their lives not in harmony with God’s will. His people will plead with God to cover them with the robe of Christ’s righteousness (*Isa. 61:10*).

**Third:** The urgency of the hour is a call for God’s people to witness, with renewed fervency, to their relatives, friends, neighbors, and working associates. The judgment-hour call is heaven’s final message to a sin-sick world, a message that will prepare hearts for the coming of Jesus.

Conclude class with these practical questions, asking your students to reflect personally on the answers in the coming week:

- 1. Have I fully surrendered my life to Christ in this critical time of earth’s history? If not, what is keeping me from Him?**

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- 2. Do I know for certain that my salvation is secure in Jesus? Why, or why not? Why must I trust in His righteousness alone? What does it mean to do that? Is my hope totally and absolutely anchored in Him? If not, what must I do to fully anchor myself in Him?**

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# Worshipping *the* Creator



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

**Memory Text:** “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (*Revelation 4:11, NKJV*).

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

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

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

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

## A Companion in Tribulation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Worship the Creator

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## A God Who Is Close

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

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

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

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

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

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## Gospel, Judgment, Creation

Look at the first angel’s message. *Everlasting gospel. Hour of judgment. Worship the Creator.* Look at how closely related these ideas are. When we stand before our Creator in judgment, it’s only the gospel that gives us any hope at all. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:1, NKJV*). No condemnation now—and certainly not in the judgment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Creator on the Cross

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

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

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

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The first angel's message to worship the Creator came after the Cross, after it had become known to the onlooking universe and to Christ's followers that the One who "made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" is the same One who, though being God, took "the form of a bondservant, and [came] in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (*Phil. 2:7, 8, NKJV*).

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Sobered by God's Grace

By DALE WOLCOTT

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The fact that God created this world in seven literal days is one of the fundamental truths of Scripture. The entire Bible begins with the words “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (*Gen. 1:1*). The Bible’s last book, Revelation, calls us to “worship Him who made heaven and earth” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). God is worthy of our worship because He created us. We did not evolve. We are not merely a genetic accident. We are much more than an advanced member of the animal kingdom. We are human beings with incredible value because God created us. Each one of us is unique in His eyes.

This week’s lesson explores the significance of Creation itself. After all, what can anything else we believe, as Christians, mean, or even become sensible, apart from us as beings created by God? Notice the opening lines of the Bible, the opening chapter, Genesis 1. They don’t talk about justification by faith alone, do they? They say nothing about the life, the death, resurrection and high priestly ministry of Jesus, either. Not a word about the Second Coming. Total silence on the Ten Commandments and the eternal perpetuity of God’s law. Nothing about the state of the dead.

Why? The answer is, really, simple. These doctrines, however important, become meaningless dribble, pure and utter nonsense apart from the doctrine of Creation itself, apart from the opening line—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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In November 1998, Charles Colson wrote an article entitled “Astronauts Who Found God: A Spiritual View of Space.” In it, he said, “Astronaut John Glenn’s return to outer space 36 years after his awe-inspiring orbit around the earth is a reminder of the kind of heroism that makes space exploration possible. . . . [Glenn told reporters in 1998, just after returning, at age 77, from his final trip into space that] ‘To look out at this kind of creation and not believe in God is to me impossible. It just strengthens my faith.’ ” —Charles Colson, *Breakpoint Commentary*, November 5, 1998.

People may be unaware that many of the early astronaut heroes had a deep religious faith. Their view of infinite space only increased their faith. “Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin are best known as [two of] the first astronauts to land on the moon and take that ‘giant leap for mankind.’ But you probably don’t know that before they emerged from the spaceship, Aldrin pulled out a Bible, a silver chalice, and sacramental bread and wine. There on the moon, his first act was to celebrate communion.

“Frank Borman was commander of the first space crew to travel beyond the Earth’s orbit. Looking down on the earth from 250,000

miles away, Borman radioed back a message, quoting Genesis 1: ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ As he later explained, ‘I had an enormous feeling that there had to be a power greater than any of us—that there was a God, that there was indeed a beginning.’ ”—Charles Colson, *Breakpoint Commentary*, November 5, 1998. Each of the astronauts discussed here sensed that this world was not the result of fortuitous chance. Nor was life a cosmic accident. The astronauts realized the truth of Genesis 1:1—that this world was created by an all-knowing, all-powerful God.

The three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 proclaim with a “loud voice” the message of Creation and of an omniscient God. God is never caught by surprise. He sees events yet to unfold before they ever occur. The message of the three angels is specifically designed by God to meet the humanistic, postmodern challenges of this generation. It is no accident that, at the same time that the theory of evolution was developed, God sent a message to the world to worship the Creator.

Think, too, for a moment, if evolution were true, how many lies we have been told in the Bible. Just for starters, Genesis 2:1, 2 tell three. “Thus the heavens and earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (*NKJV*). Genesis 2:1, which says that the original work of creation was “finished,” would be a lie because science claims that the creative process, evolution, is still going on. (Google *Is evolution still happening?* or the like). If so, then the work of creation has not ended, even though Genesis 2:2 says that God “ended His work which He had done” (*NKJV*). Genesis 2:2 also says that God rested on the seventh day from all His work. The seventh day of what? Creation (we’re told) took billions of years, and counting, and so this verse about Him resting on the seventh day “from all His work which He had done” would be another lie.

And tragically, these three fabrications would be only the start of the lies we have been told; that is, if evolution were true.

### **A Plan for Every Life**

When Bruce Olson was 19 years old, he went into the jungle on the border of Colombia and Venezuela to bring the gospel to the Bari tribe. The Bari were a primitive, aboriginal people isolated in the dense jungles of South America. They were known for their fierce fighting ability and their violent, barbaric tactics when they warred against other tribes. Bruce was unfazed by their brutal reputation and, if necessary, was willing to give his life to share the gospel with them. He spent weeks trying to win their confidence. No Westerner had entered their territory before. Slowly, over time, the Bari

learned to love this gentle, caring foreigner. As Bruce shared the gospel with these primitive natives, they experienced new life in Christ. The all-powerful Creator changed their lives. This once warlike, violent tribe became a force for peace in the entire region.

Just as Bruce was making real progress for the gospel, the unexpected happened. Colombian guerrillas kidnapped him and held him in a secret hideout deep in the jungle. Subsequently, the Colombian army attempted to recruit the Barí to war against the guerrillas.

The Barí refused, saying, “Violence only engenders violence.”

Bruce was held for months in inhumane conditions; yet, he was able to rise above the horror of his circumstances. He won the confidence of his captors. Eventually they gave him a Bible. Day after day he shared God’s Word with them. More than 100 of these rebel fighters accepted Christ and broke with the guerrilla force, laid down their weapons, and rejoined society as productive Colombian citizens.

Despite the evil forces marshaled against Bruce Olson, the all-powerful Creator had a plan for his life, and all the powers of hell could not destroy it. Our Creator not only had a plan for Bruce Olson’s life—He has a plan for our lives. But it even gets better. Our Creator not only has a plan for our lives, but through the Holy Spirit, He will guide us into His plan. Understanding the richness of the Sabbath gives us deeper understanding of God’s plan for us, as well as deeper purpose to our lives.

As this week’s lesson points out, the Hebrew word *bará* is something only God can do. Human beings can make something out of the existing materials available, but only God can make something out of nothing. When God speaks His word, tangible matter appears (*Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 1:1, 2*). When God speaks, whatever He says is so, even if it were never so before, because God’s word has the creative power to make it so. When we worship the Creator of heaven and earth on the Sabbath, we acknowledge that He is all-powerful.

If He is powerful enough to create this world and everything in it, He is certainly powerful enough to change our lives. The Sabbath is a symbol of both justification (our rest in Christ alone) and sanctification (our strength in Christ alone). The prophet Ezekiel states this idea clearly:

“Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them” (*Ezek. 20:12, NKJV*). As we worship each Sabbath, the Creator re-creates us. The One who made us remakes us. The One who formed us reforms us.

The final conflict over worship, as outlined in the book of Revelation, is precisely because Christ has created us, redeemed us, transformed us, and is coming again for us. The devil hates the Sabbath because He hates everything it represents. The Sabbath is a symbol of Christ’s authority, His

dominion, His grace, and His power. If Satan can deceive people into believing that the Sabbath is of no significance, he can then undermine the Creator's authority and turn the allegiance of millions toward himself. Therefore, God has sent His last-day message in Revelation 14 to prepare our world for the return of our Creator and Redeemer, who will re-create this planet in Edenic splendor.

### *Part III: Life Application*

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**For Personal Reflection:** The God of Creation brought the sun, moon, and stars into existence. His awesome power created this planet and filled it with living things. This same God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage, guided them in their wilderness wanderings, rained manna out of heaven, caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, and defeated Israel's enemies. This same God is interested in you and me. In our behalf, He unleashes Creation power to defeat the enemy who battles for our soul. Our understanding and acceptance of this Bible truth makes all the difference.

Every single one of us faces battles with temptation every day. Here is the incredibly good news: the same God who unleashed His infinite power to create the world unleashes that same infinite power to defeat the forces of hell that wage the battles for our souls. Jesus has something much more to offer than frustrated defeat. He has something much more to offer than repeated failure. He has something much more to offer than failing over the same impediment again and again. Who is it that we serve? The all-powerful Creator with unlimited, infinite power. This power is ours when we grasp it by faith. We are transformed, changed, and made new by the power of the Creator.

**Discussion and Prayer:** Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (*NKJV*).

Discuss with your class what it means to be made a new creation.

In closing, pray for your students, asking God to help them to understand more deeply and completely how His creative power can change their lives.



*Notes*



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# The Sabbath *and the* End




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

## The Judgment, Creation, and Accountability

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Sabbath and Creation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## A Not-So-Subtle Deception

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Creation, the Sabbath, and the End Time

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

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

Revelation 14:7 is a call to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 14:9 is a solemn appeal not to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 14:12 describes a people who \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

## The Sabbath and Eternal Rest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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



## Quandary of Two Books

By CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

Join the global church in 2023 and 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Visit [greatcontroversyproject.org](http://greatcontroversyproject.org) for more information or ask your pastor.



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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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In times of crises, what do human beings long for more than anything else? When disaster strikes, what do we all seek? The one thing human beings desire more than anything else in times of uncertainty is safety. When a tornado, hurricane, typhoon, or some other natural disaster strikes, what do we desperately desire? We desire a place to be safe with our families. This desire for safety is also true in times of war or when violence rages in our streets.

In a chaotic, uncertain world, the Sabbath is an oasis of peace. It points us to our Creator, who gives us the assurance of security and safety in His presence. The Sabbath is a place of refuge, a sanctuary in time that descends from heaven to earth each week. It unites us in a common bond with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Sabbath is the great equalizer. Worshiping together on Sabbath, we recognize anew, we understand afresh, that we are part of the great web of humanity, created by God, and that He has “made of one blood all nations” (*Acts 17:26*).

In this week’s lesson, we will probe more deeply the meaning of the Sabbath in our personal lives and discover how a proper understanding of the Sabbath influences our attitudes, our choices, and our actions. This week we will also study how the Sabbath will be the focal point of an end-time crisis over the law of God. Satan’s final attack will be on the Sabbath because the Sabbath is embedded in the heart of God’s law as the eternal symbol of His creative authority.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Creation, the Sabbath, and the judgment are remarkably linked in a divine pattern. Creation speaks of the Christ who created all people. Thus, we have a common ancestry. When the apostle Paul was debating with the philosophers in Greece, he used this powerful argument: “ ‘God, who made the world and everything in it, . . . has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth’ ” (*Acts 17:24, 26, NKJV*). Paul’s point to the Athenian philosophers was simply this: the God of the Bible is the all-powerful Creator of all humankind; therefore, we are all part of one human family. Understanding this concept of Creation leads us to respect one another, appreciate one another, and treat one another with kindness, courtesy, and compassion. The Sabbath is the practical expression that we believe in God as Creator and that we value human life. Human life is sacred because it is a treasured gift given to us by our

Creator. Our Sabbath worship testifies to this eternal truth. Our lesson this week discusses the Sabbath in the light of the judgment.

### **The Judgment, the Law, and Freedom of Choice**

The fact that there is a judgment implies that human beings can make moral choices. If we merely evolved, there would be no real basis for free will. If everything were determined by our heredity or environment, we would not be capable of exercising our freedom of choice.

William Provine, professor of history of biology at Cornell University, acknowledges that evolution and free will are incompatible. In a lecture delivered on February 12, 1998, he made this remarkable statement: “Naturalistic evolution has clear consequences that Charles Darwin understood perfectly . . . [including the idea that] human free will is nonexistent. . . . Free will is a disastrous and mean social myth.”—William Provine, abstract for “Evolution: Free Will and Punishment and Meaning in Life,” talk delivered on Feb. 12, 1998, <https://www.discovery.org/a/9581/>.

Free will is certainly not a “mean social myth.” It is an inalienable gift, given by God to each one of us. If you do away with free will, there is no way to determine right and wrong. If there is a judgment, there must be a law that is the basis of that judgment.

The apostle James states an eternal truth when he says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (*James 2:10, NKJV*). What law is James speaking about? Verses 11 and 12 explain it clearly: “For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (*NKJV*).

In this passage from James, the Ten Commandment law, which is the basis of God’s end-time judgment, is referred to as the law of liberty. Ellen G. White’s comment on this passage is extremely helpful in understanding the depth of these scriptures: “The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. ‘The truth shall make you free;’ and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one’s self—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is ‘the law of liberty.’ (James 2:12).”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we experience true freedom. Obedience to God becomes a delight. Because Sabbath worship is in the heart of God’s law, it is a symbol of our complete allegiance to Christ. Through His grace, we obey His commandments, not to be saved but because we are saved by His grace and desire to please Him in everything we do.

God never forces or coerces our will. He did not force Satan to serve

Him in heaven. He did not coerce Adam and Eve to obey in Eden and will never coerce us to obey today. Once again: “In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan’s control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.

In the devil’s final deception, he will attempt to coerce God’s people to serve him. Through restricting their ability to buy or sell, through ridicule and slander, through persecution, imprisonment, and even death, he will pressure them to conform. While Revelation 14:7 invites us to worship the Creator, Revelation 14:9 warns against worshiping the beast. The final conflict between good and evil is over worship.

A similar conflict over worship occurred when Daniel and his friends were captives in Babylon. A counterfeit image was established on the plain of Dura. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all his subjects to bow down and worship the golden idol. A decree was passed, condemning to death anyone who did not bow down and worship the golden image. The second commandment, forbidding the making and worshiping of idols, became a test for the Hebrew captives. They entrusted themselves to God completely. Because of their loyalty and trust, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But God protected them. Jesus Christ, the Son of man, entered the flames with them and provided divine protection.

In the final days of earth’s history, the world will be brought to a test over the fourth commandment: “ ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’ ” (*Exod. 20:8, NKJV*). The commandment that leads all humanity to worship the Creator will be substituted by a counterfeit day of worship. Once again, God will have a people who are faithful to Him. Revelation 14:12 declares: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*NKJV*). God’s remnant, His last-day people, will endure to the end. By His grace and through His power, they will “keep His commandments.”

They will obey because the “faith of Jesus” fills their hearts and every aspect of their lives. The same quality of faith that Jesus had when He faced the cross, they, too, will experience. They will place absolute confidence in their heavenly Father. This trust relationship with God will take them through earth’s final conflict. The heart of this week’s lesson is understanding that the One who created us will care for us in earth’s final

crisis. Keeping the Sabbath reveals our trust in Jesus, our Creator, Redeemer, Intercessor, and coming King. This is God’s appeal to each of us in the light of His final judgment. Obedience to His law is the fruit of our faith.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**For Reflection:** John Oxenham was the pen name of William Arthur Dunkerley. Oxenham was an English poet and hymn writer. He wrote a poem entitled “The Ways,” which summarizes this week’s lesson well:

To every man there openeth a Way, and Ways, and a Way.  
 And the High Soul climbs the High way, and the Low Soul gropes the low,  
 And in between, on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro.  
 But to every man there openeth a High Way, and a Low.  
 And every man decideth the Way his soul shall go.

The book of Revelation appeals to us to make eternal choices. There can be no neutrality in the earth’s last war. The tests we will face, of which Oxenham so eloquently writes, will cause “every man [to decide] the Way his soul shall go.”

Invite your class members to contemplate personally, in the coming week, the following questions:

- 1. Is Sabbath worship a day of delight for me, or is it a legalistic requirement? Why is this so?**

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- 2. Do I find my highest delight in doing God’s will? Why, or why not?**

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3. Are there things in my life that I have refused to give up for Christ's sake? If yes, what are they? How can I learn to give them up?

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The Cross calls us to a depth of spiritual experience that is much more than a mere mental ascent to truth. In the light of heaven's final judgment, our Creator calls us to trust Him completely in these final, climactic hours of earth's history.

### *Notes*

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# A City Called Confusion




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Two Contrasting Systems

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## The Wine of the Wrath

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Mystery, Babylon the Great

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Call to Commitment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Babylon: The Center of Idolatry

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Bike and Bible: Part 1

By M. B., as told to KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The mission story concludes next week.

## ***Part I: Overview***

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This week's lesson contrasts two religious systems, symbolized by the woman in white, in Revelation 12, and the woman in scarlet, in Revelation 17. The contrast reveals the difference between these two systems. The first system is based on the Word of God, with Jesus Christ at its center. The second system is based on human reasoning, with human religious leaders at its center. The contrast is between truth and error, salvation by grace and salvation by works, obedience to God's commands and submission to human decrees.

Further, we will identify the characteristics of spiritual Babylon. Revelation 17 describes Babylon as a harlot who has left her true love, Jesus Christ. She rides on a scarlet-colored beast, representing her political power. Rather than deriving her authority and power from Jesus and His Word, Babylon derives them from the kingdoms of this world. She administers a wine cup full of strange doctrines. Just as literal wine affects conscience, reason, and judgment, false doctrine affects our thinking so that we cannot clearly discern Bible truth.

In our exploration of the spiritual characteristics of Babylon, we shall focus on two characteristics specifically. The first characteristic is Babylon's dependence on human wisdom and on human leaders to ascertain divine truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (*John 14:6, NKJV*). Jesus is the originator of all truth. Any truth that comes through human religious leaders must first originate in God's Word. The second characteristic that we will study this week is that spiritual Babylon is the center of all idolatry. In the Old Testament, idols were common in Babylonian worship. But Jesus calls us to worship Him directly, not through an idol as a substitute for Him. This week we will discover Jesus anew, as the supreme Leader of His church.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Revelation 12:17, one of the principal passages in our study this week, speaks of "the remnant" (*KJV*) or "the rest of her offspring" (*NKJV*). The concept of the remnant is found throughout Scripture. It is drawn especially from the Old Testament. There are three Hebrew words that are used for the "remnant." Each of these words has its own shade of meaning. They can be literally translated as "what escapes," "those who escape," "what remains," "the remnant," "to be left over," or "to remain."

Let us now briefly consider a few examples of the use of this word

in the Old Testament. Joseph's family, preserved under his care in Egypt, are spoken of as a "posterity," literally translated as "remnant." Elijah cried out to God that he was the only one left faithful. Again, the word for "remnant" is used here. The Lord promised to leave a faithful remnant in Babylon to remember God and honor His name after the captivity. *The SDA Bible Commentary* describes the concept of the remnant in the Old Testament in these words: "The 'remnant' of OT times is thus composed of successive generations of Israelites—God's chosen people. Again and again the majority apostatized, but each time there was a faithful 'remnant' that became exclusive heirs to the sacred promises, privileges, and responsibilities of the covenant originally made with Abraham and confirmed at Sinai. This 'remnant' was the formally appointed group to which God purposed to send the Messiah and through which He proposed to evangelize the heathen; it did not consist of scattered individuals as such, however faithful they might be, but was a corporate entity, God's visible, divinely commissioned organization on earth."—"Additional Note on Chapter 12," *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 814.

Revelation's last-day remnant escapes from the spiritual apostasy of this world, remains faithful to God, does not compromise Bible truth, and clings to Jesus in earth's final crisis. According to Revelation 12:17, "The dragon [Satan] was wroth [angry] with the woman [the church], and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Here John reveals that the final conflict between Christ and Satan revolves around loyalty to Christ and obedience to His law. Revelation 13 outlines how this conflict intensifies, exposing Satan's strategy. The beast from the sea and the beast from the land join forces with the dragon to destroy God's people. Revelation 14 unfolds God's final message in this cosmic controversy between good and evil. Once again, this message concludes with God's faith-filled remnant people keeping His commandments (*Rev. 14:12*).

### **The Mystery of Babylon Revealed**

In contrast to Revelation 12's woman in white, a symbol of God's true church on earth, John describes in Revelation 17 a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, riding on a scarlet-colored beast. This woman, symbolic of a church-state union, has a name inscribed on her forehead: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots." Ellen G. White writes, "In Revelation 14 the first angel is followed by a second proclaiming: 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' Revelation 14:8. The term 'Babylon' is derived from 'Babel,' and signifies confusion. It is



employed in Scripture to designate the various forms of false or apostate religion. In Revelation 17, Babylon is represented as a woman—a figure which is used in the Bible as the symbol of a church, a virtuous woman representing a pure church, a vile woman an apostate church.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 381.

Throughout Scripture, Babylon represents the oppressor of God’s people. Babylon is the citadel of error, the center of apostasy. It stands for rebellion against God and disobedience to the divine commands. God’s judgments on Old Testament Babylon represent His final judgments upon the world. For an end-time people, the story of Babylon’s fall is instructive. You will recall that Babylon attacked Jerusalem and forced many of the leading young men into captivity, including Daniel. Cyrus, the king of the East, eventually attacked Babylon and freed the Jewish captives and allowed them to return to Jerusalem and worship the true God.

Once again, at the time of the end, God’s people will be afflicted and persecuted by a religious oppressor called Babylon the Great (*Rev. 17:5*). The book of Revelation predicts that at a time of social chaos, political crisis, natural disasters, and economic collapse, Jesus will return to triumph over the oppressive powers of the world and liberate His people. He will reign eternally. He will establish His throne securely in the universe forever. In the battle for the throne, He will be the victor. His people will journey with Him through limitless space to worship in the New Jerusalem.

### **A Contrast Between Revelation’s Two Women**

- The pure woman, in Revelation 12, is clothed with the sun. She is adorned with the glory of Christ’s righteousness.  
The impure woman, in Revelation 17, is dressed in purple and scarlet garments. She is adorned with human falsehood and tradition.
- The pure woman has a garland of stars on her head. She is guided by the teachings of the apostles in her mission.  
The impure woman is adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She depends on her lavish wealth and outward adorning to impress and attract her followers.
- The pure woman stands on the moon. She derives her power from the prophetic Word.  
The impure woman sits on a scarlet beast. She derives her power from the state, or the political powers of the earth.

### **A Human Leader, or a Divine Head?**

When King Nebuchadnezzar sat in his temple on his royal throne, he spoke as a god. His commands were, supposedly, the voice of a god. Once again, in the last days, a church-state system (called spiritual Babylon), whose spiritual

leader will claim to speak as God, will arise. His authority will be declared to be the very word of God. The apostle Paul exposes this power in these words: “Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (*2 Thess. 2:4, NKJV*). Spiritual Babylon’s leader would claim that his word had the authority of the very God of heaven. The papal power fits this description.

### **Babylon Was the Center of Idolatry.**

Babylon was the center of image worship. Christ invites us to come directly to Him. Images limit the ability of the Holy Spirit to impress upon our minds the things of eternity. Images are often accorded the sacredness and homage that belongs to God alone. We do not need to come to Jesus through the image of a saint. Jesus is our intercessor, our great High Priest.

Further, “Babylon” also encompasses all apostate religious powers that have drifted from the clear teachings of God’s Word.

## ***Part III: Life Application***

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This week’s lesson study is more than a theoretical discourse on the identity of the true church and of Satan’s strategy to destroy the people of God. There are at least three very practical lessons for your students to consider:

- 1. Jesus and His Word are our only safeguards in the coming crisis. We must be anchored in Jesus and the Scriptures. Jesus and His Word are our sure defense, our impregnable place of refuge, and our security in the coming crisis. This understanding leads to vitally important questions: Is my life totally anchored in Christ? How can I know for sure? Do I depend on Him in the daily decisions of life? If not, why not? Have I set my affections on things above, not on things on earth (*Col. 3:1, 2*)? What can I do to shift my priorities if they are not what, or where, they should be?**

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2. For sure, our safeguard in the coming crisis is to saturate our minds with God's Word. We are told that in the final crisis: "So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 593. An important question is simply this: "Am I daily filling my mind with the Word of God and earnestly seeking the guidance of His Holy Spirit?" Think of ways to spend more time in the Word each day. How can sharing with others what you learn from God's Word help you to strengthen both your understanding of God's will and your commitment to study His Word more deeply?

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3. In preparation for the coming crisis, we must recognize that Babylon is fallen and that Christ's church will triumph in the end. Anchored in Christ, our minds filled with His Word, the remnant church most assuredly will triumph at last. What wonderful hope does this thought give you in light of the trials ahead?

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# Satan's Final Deceptions



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Way That Seems Right in a Man's Eyes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Old Lie of Immortality

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Babylon: The Center of Sun Worship

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Call to Faithfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Grace for Obedience

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Bike and Bible: Part 2

By M. B., as told to KATHIE LICHTENWALTER

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

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

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

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

My heart is filled with thanksgiving to God. I am filled with awe by the privilege of sharing God with Hussein. I am thankful to my wife for her kind and faith-filled support. I am thankful to relatives in my homeland who have prayed with us for Hussein. I am thankful for believing friends who have



prayed for us during this experience. I thank God for sending us the money to buy the bicycle and for giving us the courage to share His Word with someone who is thrilled to learn about God from a new perspective.

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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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Revelation 14:8 announces the fall of spiritual Babylon. As we saw last week, Babylon was an oppressor of God's people in the Old Testament. Thus, Babylon is a fitting symbol of the citadel of error, of the center of apostasy, and of the archenemy of truth. Last week, we also studied the contrast between the woman in white, Christ's true church, and the harlot, Babylon. We noted that the false system of religion termed as Babylon looks to human religious leaders for authority rather than to the Word of God. Babylon derives its power from the state rather than from Christ. In keeping with the custom of many false religions, Babylon uses idols as representations of the deity.

This week, we will study the two major falsehoods of Babylon: the concept of the immortal soul and sun worship. Throughout the centuries, heathen religions have believed that the soul was immortal. This belief is true of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. This idea of the immortality of the soul entered the Christian church in the early centuries, along with the worship of pagan idols that were repackaged under a veneer of Christianity and venerated as saints. The second error, sun worship, also entered the Christian church relatively early when Christian leaders attempted to appease the pagans and make Christianity more palatable to them. The purported sacredness of Sunday and the immortality of the spirit are two of Satan's greatest deceptions for the last days. This week, we will study these deceptions in the light of God's Word.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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When the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, the ancient city of Babylon had long since been destroyed. John wrote Revelation toward the end of the first century A.D. Babylon had been overthrown by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C., more than 600 years before. The prophet Isaiah foretold Babylon's fate: "It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there" (*Isa. 13:20, NKJV*). Throughout the centuries, this prophecy has been proven true. Alexander the Great of Greece brought 10,000 men to Babylon to clear the ruins and rebuild the city. He died in Babylon before the project could be accomplished. Subsequent to his death, the mission was abandoned. The city has lain in ruins for more than 2,500 years.

Revelation's mystical Babylon then is certainly not the ancient city of Babylon. *The SDA Bible Commentary* forcibly reveals the identity of

spiritual Babylon: “Babylon, both literal and mystical, has thus long been recognized as the traditional enemy of God’s truth and people. As used in the Revelation the name is symbolic of all apostate religious organizations and their leadership, from antiquity down to the close of time. . . .

“This prophecy of the fall of Babylon finds its last-day fulfillment in the departure of Protestantism at large from the purity and simplicity of the gospel.”—Volume 7, p. 830.

This assertion leads us to a couple of significant questions. What were the major characteristics of Old Testament Babylon? Were some of its practices adopted by the Catholic Church in the early centuries after Christ’s ascension? We already have noted in last week’s study that idols were brought into the church and incorporated into Christian worship. This week, as we stated in our overview, we will focus on two other errors that corrupted the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages: the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness. Ellen G. White makes this remarkable statement, linking these twin errors together: “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

### Spiritualism

Throughout the book of Revelation, spiritualism is one of Satan’s final deceptions to unite the world and lead it to earth’s final conflict between the people of God and the forces of evil. Revelation 16:14 states, “For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (*NKJV*). Revelation 19:20 adds that those who received the mark of the beast were deceived by these false spectacular wonders or signs, and Revelation 13 confirms that the devil “deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast” (*Rev. 13:14, NKJV*). According to Revelation 18:2, Babylon “has become the dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit” (*NKJV*). Under the guise of spiritualism, Satan will work with “lying wonders” and “all deceivableness” (*2 Thess. 2:9, 10*). One of his final deceptions will be the impersonation of the dead by his evil angels and a distortion of Bible truth, including the Sabbath.

Ellen G. White gives us this chilling picture of what is coming upon those who have accepted the error of the immortality of the soul: “The doctrine of man’s consciousness in death, especially the belief that spirits

of the dead return to minister to the living, has prepared the way for modern spiritualism. If the dead are admitted to the presence of God and holy angels, and privileged with knowledge far exceeding what they before possessed, why should they not return to the earth to enlighten and instruct the living? . . . He [Satan] has power to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvelous distinctness. Many are comforted with the assurance that their loved ones are enjoying the bliss of heaven, and without suspicion of danger, they give ear 'to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.'”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 551, 552.

Lest we pride ourselves on our knowledge of Bible truth and believe we are in no immediate danger from such blatant deceptions, think again. Modern spiritualism extends far beyond the impersonation of our loved ones by evil angels. (Bible-believing Adventists are, for the most part, not going to be tricked by Beelzebub appearing at the foot of their bed at night as dear old Uncle Barney back from the grave with “new light” on the Sabbath.) Spiritualism, in its modern incarnation, finds its expression in a more subtle, though devastating, attack on Bible truth.

One of its tenets, reaching all the way back to the Garden of Eden itself, is the serpent’s fatal lie that humans shall be as gods when they transgress God’s law. We see this pernicious tenet repackaged by postmodernism and marketed with seductive appeal in the teaching “Do as you will,” a refutation of, and attack on, the law of God itself. This dangerous sophistry subordinates the changeless and absolute sovereignty of God’s law to the caprice of human authority and the whims of culture. Subject to human authority, the law of God is thus made to have no force, nor be binding upon humanity. The devastating result is that God’s authority and Word are undermined and disregarded, to a large extent, in our modern cultures.

The bottom line? Satan doesn’t really care how he deceives us with the lying wonders of spiritualism. Whether by a blatant attack through “new light” from “dead” relatives or through a more subtle assault on the inspiration and the authority of God’s Word, it’s all the same to him. So, we must put on the whole armor of God (*Eph. 6:10–18*), praying for discernment to detect the most subtle deceptions of our unsleeping foe.

### **Attack on the Sabbath Truth**

And that point neatly leads us to the second great error that Satan will use to deceive the people of God in the last days. It is the false teaching that the Sabbath is no longer valid because God’s law is no longer binding. This last error has its roots in antiquity. Sun worship has long been practiced by ancient cultures. The chief god of the Babylonians was Bel-Marduk. He was depicted as sitting on a golden throne in a golden temple before a

golden table. He was the sun god of justice, light, truth, and kingly authority. *Encyclopedia Britannica* has an insightful article describing the influence of the sun god on past civilizations. According to the editors of *Britannica*, the ancients believed, “The sun is the bestower of light and life to the totality of the cosmos; with his unblinking, all-seeing eye, he is the stern guarantor of justice; with the almost universal connection of light with enlightenment or illumination, the sun is the source of wisdom. . . . These qualities—sovereignty, power of beneficence, justice, and wisdom—are central to any elite religious group, and it is within these contexts that a highly developed solar ideology is found. Kings ruled by the power of the sun and claimed descent from the sun. Solar deities, gods personifying the sun, are sovereign and all-seeing. The sun is often a prime attribute of or is identified with the Supreme Deity.”—“Sun Worship: Religion,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

The Babylonians, along with their pagan counterparts, gave great reverence to the sun god, Bel-Marduk. The false religious system of end-time Babylon disregards the law of God as did its ancient counterpart. In the early centuries, a compromise occurred in the Roman Church to accommodate the surrounding pagan culture. To disassociate from the Jews and to evangelize the heathen, church and state leaders united to honor Sunday, first as a civil rest day and then as the official day of worship. Through the centuries of the Middle Ages under the auspices of Babylon, this church-state, geopolitical alliance substituted human traditions for the Word of God. The worship of idols replaced worshiping Jesus directly. The Bible truth about the state of the dead was supplanted by the error of the immortality of the soul. The Sabbath was changed from the seventh day, Saturday, to the first day, Sunday. It appeared that error and falsehood would triumph. But the Bible’s last book, Revelation, prophesied that God would raise up a last-day remnant who, saved by grace and through the power of the living Christ, would live in godly obedience and proclaim His last-day message to the world.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**Reflect:** This week’s study ought to lead us to do some serious thinking about our own spiritual experience. If the devil is going to use spiritualism to deceive millions because they long for signs and wonders more than the truth of God’s Word, is it possible that we, too, could be deceived if the basis of our spiritual experience is feeling and emotion? Do we want signs and wonders more than the truth of God’s Word? Here are some questions for your class members to ponder this week in the classroom and beyond:

- 1. What role does emotion play in our religious experience? What if our emotions point one way and the Word of God points another?**

**What then do we do? Are our feelings ever a safe guide? Explain. What if you were confronted with the appearance of a dead loved one? What would you do? More important, what is your only safeguard against the deceptions of spiritualism in your culture that undermine the supremacy of God's Word?**

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- 2. The change of the Sabbath is reflective of a departure from the Word of God. This change took place gradually over the centuries. Satan's deceptions are often subtle. He is a cunning strategist. Is it possible that we could be on the slippery slope of compromise in our own lives? If so, what might these compromises be? Further, what do you see as the greatest challenges the church is facing today in the area of compromise?**

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- 3. Discuss the following statement: "Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 911. What element, or elements, stand out to you in this statement? Why?**

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




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

In this lesson, we will explore these themes further.

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

## Steadfast Endurance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Cosmic Struggle

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Ungodly Chain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Those Who Follow the Lamb

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Jesus: Our Only Mediator

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Further Thought:** “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. . . . In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## “I Can’t Do This”

By Andrew McChesney

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I was at church,” Mildred said.

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

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

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

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



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

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

*“To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives.” For more information, visit [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org).*



## ***Part I: Overview***

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Revelation is a book of contrasts. This week's study discusses the seal of God and the mark of the beast. Throughout the centuries, the Sabbath has been a special sign of allegiance to God. The Sabbath has revealed that God is worthy of worship as the Creator of the universe. The mark of the beast also revolves around worship. Satan has introduced a counterfeit sabbath, the first day of the week, as a symbol of his authority. The final conflict between Christ and Satan focuses on who is worthy to rule the universe. Because Jesus is the Giver of life, He is worthy to be worshiped. Satan understands this truth as one of the dominant issues in the great controversy between good and evil. For this reason, Satan attacks the Sabbath, the symbol of God's creative authority.

Because of the centrality of the Sabbath in the final conflict, the law of God is preeminent in the final conflict. In this week's study, we will explore the issues in earth's last war. Revelation 14:12 declares, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*NKJV*). Christ's end-time remnant is filled with Jesus' gift of righteousness by faith, which enables His elect to keep God's commandments.

Our study this week also helps us identify fully the beast power from the sea in Revelation 13. We will discover that this power, which usurps the authority of God, gets its authority from the dragon, or Satan. This beast power grows out of the ruins of the Roman Empire and claims for itself the very prerogatives of God.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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**Overview:** Those who heed the messages of the three angels turn away from Babylon and its false teachings. Consequently, they are commended for two things: their obedience and having the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). They are patiently waiting for Jesus to return, which is another way of saying that they are steadfast and unshakable in their trust in God and in their obedience to His law. They will not be moved. *Gill's Exposition of the Bible* offers an enlightening statement on Revelation 14:12: "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and not the inventions of men, and the traditions of antichrist, but the ordinances of the Gospel, as they were at first delivered, without any adulteration and corruption; and who kept them because they were

enjoined by God, and from a principle of love to him, and with a view to his glory: these are distinguished from the worshippers of the beast, and were preserved throughout the apostasy; these are the witnesses . . . and the remnant of the woman's seed, with whom the dragon made war by the beast.”—*Comments on Revelation 14:12*, biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/revelation-14-12.html.

Saved by grace, the remnant is distinguished from the worshipers of the beast power from the sea because of their love for Jesus and their obedience to His commandments. They have the faith of Jesus—both faith in Jesus and the quality of faith from Jesus that enables them to become overcomers. Their faith results in obedience and enables them to stand when most of the people in this world bow to the beast power from the sea. Having the faith of Jesus means to have Jesus live His life in us. On the cross, Jesus trusted His Father's love when He was unable to experience the Father's care and concern for His suffering as the world's sin bearer. The faith of Jesus, living within our hearts, enables us to trust Jesus in all of life's experiences.

### Identifying the Beast From the Sea

The clues to identifying the beast power from the sea of Revelation 13 are extremely specific. In this week's study, we will discuss three of these significant identifying marks of the beast from the sea. The first clue we find concerns the origin of its power. “The dragon gave him [the beast from the sea] his power, his throne, and great authority” (*Rev. 13:2, NKJV*). Who is this dragon that gives the beast from the sea of Revelation 13 its power, throne, and authority?

We read about the dragon in Revelation 12. Revelation 12:3–5 says this “dragon”—the devil—attempted to destroy, “as soon as it was born,” the “male Child,” who was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*), an unmistakable reference to Christ. The dragon is identified clearly in these verses. In straightforward language, God's Word tells us that the dragon is the devil, or Satan (*Rev. 12:8, 9*). None other than the archenemy of God and of man is behind the beast power that comes from the sea. But the devil works through *human* agents. Just as God works through His church, the devil works through a mammoth fallen religious institution that has rejected God's truth and turned its back on God's law. Although the dragon is *primarily* Satan, as we've just learned, so closely was Satan aligned with pagan Rome that the dragon, in a *secondary sense*, also is a symbol of the pagan Roman Empire (*compare Dan. 7:7*). Satan used pagan Rome in his attempt to destroy Jesus shortly after His birth (*Matt. 1:1–20*). Later, Satan used pagan Rome to crucify Christ:

A Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die:

**Matthew 27:2, 17–26.**

A Roman executioner nailed Him to the cross:

**Matthew 27:27, 35.**

A Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear:

**John 19:34.**

A Roman seal was affixed to His tomb:

**Matthew 27:66.**

A Roman squad of soldiers guarded His tomb:

**Matthew 27:62–65.**

Still later, the dragon, through pagan Rome, gave the beast from the sea his seat, or throne. This endowment happened when the Roman Emperor Constantine decided to move the capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople, in modern-day Turkey, leaving a power vacuum at the former throne or seat of the Caesars, the Imperial City of Rome.

“By retiring to the East, he [Constantine] left the field clear for the Bishops of Rome.” “The Papacy is but ‘the ghost’ of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the ‘grave thereof.’ ”—Arthur P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1862), p. 305. Thus, the beast power that arises from the sea, in Revelation 13, is the papal system of religion. We must remember here that we are talking about a system, not about individual members of that system. The beast power from the sea is not a person; it is a false religious organization.

The second clue that Revelation 13 gives us about the identity of the beast from the sea closely parallels the first clue. The power that rises out of Rome is a power that commands worship. It is a religious power. Revelation 13:3, 4 declares that “all the world marveled and followed the beast. So . . . they worshiped the beast” (*NKJV*). The organization described here is also a religious power that grows into a universal system of worship.

This observation leads us to the third clue that Revelation 13 gives in identifying the beast from the sea: blasphemy (*Rev. 13:5, 6*). According to the Bible, what is blasphemy? There were two occasions when the Lord Jesus unjustly was accused of blasphemy, thus giving us two examples from the Bible of what is meant by blasphemy: (1) if any human pretends to be, or claims to be, God or claims the privileges and prerogatives of God; and (2) if any human claims the power to forgive sins. In Jesus’ case, the accusations were unjust because He truly was, and is, God and holds all the powers and prerogatives of God—including the right to forgive us our sins. (*See John 10:33, Luke 5:21.*)

The Roman Church has two distinctive doctrines that the Bible calls

blasphemy. One is its claim to have the power to forgive sins. The other is delegating to the pope the office of God on earth.

Jesus is our true priest, and only He can forgive our sins. It is true that we are not righteous enough to appear before God. We need a mediator. The incredibly good news is we have a mediator, Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that there is only “one Mediator between God and men” (*1 Tim. 2:5, NKJV*).

As to how the Roman Church fulfills the second Bible definition of blasphemy, let’s look at a clear statement from an authoritative Catholic source on the status of the pope: “The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, and the vicar of God. . . . Hence the Pope is crowned with a triple crown, as King of Heaven and of earth and of the lower regions. . . . The Pope is as it were God on earth, . . . chief King of kings . . . to whom has been entrusted by the omnipotent God directions . . . of the heavenly kingdom.”—Lucius Ferraris, “Papa,” article 2 in his *Prompta Bibliotheca* [“Handy Library”] (Venice, Italy: Gaspar Storti, 1772), vol. 6, pp. 26–29. Latin. Reprinted (Rome: Press of the Propaganda, 1899).

The book of Revelation exalts Jesus, identifies God’s last-day people, and reveals the identifying characteristics of the beast so that we can be prepared for the coming conflict.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

**Reflect:** At times, it may appear to some as if God’s condemnation of a religious organization that has done a great deal of good in the world, with its schools, hospitals, and humanitarian service, seems a little harsh and unjust. The ultimate question is not whether a religious organization has done some good. The ultimate questions are: Is this organization faithful to Jesus and the teachings of Scripture? What is behind its worldwide influence, and is it leading the world into the union of church and state that prophecy predicts? The book of Revelation reveals that, under the auspices of Rome, our religious liberties will be restricted, an economic boycott will be passed, and ultimately God’s people will experience oppression, imprisonment, and death.

Ask your class members to read aloud and discuss the following three vital points from our study this week:

1. ***Be alert to what is happening in our world. Revelation’s prophecies predict that a religiopolitical union will arise. Jesus instructed His***

disciples, just before He went to the cross, to “ ‘watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming’ ” (*Matt. 24:42, NKJV*). What does Jesus mean when He tells us to “watch”? In practical terms, how do we do that?

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2. *Be prepared.* The time to prepare for earth’s final crisis is now. A crisis generally does not develop character; a crisis reveals character. Now is the time to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). Think of a crisis you went through recently. What did that reveal to you about yourself? What areas do you need to strengthen in your walk with God as a result of that revelation of character? How do we prepare for Christ’s coming?

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3. *Be active.* Jesus said, “ ‘You shall be witnesses to Me’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). If there ever were a time to be active in sharing God’s love, His Word, and His end-time message with those around us, it is today. What are ways you can share Christ’s end-time message with those around you in the coming week?

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



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Deadly Wound

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Falling Away

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Satan's Final Strategy

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Mark of the Beast

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Sabbath Test

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Though living in anticipation, even expectation, of final events, why must we be careful about not getting into fanaticism, date setting, or speculating beyond what has been revealed to us through inspiration? What are the dangers of doing this, and what have been the results when the expected events have not unfolded when and how people have said they would happen?
- ② While we must avoid the dangers depicted in the previous discussion question, how do we respond to those who say that our scenario about the mark of the beast and persecution cannot happen because it just doesn’t seem possible, given the current state of the world? Why is this line of reasoning, though on the surface seemingly sensible, really not sensible at all? (After all, look at how quickly great changes can come to the world.)

## School Saves

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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




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*“Adventist education is closely connected with the mission of the church,” said Ivan Riapolov (pictured), education director of the Euro-Asia Division, whose territory includes Ukraine. “You cannot separate Adventist education and Adventist mission. Wherever schools open, the church grows.” Thank you for your mission offerings that support Seventh-day Adventist education worldwide.*

## ***Part I: Overview***

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The Bible is a cohesive whole. The theme of the great controversy runs like a scarlet thread throughout its pages, weaving its narratives and sacred truths together. The ministry of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, His high priestly ministry, and His return are themes that echo through its pages. The great controversy comes to a climax in the book of Revelation. This week's lesson, entitled "The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast: Part 2," continues our identification of the beast power from the sea, outlines earth's final events, and shares practical principles that will help us prepare for the coming of Jesus.

One of the important principles in understanding the time prophecies of the Bible is the day/year principle. To recap, in the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, one prophetic day equals one literal year. We will review the biblical and historical support for this principle again in our study this week. Another important principle of prophetic interpretation is the link between the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

The little-horn power of Daniel 7, the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2, and the beast from the sea in Revelation 13 represent the same oppressive power that persecuted God's people during the Middle Ages: the Papacy. In our study this week, we will discover how the beast from the sea, in Revelation 13, also opposes and oppresses God's last-day people, who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Revelation 12 explains that Satan would persecute God's church during the Middle Ages. According to Revelation 12, Christ's faithful followers would flee into the wilderness for 1,260 days (*Rev. 12:6*). As we read in Revelation 12:14: "The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (*Rev. 12:14, NKJV*). Daniel 7:25 explains that the little horn, or Roman Catholic Church-state power, would "intend to change times and law. Then the saints [believers] shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time" (*NKJV*). According to Revelation 13:5, the Roman Catholic Church-state power would be allowed to "continue for forty-two months" (*NKJV*). These three time periods, 1,260 days, times and time and half a time, and 42 months all describe the same time period and appear seven times in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

In an article published by the Biblical Research Institute, Gerhard Pfandl makes this observation: “Until the 19th century, most students of the apocalyptic books Daniel and Revelation used the historicist method to interpret the prophecies in these books. One of the main pillars of the historicist method is the year-day principle which says that a day in apocalyptic time prophecies represents a year. During the 19th century, the historicist method was slowly replaced by the preterist and futurist systems of interpretation, both of which deny the year-day principle. Preterists place most of the prophecies into the past up to the time of the Roman Empire; futurists place most of them into the future, specifically into the last seven years between the secret rapture and the Second Advent.” —Pfandl, “In Defense of the Year-day Principle,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no. 1 (2012), p. 3.

It is only logical to conclude that, given the symbolic nature of the imagery of Daniel 7, 8, 9, and 12, along with the imagery in Revelation 12 and 13, the time periods in these chapters are also symbolic. When we apply the day-for-a-year principle in each of these instances, the events predicted come out exactly on time.

The article by Pfandl also makes this telling point: “According to the context, the expressions ‘time, times, and half a time’ (*Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14*), ‘forty-two months’ (*Rev. 11:2; 13:5*), and ‘one thousand two hundred and sixty days’ (*Rev. 11:3; 12:6*) all apply to the same time period, but the natural expression ‘three years and six months’ is not used once. ‘The Holy Spirit seems, in a manner, to exhaust all the phrases by which the interval could be expressed, excluding always that one form which would be used of course in ordinary writing, and is used invariably in Scripture on other occasions, to denote the literal period. This variation is most significant if we accept the year-day system, but quite inexplicable in the other view’ [Thomas R. Birks, *First Elements of Sacred Prophecy* (London: William E. Painter, 1843), p. 352].” —Pfandl, “In Defense of the Year-day Principle,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 23, no. 1 (2012), p. 8.

The 1,260 prophetic days—the time, times, and half a time of Daniel and Revelation—equals 1,260 years. Commenting on this prophetic period, *The SDA Bible Commentary* states, “The prophetic period of the little horn began in A.D. 538, when the Ostrogoths abandoned the siege of Rome, and the bishop of Rome, released from Arian control, was free to exercise the prerogatives of Justinian’s decree of 533, and thenceforth to increase the authority of the ‘Holy See’ (see on v. 8). Exactly 1260 years later (1798), the spectacular victories of the armies of Napoleon in Italy placed the pope at the mercy of the French revolutionary government, which now advised him that the Roman religion would always be



the irreconcilable enemy of the Republic, and added that ‘there is one thing even more essential to the attainment of the end desired, and that is to destroy, if possible, the centre of unity of the Roman Church; and it is for you, who unite in your person the most distinguished qualities of the general and of the enlightened politician, to realize this aim if you consider it practicable’ (*Ibid.*, p. 158). In response to these instructions and at the command of Napoleon, [General] Berthier, with a French army, entered Rome, proclaimed the political rule of the papacy at an end and took the pope prisoner, carrying him off to France, where he died in exile.”—Volume 4, p. 834.

The prophecies of Revelation predict that the deadly wound, afflicted on the Papacy by Napoleon’s armies, would be healed, and the Papacy would rise to international preeminence (*Rev. 13:3*). This rise would usher in the final conflict between the mark of the beast and the seal of God. To understand more fully the nature of this conflict, we must first decode the meaning of the seal of God. What exactly is this seal?

According to Romans 4:11, a sign and a seal are interchangeable. Seals were well known in the ancient world. They were used to authenticate documents. They were also a sign of ownership. Seals were often made of wax or stamped on freshly formed clay. Of all the commandments, the Sabbath is the only one that qualifies as God’s seal. It contains the name, title, and domain of the lawgiver. As P. Gerard Damsteegt observes: “The Sabbath commandment can therefore be considered a seal because it ‘is the only one of all the ten in which are found both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It is the only one that shows by whose authority the law is given. Thus it contains the seal of God, affixed to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force’ (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 307). The Sabbath helps to give the ten commandments their unique significance. ‘The Sabbath was placed in the decalogue as the seal of the living God, pointing out the Law-giver, and making known his right to rule.’ Thus the Sabbath is the sign of a relationship between God and His people, serving as ‘a test of their loyalty to Him’ [*Signs of the Times*, May 13, 1886]. The mission of Seventh-day Adventists can be described as ‘presenting the law of God as a test of character and as the seal of the living God’ (*Testimonies for the Church*, 2:468).”—Damsteegt, “The Seal of God,” *Adventists Affirm*, vol. 8, no. 3, Year End 1994, pp. 37, 38.

The seal of God, as manifested by keeping the Sabbath, is a sign of accepting God’s authority in our lives. As Ellen G. White so powerfully states: “Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1,161. Sealed by the Holy Spirit, we are



prepared for the crisis ahead. We do well to heed the apostle Paul’s admonition: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (*Eph. 4:30, NKJV*).

### *Part III: Life Application*

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**Reflect:** As diametrically opposed as the seal of God is to the mark of the beast, they do have one thing in common. Neither is assigned instantly. The reception of the seal of God takes place over a period of time in which our minds are daily conformed to the image of Christ. Ellen G. White writes, “It is a *law* both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by *beholding* we become *changed*. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 555, emphasis supplied.

By beholding Jesus and saturating our minds with the teachings of His Word, we become more like Him. It takes time for character to develop. Meaningful, lasting relationships are developed over time and take time. As we meditate on the life of Christ, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to “seal” within us the principles of God’s kingdom in preparation for the final test over the Sabbath commandment.

Just as the seal of God is not received in an instant, neither is the mark of the beast. Daily compromises, sins cherished, hidden idols of the heart retained, un-Christlike attitudes fostered—all lead to the reception of the mark of the beast. If we fail to meet the tests of today, we will certainly fail in the larger tests of tomorrow, when the mark of the beast is enforced. As the old Adventist preacher Luther Warren used to say: “The only way to be ready for the coming of Jesus is to get ready and stay ready.”

Ask class members to reflect on the statement by Luther Warren. Encourage them to pray this week that God will reveal anything that is an impediment to their being ready for the Second Coming.

### *Notes*

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# Ablaze With God's Glory




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

# Preparing for the Final Crisis

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## Knowing Truth

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

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

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

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

And the United States will eventually take the lead in this global confederation. “Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

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

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

## The Reformation Continues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## God's Glory Fills the Earth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Lamb, the Slain Lamb

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Training Boys to Read the Bible

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was the secret for teaching a child to spend personal time with God in the morning. “I never once told the boys that they needed to start having morning devotions,” Christian said. “They just saw that their mother and I had devotions and followed our example.”




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

## ***Part I: Overview***

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Revelation's prophecies reveal what is coming, so that God's people can be prepared for it. In his letter to the church at Thessaloniki, the apostle Paul clearly states the purpose of prophecy: "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (*1 Thess. 5:4–6, NKJV*). God's Word provides light on the road ahead. In this week's lesson, we will study Revelation's predictions of the final movements of this earth's history.

Understanding what is coming will help us prepare for the final conflict between the forces of good and evil. Revelation 18 predicts that a confederation of religious, political, and economic powers, called Babylon, will unite in an attempt to rule the world. But God is never caught by surprise. According to Revelation 18:1, 2, God will move through His Holy Spirit to lighten the world with His glory. Demonic powers from beneath will be met by heaven's power from above. Then it will be demonstrated through God's people that the glory of God is His character.

The focus of our study this week is on God's glory, revealed through His people to lighten this sin-darkened world. Changed by grace, transformed by love, filled with the Holy Spirit, God's last-day church gives His final appeal to this world, and tens of thousands hear and respond to the call. Thus, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*).

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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### **The Glory of God**

Revelation 18:1 is one of the most significant passages in the entire book of Revelation. It reads, "After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory" (*NKJV*). The expression "the earth was illuminated with [God's] glory" is extremely significant. Throughout Revelation there are three words that are linked together—"God's glory, God's honor, and God's power."

Revelation 4:11 states, " 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power' " (*NKJV*). Consider Revelation 5:12, where John once again says that Jesus is worthy to receive, among other things, glory, honor,

and power. We discover this thought again in Revelation 19:1: “ ‘Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!’ ” (*NKJV*). And notice how Revelation, referring to the habitation of the New Jerusalem by the saints, closes: “And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it” (*Rev. 21:26, NKJV*).

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

Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection exploded that myth. The One who created us plunged into this snake pit of a world to redeem us. On the cross, Jesus answered Satan’s charges and demonstrated that God is both loving and just. Charmed by His love, concerned about His honor, His end-time people reveal His glory—His loving, self-sacrificing character—to a self-centered, godless world. Thus, the earth will be illuminated by a revelation of the character of God.

### **The Fullness of the Spirit**

The Holy Spirit will be poured out in the fullness of His power just before the coming of Jesus, and the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. Revelation 18:1 is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk’s words: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (*Hab. 2:14, NKJV*). As we just commented, the glory of God is His character of love. But this assertion begs a question: How will this glory be revealed in the last moments of history on a morally darkened, sin-polluted planet?

To answer this question, let us consider an experience of Moses. Remember when Moses asked God to show him His glory? What did God reveal? Let’s read God’s answer to Moses’ question: “And he said, ‘Please, show me Your glory.’ Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’ ” (*Exod. 33:18, 19, NKJV*). God’s glory is His character.

The glory of God fills the earth at a time of spiritual darkness, as His people—overwhelmed with His love, transformed by His grace, and committed to His mission—reveal to the world His loving character in their lives and witness. The witness of their unselfish lives and the proclamation of the message of His goodness, grace, and truth is in stark contrast to the selfishness, pride, and falsehoods of this world’s system.

### God's Final Appeal

An angel descends from heaven with a message directly from the throne of God, a message that calls His people out of an apostate religiopolitical confederacy named Babylon. God's warning is that " 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons' " (*Rev. 18:2, NKJV*). This proclamation mirrors that of the second angel of Revelation 14 who also announced the fall of Babylon (*Rev. 14:8*). Revelation 18:4 is God's last call to all humanity. He urgently appeals to those called by His name: " 'Come out of her [Babylon], my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues' " (*NKJV*). "Sin is the transgression of [God's] law" (*1 John 3:4*). God is calling His people to come out of every lawbreaking church. Why is God calling His people out of Babylon at this point? Revelation 18:5 tells us: " 'For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities' " (*NKJV*). Babylon has filled the cup of her iniquity. God keeps an accurate record of the sins of earthly powers, and when the figures reach a certain amount, God says, "Enough!"

That's exactly what happened in the days of Noah. God sent a message of redemption to the antediluvian world, but when their sins reached a certain amount, and after every person on earth had had a chance to repent, the rains came. We see the same thing again in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot made a solemn appeal to his children to leave Sodom with him. When the tally of sin reached a certain amount, the fire fell.

The same thing happened with ancient Babylon. God sent message after message to Babylon, calling its leaders and people to repentance, but when those messages were rejected, the Medes and Persians invaded. God's mercy bears long with His wayward children. He gives them every chance to repent. He sends His Spirit to individual hearts. He sends prophetic warnings and makes urgent appeals, but He gives to all the freedom of choice. Spiritual Babylon, as did its ancient counterpart, hardens its heart in rebellion.

Demonic forces will eventually take total control of modern, spiritual Babylon. She becomes "a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit" (*Rev. 18:2, NKJV*). God's people are filled with the Holy Spirit, and, by contrast, the spirits of demons fill Babylon. When any individual or religious organization knowingly turns from the teachings of Scripture, they become open to spiritual delusions. The only way to avoid being controlled by unholy spirits is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Babylon's deceptions become universal, for all nations will drink the wine of her fornications. Wine represents false doctrines, as we saw in a previous study. Those who drink the wine of Babylon become confused in their thinking. They mistake error for truth and conclude that

truth is error. Carefully notice the wording in Revelation 18:3: “ ‘For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury’ ” (*NKJV*).

Fornication is an illicit union. There are three groups who unite in this illicit union, or end-time confederacy: Babylon (all false religions of the world, including spiritualism, in league with the papal power), the kings of the earth (political/state powers), and the merchants of the earth (economic forces). Speaking about the union of church and state that is coming, Ellen G. White warns us that “when Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 451. God will meet the “marvelous working of Satan” with the greatest manifestation of heaven’s power since Pentecost: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. The earth will be ablaze with the glory of God. The gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth by people who will be living witnesses of its transforming power. Tens of thousands of honest-hearted men and women will flee Babylon and unite with Christ’s followers. Then Jesus will stream down the corridor of the skies in glory and take His children home.

### ***Part III: Life Application***

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**Reflect:** The two most important things in life are knowing Jesus and helping others to know Him. Stated another way, the two most important things in life are being ready for the coming of Jesus and helping others to be ready when He comes. The closer we draw to Christ, the more we reveal His glory to the world. As John writes: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (*John 1:14, 16, NKJV*). To reflect God’s glory is to be filled with Christ’s love, grace, and power. It is to live for the glory of His name and the honor of His kingdom.

Hymn 322, “Nothing Between,” expresses the longing of every converted heart: “Nothing between my soul and the Savior, naught of this world’s delusive dream: I have renounced all sinful pleasure—Jesus is mine! There’s nothing between.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985).

Ask class members to reflect in the coming week on the questions below:

- 1. Is there anything that I would rather have than Jesus? If so, what is this “idol”? What occupies my time? How do I spend my leisure moments? What consumes my inmost thoughts?**

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- 2. In what ways does my life reflect my outward profession of faith? How do my actions testify to my spiritual commitment?**

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- 3. If Jesus came today, would I be ready? If not, why not?**

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- 4. Does Christ have complete control of my life? If He doesn't, what is standing in the way, and what can I, with the Holy Spirit's help, do about it?**

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

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

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

## Lesson 1—Paul and the Ephesians

### The Week at a Glance:

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

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

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

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

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

**Memory Text**—*Ephesians 1:9, 10, ESV*

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

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

### The Week at a Glance:

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

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

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

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

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

**Memory Text**—*Ephesians 1:3, ESV*

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

**Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind** The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: [info@christianrecord.org](mailto:info@christianrecord.org); website: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).