

# The War Behind All Wars



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 12:7–9, Ezek. 28:12–15, Isa. 14:12–14, Gen. 3:15, John 17:24–26.*

**Memory Text:** “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer” (*Revelation 12:7, 8, NKJV*).

If God is so good, why is the world so bad? How can a God of love allow so much evil to exist? Why do bad things happen to good people? In this week's lesson, we will explore the age-long conflict between good and evil. Beginning with Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, we will examine the origin of evil and God's long-suffering in dealing with the sin problem.

God is a God of incredible love. His very nature is love (*1 John 4:7, 8*). All of His actions are loving (*Jer. 31:3*). Love can never be forced, coerced, or legislated. Ellen G. White states it well when she writes, “Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. To deny the power of choice is to destroy the ability to love, and to destroy the ability to love is to eradicate the possibility of being truly happy. God wins our allegiance by His love. He is dealing with the great controversy between good and evil in such a way that sin will never arise in the universe again. God's purpose is to demonstrate before the entire universe that He has always acted in the best interests of His creatures. Looking at the world through the lens of God's love, in the light of the great controversy between good and evil, reassures each of us that right will triumph over wrong and will do so forever.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy*, chapters 29–30, to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.

## War in Heaven

**Read** Revelation 12:7–9. What does this passage reveal about the freedom existing in heaven and the origin of evil? When Lucifer rebelled, in what ways could God have responded?

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These verses describe a cosmic conflict between good and evil. Satan and his angels warred against Christ and, eventually, were cast out of heaven. It seems extremely strange that war would break out in such a perfect place as heaven. Why did it happen? Did a loving God create a demonic angel who initiated this war? Was there some fatal flaw in this angel that led him to rebel? The Bible clearly explains the origin of evil. It draws the curtain aside in this conflict between good and evil.

**Compare** Ezekiel 28:12–15 and Isaiah 14:12–14. What went on in the mind of this angelic being called Lucifer that led to his rebellion?

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God did not create a devil. He created a being of dazzling brightness named Lucifer. This angelic being was created perfect. Included in his perfection was freedom of choice—a fundamental principle of God’s government, which runs by love, not coercion. Sin originated with Lucifer in heaven itself. There is no logical explanation why this perfect angel should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator.

Lucifer, a created being, desired the worship that belonged only to the Creator. He attempted to usurp God’s throne by questioning God’s authority. His rebellion led to open warfare in heaven.

Although God bore long with Lucifer, He could not allow him to spoil heaven with his rebellion. “The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness, and the justice of the Creator, and the sacred, unchanging nature of His law. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker, and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 494, 495.

**What lessons can you draw about God’s character in His dealing with evil?**

## Lucifer Deceives; Christ Prevails

There is no logical explanation for why Lucifer, this perfect angel, should have allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator. Satan's pride ripened into open rebellion. He accused God of being unjust and unfair. He infected the angels with his doubts and accusations.

**Read** Revelation 12:4. What does this passage reveal about Satan's ability to deceive? How many of the angels fell for his lies about God?

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When war broke out in heaven, the angels had to decide—would they follow Jesus or Lucifer? What was the nature of this war in heaven? Was it a physical war, or a war of ideas, or both? We don't know the details, but the conflict was physical enough that Satan and his angels eventually were "cast out," and a place was not "found for them in heaven any longer" (*Rev. 12:8, 9, NKJV*). This war obviously includes some kind of physical element.

One thing is certain about the war in heaven. Every angel had to decide for or against Christ. Whom would they follow? Whose voice would they listen to? The loyal angels chose to be obedient to Christ's loving commands, while one-third of the angels listened to the voice of Lucifer, disobeyed God, and lost heaven. We, too, in this critical time of earth's history, are called to decide for or against Christ. We, too, are to declare whose side we are on—Christ's or Satan's.

**Read** Genesis 2:15–17, Exodus 32:26, Joshua 24:15, 1 Kings 18:20, 21, and Revelation 22:17. What fundamental principle in the great controversy do these verses teach us?

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When God created humanity, He embedded deep within our brains the ability to think, to reason, and to choose. The essence of our humanness is our ability to make moral choices. We are not mere robots. We were created in God's image, distinct from the animal creation, in our ability to make moral choices and live by eternal spiritual principles. After Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, and after the Fall, God has called His people to respond to His love and be obedient to His commands by choosing to serve Him.

**What lessons can we learn from the battle in heaven that relates to our own personal battle with evil? If Satan was able to deceive these righteous, holy heavenly beings, what does this say about his evil attempts to deceive us?**

## Planet Earth Becomes Involved

When God created the earth, He created it perfect. The Bible says that He “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31, NKJV*). There was no stain of sin or evil anywhere. But He gave Adam and Eve the same freedom of choice He had given to Lucifer. He didn’t want robots on earth any more than He wanted robots in heaven.

In fact, He went out of His way to make this freedom clear. He planted a tree in the Garden and called it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He made a point of telling Adam and Eve about it because He wanted to make sure they knew they had a choice.

Satan came to the tree, and as Eve lingered there, he told her: “ ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ ” (*Gen. 3:4, 5, NKJV*). In other words, if you eat of this tree, you will enter a new sphere of existence. You will have excitement. You will have a thrill that you’ve never known before. Eve, God is keeping something from you. Here, take the forbidden fruit and eat it.

When Eve and later Adam made that choice, they opened a door that God wanted to keep forever closed. It was the doorway to sin—the doorway to suffering, heartache, sickness, and death.

**Read** Genesis 3:1–3 with Romans 3:23 and Romans 5:12. What do these texts have in common? Describe the ultimate results of sin that plague the entire human race.

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At its very core, sin is rebellion against God. Sin separates us from God. Since God is the Source of life, separation from God leads to death. It also leads to worry, anxiety, sickness, and disease. The suffering in our world is ultimately the result of living on a sin-ravaged planet. This certainly does not mean that every time we suffer, we have sinned. It does mean that every one of us is affected by living on this planet.

**Read** Genesis 3:15; Leviticus 5:5, 6; and John 1:29. What promise did God give Adam and Eve in the Garden after they sinned that would give them hope in their despair? What service did God initiate in Eden that would point them forward through the centuries to the solution to the sin problem?

## Love Finds a Way

Adam and Eve have sinned, and God has told them that they must leave their garden home. From now on, toil and suffering will be their lot. Will they have to suffer and finally die with no hope? Is death the end of everything?

It was at this point that God gave them the promise recorded in Genesis 3:15. Looking directly at Satan, the serpent, He said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (*NKJV*). They may not have fully understood at that moment exactly what this meant, but they knew they could hope again. In some way, through the “Seed of the woman,” their redemption would come.

The “Seed of the woman,” of course, is Jesus Christ (*Gal. 3:16*). At the cross, Satan bruised His heel. But Jesus’ victory is our guarantee that one day the serpent’s head will be crushed. The door of suffering and death that Adam and Eve opened will one day be closed.

**Read** Hebrews 2:9, Galatians 3:13, and 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do these verses tell us about the immensity of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross?

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Do you ever wonder if God really loves you? Look at the Cross—look at the crown of thorns, look at the nails in His hands and feet. With every drop of blood that Jesus shed on Calvary, God is saying, “I love you. I do not want to be in heaven without you. Yes, you’ve sinned; you sold yourself into the hand of the enemy; yes, in and of yourself you are unworthy of eternal life. But I’ve paid the ransom to get you back.” When you look at the Cross, you never have to wonder again if you’re loved.

The Bible speaks of a Jesus who came to this world and experienced heartache, disappointment, and pain in common with all humanity. It reveals a Christ who faced the same temptations we face—a Christ who triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell both in His life and through His death on the cross—all for each one of us, personally.

Think about it: Jesus, the One who created the cosmos (*see John 1:3*), stepped down from heaven and not only came into this fallen world but suffered in it in ways none of us ever will (*see Isa. 53:1–5*). And He did it because He loved us—each of us. What a powerful reason to hope!

**How did Christ answer Satan’s charges on the cross? In the light of the great controversy between good and evil, what did His death accomplish?**

## Our High Priest

What Jesus did for us on the cross enables Him also to intercede for us in heaven. Our resurrected Lord is our great High Priest, providing everything we need to be saved and to live in God's kingdom forever.

**Read** Hebrews 4:15, 16 and Hebrews 7:25. How do these verses give us assurance in a world of temptation, suffering, disease, and death?

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The text says that He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (*Heb. 4:15, NKJV*). And it adds, “Let us therefore come boldly”—that means confidently—“to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (*Heb. 4:16, NKJV*).

To state it very simply, Jesus presents us before the universe as clothed in His righteousness, saved by His death, and redeemed through His blood. Everything we should have been, He was. In Christ there is no condemnation for the sins of our past. In Christ our guilt is gone, and through His mighty intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. The chains that bind us are loosed, and we are free.

**Read** John 17:24–26. What is Christ's longing desire in the great controversy between good and evil?

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“When the great sacrifice had been consummated, Christ ascended on high, refusing the adoration of angels until He had presented the request: ‘I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.’ John 17:24. Then with inexpressible love and power came forth the answer from the Father's throne: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ Hebrews 1:6. Not a stain rested upon Jesus. His humiliation ended, His sacrifice completed, there was given unto Him a name that is above every name.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 501, 502. Jesus wants more than anything else for us to be with Him in heaven. The desire of His heart, the reason for His death and intercession, is to save us. Do you have a special need in your life? Tell it to Jesus. Where there is sorrow, He brings comfort. Where there is fear, He brings peace. Where there is guilt, He brings forgiveness. Where there is weakness, He brings strength.

**Why do you think Christ sacrificed Himself for us? What makes us so valuable to Him?**

**Further Thought:** “In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 500, 501.

“The cross of Calvary, while it declares the law immutable, proclaims to the universe that the wages of sin is death. In the Saviour’s expiring cry, ‘It is finished,’ the death knell of Satan was rung. The great controversy which had been so long in progress was then decided, and the final eradication of evil was made certain. The Son of God passed through the portals of the tomb, that ‘through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’ Hebrews 2:14.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 503.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① If God knew that Lucifer was going to rebel, why did He give him the power of choice in the first place? Or when Lucifer rebelled, why didn’t God just annihilate him immediately? What kind of reaction might the unfallen universe have had if God had immediately wiped Lucifer out? Why is the concept of the universe’s interest in the plan of salvation (*1 Pet. 1:12, Rev. 5:13, Rev. 16:7*) so important to understanding the great controversy?
- ② What reason or reasons can you think of for Christ’s death on the cross? Was it only to reveal the character of God? Was it to pay the ransom price for sin? If so, to whom was the ransom paid? Share your thoughts and give biblical reasons for them.
- ③ When we use the term “the great controversy,” what do we mean? Discuss the various aspects of the great controversy and how this week’s lesson applies to your own life.
- ④ What Bible texts talk about the reality of the great controversy? (See, for instance, *Job 1, 2; Eph. 6:12*.)
- ⑤ How is the Seventh-day Adventist understanding unique among other Christian denominations? What is it in this great controversy theme that sets Adventists apart?

# Volcano, Fires, and COVID-19

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Cuban missionary Misael Delgado Rodríguez faced a major challenge on his first Sabbath in the Canary Islands. Only five people came to worship.

Misael dove into mission outreach work, visiting former church members and others on La Palma island. A month later, he rejoiced with a first baptism. But then COVID-19 suspended outreach efforts, and his problems seemed to multiply. A fire broke out in the north of the island, leaving some members without homes. Then a fire broke out in the south. Then a volcano erupted for 85 days, leaving islanders grappling with earthquakes, toxic gas, and ashes. Two church families lost everything.

Amid the storms, something amazing happened. Faith blossomed. Three years after Misael's arrival, 45 people were regularly worshipping on Sabbath. In addition, seven people had been baptized, five were preparing for baptism, and 15 were taking Bible studies. What happened?

Misael said intercessory prayer was key. "We pray every day at 7 A.M., 2 P.M., and 9 P.M.," he said. "Each member prays for five people."

Each church department also embraced practical evangelism. One project, an initiative of the Spanish Union of Churches Conference, saw church members calling contacts over the phone and offering Ellen White's *Steps to Christ* and related Bible studies. Other projects included educational courses on the church's Facebook page aimed at the needs of families, young people, and little children; musical evangelism in which Adventist young people held mini-concerts on the street or while visiting the sick and needy; a program with ADRA in which members handed out cards that could be presented for food in supermarkets; health presentations; Bible studies; and the distribution of *The Desire of Ages* and other books. On holidays, such as Mother's Day, church members placed a special card inside each book.

The church also opened a discipleship school where laypeople could learn how to evangelize, and four small groups were meeting regularly in homes.

Friendship evangelism has proven very successful, Misael said. While the volcano was erupting, church members spent two months passing out masks and literature with health information related to volcanoes. "That way the church became well known," Misael said. Indeed, many of the 15 people taking Bible studies lost everything in the volcano, and they have acknowledged that the crisis led them to God, he said. "Otherwise, they would not have been interested in learning about God," he said.

Misael looks back at his experience in the Canary Islands with joy. "The beginning was very difficult," he said. "We have been through a lot. But the results are very satisfying. We have seen how God has blessed us."

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*Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in the Canary Islands and around the world.*



# The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Luke 19:41–44; Matt. 23:37, 38; Heb. 11:35–38; Rev. 2:10; Acts 2:44–47; John 13:35.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand’ ” (*Isaiah 41:10, NKJV*).

Suppose you are a herdsman tending your goats on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. You hear voices. Immediately you recognize the voice of Jesus. As the setting sun gleams off the temple and reflects in snowy whiteness off its magnificent marble walls, Jesus emphatically states, “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ” (*Matt. 24:2, NKJV*).

The disciples are confused, and so are you. What could Jesus possibly mean by these words? How do they relate to the end of the world that Jesus' disciples asked about? You listen in rapt attention as Jesus masterfully blends events that would lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem with those that would take place just before His return.

In the destruction of Jerusalem, we discover a foreshadowing of Satan's strategy both to deceive and destroy God's people at the end time. Jesus' instruction in Matthew 24 clearly outlines last-day events in the context of Jerusalem's fall.

We will study Satan's twofold strategy both to deceive and destroy God's people. What the evil one fails to accomplish through persecution, he hopes to achieve through compromise. God is never caught by surprise, and even in the most challenging times He preserves His people.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy*, chapters 1–2, to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.

## A Brokenhearted Savior

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem, His heart was broken. John's Gospel says, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (*John 1:11, NKJV*). Jesus did everything He could to save His people from the coming destruction of their beloved city.

Jesus' love for His people flowed from a heart of infinite love. He repeatedly appealed to them in love to repent and accept His gracious invitation of mercy.

**Read** Luke 19:41–44; Matthew 23:37, 38; and John 5:40. What do these verses tell you about Jesus' attitude toward His people and their response to His loving invitation of grace and mercy? What revelation of God's character do you see?

It is difficult to understand such an event as the destruction of Jerusalem in the light of God's loving character. History reveals that tens of thousands died as the Roman general Titus led his armies against the city. Jerusalem was devastated. Men, women, and children were slaughtered. Where was God when His people suffered so greatly? The answer is clear but not easy to grasp fully. God's heart was broken. His eyes were filled with tears. For centuries He reached out to His people. By their rebellion against His loving-kindness, they forfeited His divine protection. God does not always intervene to limit the results of His people's choices. He allows the natural consequences of rebellion to develop. God did not cause the slaughter of innocent children in the destruction of Jerusalem; the tragic death of the innocents was Satan's act, not God's.

Satan delights in war because it stirs the worst passions of the human heart. Down through the centuries, it has been his purpose to deceive and destroy and then blame his evil actions on God.

**Read** Matthew 24:15–20. What instruction did Jesus give to His people to save them from the coming destruction of Jerusalem?

It is well to remember that the vast majority of Christians living in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 came from a Jewish background. A loving God desired to preserve as many of His people as possible. That is why He gave the instruction that when the Roman armies approached, they were to flee the city.

**Reflect on the following statement: we do not judge God's character by events we see around us; rather, we filter all the events we see through the prism of His loving character as revealed in the Bible. Why is this such good counsel?**

## Christians Providentially Preserved

God's mercy, grace, providence, and foreknowledge are clearly revealed in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Cestius Gallus and the Roman armies surrounded the city. In an unexpected move, when their attack seemed imminent, they withdrew. The Jewish armies pursued them and won a great victory.

With the Romans fleeing and the Jews pursuing, the Christians in Jerusalem fled to Pella in Perea, beyond the Jordan River. "The promised sign had been given to the waiting Christians, and now an opportunity was offered for all who would, to obey the Saviour's warning. Events were so overruled that neither Jews nor Romans should hinder the flight of the Christians."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 30.

**Read** Psalm 46:1 and Isaiah 41:10. What do these passages tell us about God's providential care?

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God is sovereign and overrules events on earth for the ultimate accomplishment of His divine purposes. Although at times God alters His original plans based on our human choices, His ultimate plan for this planet will be fulfilled. There will be times when the people of God experience hardship, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself for the cause of Christ. But even in the most challenging of times with Satan's most vicious attacks, God sustains and preserves His church.

**Read** Hebrews 11:35–38 and Revelation 2:10. What reality do these texts reveal about our battle with the forces of evil? How do these passages harmonize with the idea of God's protection in the previous question? Is there a contradiction in the idea of God's protection and God allowing some to face painful suffering and even a martyr's death for the cause of Christ?

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"In vain were Satan's efforts to destroy the church of Christ by violence. The great controversy in which the disciples of Jesus yielded up their lives did not cease when these faithful standard-bearers fell at their post. By defeat they conquered. God's workmen were slain, but His work went steadily forward."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 41.

**What should it mean to us that the Bible writers, who certainly knew pain and suffering, could nevertheless, again and again, write about the reality of God's love? How can we experience that same love for ourselves?**

## Faithful Amid Persecution

Throughout the early centuries of Christianity, the Christian church grew rapidly, despite imprisonment, torture, and persecution. Faithful believers, totally committed to Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed His Word with power; lives were changed, and tens of thousands were converted.

**Read Acts 2:41; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:42; and Acts 8:1–8. What do these verses teach us about the challenges the New Testament church faced and also why it grew so rapidly?**

The disciples faced threats (*Acts 4:17*), imprisonment (*Acts 5:17, 18*), persecution (*Acts 8:1*), and death itself (*Acts 7:59, Acts 12:2*), yet, in the power of the Holy Spirit, courageously proclaimed the resurrected Christ, and churches multiplied throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (*Acts 9:31*).

The bastions of hell were shaken. The shackles of Satan were broken. Pagan superstition crumbled before the power of the resurrected Christ. The gospel triumphed in the face of overwhelming odds. The disciples no longer cowered in the upper room. Fear danced away like a fading shadow.

Instead, faith filled the disciples' hearts. One glimpse of their resurrected Lord changed their lives. Jesus gave them a new reason for living. Our Lord had not only given them the Great Commission (*Mark 16:15*) but the great promise, “ ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

The gospel penetrated the remotest corners of the earth (*Col. 1:23*). Although the last of the disciples, John, died at the end of the first century, others picked up the torch of truth and proclaimed the living Christ. Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the north coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny's statement is significant because it was nearly eighty years after the Crucifixion. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. He stated, “For many persons of all ages, and classes and of both sexes are being put in peril by accusation, and this will go on. The contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well.”—Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.

Despite the devil's most vicious attacks, the Christian church grew rapidly.

**What can we learn from the early church that could help us, the end-time church?**

## Caring for the Community

The early Christian church grew not only because its members preached the gospel but also because they lived the gospel. Believers modeled the ministry of Christ who “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (*Matt. 4:23, NKJV*). Jesus deeply cared for people, and so did the New Testament church. It was this unselfish love and commitment to meeting human needs combined with sharing the good news of the gospel in the Holy Spirit’s power that made such an impact on the world in the early centuries of the Christian church.

**Read** Acts 2:44–47, Acts 3:6–9, and Acts 6:1–7. Although circumstances vary, what principles can we learn from these passages about authentic Christianity?

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These New Testament believers followed the model of Christ, who as Peter expressed was “‘anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him’ ” (*Acts 10:38, NKJV*). Christ’s church was His body on earth, and it, too, in these early centuries, expressed Christ’s sacrificial love and concern for hurting, broken humanity. These believers were living examples of Christ’s compassion.

In the great controversy raging in the universe, the devil wants to deface the image of God in humanity. The purpose of the gospel is to restore the image of God in humanity. This restoration includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing.

In John 10:10, Jesus reveals His plan for each one of us.

“ ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*NKJV*). He longs for us to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally stable, and spiritually whole.

This is especially true in the light of His promised return. This world is facing an enormous crisis. Jesus’ own predictions in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 foretell catastrophic conditions on the earth before His return. When Christ touches us with His healing grace, we long to touch others with the touch of Christ so that they can be made whole. Jesus sends us out into a broken world as ambassadors for Christ to touch others with His love. New Testament Christianity was characterized by the Christians’ love for one another and their communities.

**Discuss:** What role does the church have in cooperating with Christ in proving Satan’s charges wrong?

## A Legacy of Love

**Read** John 13:35 and 1 John 4:21. What do these passages reveal about Satan’s challenge against the government of God in the great controversy? What do they tell us about the essence of genuine Christianity?

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Love was the norm of Christian communities in the first few centuries. Tertullian, an early Christian theologian, claimed: “It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See, they say, how they love one another.*”—“Chapter 39,” in *Apology*, trans. S. Thelwall, <https://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/39.html> (accessed October 10, 2022).

One of the greatest revelations of God’s love was demonstrated when two devastating pandemics plagued the early centuries around A.D. 160 and A.D. 260. Christians stepped forward and ministered to the sick and dying. These plagues killed tens of thousands and left entire villages and towns with scarcely an inhabitant. The unselfish, sacrificial, caring, loving ministry of Christians made a huge impact on the population. Over time, thousands, and eventually hundreds of thousands, and then millions in the Roman Empire became believers in Jesus during these two epidemics. Love, outgoing concern, and organized, selfless care of the sick and dying created an admiration for these believers and the Christ they represented.

Rodney Stark’s *The Rise of Christianity* is a modern historical narrative portraying these historic events in a new and improved light. In it he describes how during the second epidemic the whole Christian community, which was still heavily Judeo-Christian, became a virtual army of nurses, providing the basic needs for the suffering community to survive.

“At the height of the second great epidemic, around A.D. 260, . . . Dionysius wrote a lengthy tribute to the heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others.

“Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.”—*The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 82.

**What is the obvious message for us here? How do we learn to die to self so that we, too, can manifest this same selfless spirit? It’s not easy, is it?**

**Further Thought:** “The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome. Said a Christian, expostulating with the heathen rulers who were urging forward the persecution: You may ‘kill us, torture us, condemn us. . . . Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. . . . Nor does your cruelty . . . avail you.’ It was but a stronger invitation to bring others to their persuasion. ‘The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.’—Tertullian, *Apology*, paragraph 50.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 41, 42.

“The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God because He suffers the basest of men to prosper, while the best and purest are afflicted and tormented by their cruel power. How, it is asked, can One who is just and merciful, and who is also infinite in power, tolerate such injustice and oppression? This is a question with which we have nothing to do. God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 47.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① What value does persecution serve? Why do you think God allows His people to suffer at times? And though in some cases, such as in the early church, good was able to come of it, what about times when it appears that nothing good has come from it? Why in situations like this is the personal experience of God’s love so important in order to maintain faith?
- ② How would you respond if a friend asked you these questions: “Where is God in my suffering? If He loves me, why am I going through such a difficult time?”
- ③ How can your local church become a caring community to impact the world? Discuss practical ways to apply this week’s study.

## Faithful Gymnast in Italy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Seven-year-old Sara loved gymnastics. It was easy for her, and she was good at it. She especially liked doing cartwheels. She could do cartwheel after cartwheel in a row, and she only stopped when she fell down.

But there was something that Sara loved even more than gymnastics. She loved God.

So, she was not tempted to skip church when the gymnastics coach announced that a major gymnastics show would be held on the Sabbath in her hometown of Iesi, Italy. The show only took place once a year, and children would show off what they had been learning to their parents and families.

Sara felt sad when the coach said the show had been scheduled on the Sabbath.

At home, Mother saw Sara's downcast face.

"God can solve any problem," she said.

She suggested that Sara could take her Sabbath problem to God.

That evening, Sara prayed, "Dear God, I am very sad to hear the news that I will miss the show, but Your will be done."

Sara and the other children met for gymnastics practice every Tuesday and Thursday. The coach had announced the date for the gymnastics show at a Tuesday practice.

Sara prayed on Tuesday night and on Wednesday night. At the Thursday practice, the coach suddenly announced that the date for the gymnastics show had been changed.

"We have to postpone the show by one day, until Sunday, because of some organizational problems," she said.

Sara couldn't believe her ears. She was ecstatic with joy! When she excitedly broke the news to Mother a short time later, Mother smiled bigger than the sun.

"You have to trust God always!" she said.

And Sara always has. This was her first experience with prayer, and it greatly strengthened her faith in God. On Sabbath, she told the church about what had happened. A church member prepared a special sermon about the prayer and invited Sara onto the platform to tell her story.

"I have always prayed when facing problems in life," Sara, now 19, told Adventist Mission.

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*This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: "To help youth and young adults place God first." For more information, go to the website: [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org). Read more about Sara next week.*



# Light Shines *in the* Darkness



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 8:44; Prov. 23:23; Acts 20:27–32; 2 Thess. 2:7–12; Ps. 119:105, 116, 130, 133, 160; Prov. 16:25; 2 Cor. 4:3–6.*

**Memory Text:** “Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.’ ” (*John 12:35, NKJV*).

In the Bible's last book, Revelation, the devil is pictured as a dragon and a serpent (*Rev. 12:9*). He is a dragon because he desires to destroy God's people, and he is a serpent because he uses all his cunning lies to deceive them. In the years after Christ's death, thousands were tortured, thrown to lions, and burned at the stake by imperial Rome for refusing to worship its deities. Yet, in the face of this cruel punishment, many stayed faithful, the gospel continued to spread, and the church grew.

As a result, Satan changed his strategy. Scores of pagans were baptized but without thorough instruction in Bible truth. Error flooded into the church as leaders merged the truths of Scripture with popular customs. The fourth and fifth centuries were eras of compromise when church prelates blended pagan practices with Christian teachings.

Yet, even in life's most difficult times, God was continually with His people. They found Jesus, “the way, the truth and the life,” and through the power of the Holy Spirit, they stood firm, even in the face of overwhelming pressure to yield their conscientious convictions. They stayed loyal to God's revealed will in Scripture and unflinchingly stood for the truth of His Word, regardless of the pressure placed on them, either overtly or subtly.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy, chapter 3*, to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.

## Compromise: Satan's Subtle Strategy

**Compare** John 14:6 with John 8:44. What contrast between Jesus' character and Satan's is seen in these two passages?

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What Jesus says is true because He is the author of truth. Truth proceeds from the heart of an all-wise, all-loving, all-knowing God. He is the foundation of reality and of all truth.

In contrast, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is prepared to use lies, deceit, misinformation, and a distortion of the truth to lead God's people astray. He deceived Eve in Eden by distorting truth, creating doubt, and blatantly denying what God said. Satan's statement, "You shall not surely die," in the context of eating the fruit, was a clear contradiction of what God had said. Throughout the centuries, Satan has used the same strategy. He undermines confidence in God's Word, contradicts God's revealed will, distorts Scripture, and at times misquotes the Bible to his advantage.

**Read** Proverbs 23:23, John 17:17, and John 8:32. What similarity do you see in these Bible passages regarding the truth of God's Word? What is their central message?

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"Satan well knew that the Holy Scriptures would enable men to discern his deceptions and withstand his power. It was by the word that even the Saviour of the world had resisted his attacks. At every assault, Christ presented the shield of eternal truth, saying, 'It is written.' To every suggestion of the adversary, He opposed the wisdom and power of the word. In order for Satan to maintain his sway over men, and establish the authority of the papal usurper, he must keep them in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Bible would exalt God and place finite men in their true position; therefore its sacred truths must be concealed and suppressed. This logic was adopted by the Roman Church. For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. The people were forbidden to read it or to have it in their houses, and unprincipled priests and prelates interpreted its teachings to sustain their pretensions. Thus the pope came to be almost universally acknowledged as the vicerent of God on earth, endowed with authority over church and state."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 51.

**Discuss** ways that Satan attempts to distort or misinterpret God's Word today.

## Savage Wolves

**Read** Acts 20:27–32. What specific warnings did the apostle Paul give to the church leaders from Ephesus regarding the coming apostasy?

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The purpose of Paul's counsel was to prepare the church for what was coming. In these passages, he describes his major concern.

His concern is that "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (*Acts 20:29, NKJV*). In other words, believers would face fierce persecution from within the church.

The apostle expressed his concern when he said, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (*Acts 20:30*). Heresies would enter the church. False doctrines would be substituted for divine truths. Pagan practices would prevail. In the fourth and fifth centuries, compromise subtly crept into the Christian church, with mission advance being the probable justification. But the terrible result was a departure from the truths of God's Word.

**Read** 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12. How does the apostle Paul describe the coming apostasy? What characteristics should believers look for?

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Paul's comment, "the mystery of lawlessness does already work," is significant. Even in Paul's day, there was a gradual departure from the truth of God's Word regarding obedience to God's law. This departure would flourish in the later centuries.

Contrary to the second commandment, idols were introduced into Christian worship. For millennia, idols were in the forefront of all pagan religions. To make Christianity more acceptable to heathens coming into the Christian church, pagan deities were renamed as so-called saints. Sunday, the day of worship for the sun god, was gradually adopted as the day of Christian worship in honor of the Resurrection. This false day, not sanctioned in Scripture, prevails even now.

**What kind of compromises do we see entering the church today? More important, what compromises might you be making? Is it sometimes by blending truth and error?**

## Safeguarded by the Word

**Compare** John 17:15–17 and Acts 20:32. What insights do Jesus and the apostle Paul give us regarding protection from the deceptions of Satan?

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The Bible is the infallible revelation of God's will. It presents Heaven's plan for humanity's salvation. Since "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God," it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV). That is, "all Scripture" is inspired by God; not some parts or some parts more than others. The whole Bible must be accepted as the Word of God. Otherwise, the door is wide open for deception.

The Bible clearly reveals God's infinite love in the light of the great controversy. It also exposes satanic delusions and reveals the devil's deceptions. Satan hates the Word of God and has done everything possible throughout the centuries to destroy its influence.

After all, what would we know about the plan of salvation without the Bible? How much, if anything, would we understand about the birth, life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus? Without the Scriptures, would we even begin to comprehend the depth of Christ's sacrifice, the glory of His resurrection, the power of His intercession, and the majesty of His return?

All these crucial truths are revealed, taught, and emphasized in the Word of God. It, and it alone, must be the final and ultimate standard for understanding all sacred truth.

Hence, we must fight against any and all attempts to undermine its authority or inspiration, even from those who, while professing great love of the Bible, bring doubts about it, even subtly. Tragically, especially through the inroads of modern thinking, many theologians and Christians focus so much on the human side of Scripture that the Bible becomes the word of man instead the Word of God. The Bible, they argue, is the writings of kings, shepherds, a fisherman, priests, poets, and others who shared their understandings and conceptions of God, of nature, and of reality the best that they, in their time and place, understood them.

Really, now? If this were true, why should we, living today in the twenty-first century, really care about what these people thought, much less make what they thought the foundation for our hope of eternity?

We shouldn't.

**Read Psalm 119:105, 116, 130, 133, and 160. What insights does the psalmist give us regarding the significance of God's Word in the plan of salvation?**

## Human Reasoning Apart From Scripture

The Holy Spirit works through our minds. He invites us to explore the mysteries of the universe. As someone has aptly stated: “As Christians, we do not check our brains at the door of the church.” Nevertheless, the brilliance of human reasoning alone is incapable of discovering the divine truths of Scripture. Truth is not a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of divine revelation.

**Read** Proverbs 16:25, Judges 21:25, and Isaiah 53:6. What do these texts reveal about Satan’s strategy of deception?

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One of the devil’s most effective deceptions is to lead us to believe that human reasoning, unaided by the Holy Spirit and uninformed by the Word of God, is sufficient to understand God’s will. There may be a way that seems right to us, or even to entire cultures, but it may be totally wrong in the eyes of God.

A few years ago, my wife and I decided to do some hiking in the forest near the hotel we were staying at for the night. Typically, I am fairly good at directions, and after hiking for about an hour or so taking various trails, I was quite confident that I could find our way back with little difficulty. But soon we found ourselves hopelessly lost in the forest. The sun was going down, and I feared the worst. Thankfully, we met some other hikers who knew the way. We had been at least five miles off course but near a main road. Since their car was parked nearby, they offered us a ride back to our hotel. Discovering someone who knew the way and someone who had the ability to get us back to our destination made all the difference for us.

God has not left us alone on our journey from earth to heaven. The Holy Spirit points us to the sacred Scriptures that lead us homeward. Truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil—these can be correctly understood only in light of God’s Word. That which contradicts God and His Word is error, and error is always dangerous; that which is in harmony with God is truth and goodness. How important that we make God’s Word our final arbiter of truth and morality.

**Why is the human mind without the aid of the Holy Spirit incapable of discovering divine truth? Discuss the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. How does reason actually help us understand divine revelation? For example, look at Daniel 2, a prophecy that covers world history from the time of Babylon to the Second Coming. How does a prophecy like this powerfully appeal to human reason?**

## Battle for the Mind

**Read** 2 Corinthians 4:3–6. What does “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe” (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV) mean? How are their eyes blinded? How are eyes opened?

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The Greek word for “mind” in this passage is *noema*. It literally means our perception or mental faculties. *The SDA Bible Commentary* makes an enlightening statement about this verse. “The battle between Christ and Satan is a battle for the minds of men. (Rom. 7:23, 25; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:14, 11:3; Phil. 2:5, 4:7, 8). Satan’s principal work is to blind or darken men’s minds. He does this by keeping them from the study of God’s Word, by deranging the powers of the mind through the excesses of body and soul, by wholly occupying the mind through the things of this life, and by appealing to pride and self-exaltation.” —Volume 6, p. 854.

The lack of knowledge on the part of the lost is not because they could not know. It is because they would not know. Many have had every opportunity to know truth but chose not to believe, and Satan blinded their eyes. Satan’s kingdom is a kingdom of darkness. As *The SDA Bible Commentary* adds, “The gospel is the only means by which Satan’s diabolical schemes and deceptions can be exposed, and by which men can see the way from darkness to light.” —Volume 6, p. 854. The essence of the New Testament message is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is at the heart of the gospel and is the center of Scripture. All Scripture testifies of Him (*John 5:39*).

**Read** John 1:4, 5, 9 and 14. How do these verses describe Jesus? Note particularly John 1:14.

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During the early centuries of the Christian church, the New Testament believers were totally committed to Christ as the One who was the light in their darkness. They were redeemed by His grace, transformed by His power, and motivated by His love. Even death could not break their bond of loyalty to Christ. They recognized the devil’s deceptions in the glorious light of the gospel. Christ has always had men and women who, by His grace, have stood courageously for His truth. In these early centuries, the light of Christ’s love, grace, and truth shone through the darkness.

**Further Thought:** “The same spirit of hatred and opposition to the truth has inspired the enemies of God in every age, and the same vigilance and fidelity have been required in His servants. The words of Christ to the first disciples are applicable to His followers to the close of time: ‘What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.’ Mark 13:37.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 56, 57.

In many parts of the world, especially where people have free access to the Bible, Satan has employed other means to weaken its influence. One very effective way has been through various scientific endeavors or even biblical scholarship, which sometimes takes positions that, if accepted, would undermine trust in the Word of God. For example, though the book of Daniel dates itself to more than 500 years before Christ, many Bible scholars date it, instead, to the middle of the second century B.C. They argue that it had to be written at this time; otherwise the prophet would have been accurately telling the future, and that can’t happen. Therefore, they argue, Daniel was not written when it says it was but, rather, hundreds of years later. Unfortunately, this lie about the Bible is one of many that modern scholarship seeks to foist upon us. And more unfortunately, many people accept this error because, after all, Bible scholars are teaching it. No wonder Paul warns us, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (*1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV*).

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Refer to the quote in Tuesday’s study and then consider the following: How is Satan using similar methods today to subtly undermine the authority of the Scriptures?
- ② What are our greatest safeguards against misinterpreting God’s Word?
- ③ Satan’s major attempt in the great controversy between good and evil is to malign God’s character and present Him as an authoritarian, unloving tyrant. How does the evil one attempt to do this, and what is God’s response to his lies?
- ④ The apostle Peter affirms that “no prophecy is of private interpretation” (*2 Pet. 1:20*). How can we be sure we do not distort the meaning of Scripture to achieve our own ends? Why might this be easier to do than we realize? How can we safeguard ourselves against it?

## Faithful Student in Italy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

In Italy, schoolchildren have the option of attending an hour of religion classes every week in public school. As a small girl, Sara decided to attend because she wanted to know more about the Bible.

Her classmates quickly realized that she knew the Bible well. So, when the teacher asked a question, they would say, “Sara knows the answer!”

After hearing the children say this for many months, the teacher asked Sara, “How is it that you know the Bible so well?”

“I go to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Sara said.

The teacher wanted to know more, so she went to church with Sara.

Sara got a new religion teacher in the sixth grade. Again she was able to answer the teacher’s questions. Impressed, the teacher invited her to give an hour-long class presentation about the Adventist Church. Sara prepared with help from her pastor and other church leaders. At the end of the presentation, classmates peppered her with questions about the seventh-day Sabbath.

Today, Sara is in high school, and her religion teacher is a nun. Once, she impressed the nun by writing a Bible verse on an exam. Other teens rarely cited the Bible. The nun asked for an explanation, and Sara told her about her faith. Afterward, the nun came to her church.

In another high school class, the teacher grew upset when Sara could not answer a question about religion in Italy. Sara explained that she did not know because she was not a member of Italy’s largest denomination. The teacher asked several questions and invited Sara to give the class a lesson about the Adventist Church. Sara’s presentation pleased the teacher, and she said, “It is wonderful to learn about another faith in our class.”

The next year, however, Sara had a Saturday class from the same teacher. The teacher pressured Sara to attend, and when she didn’t, teased her. “Please come to school,” she said. “We won’t tell anyone that you came.” Week after week, she mocked Sara. “I also could stay home on Saturdays,” she said. “It would be better than coming to school.”

To Sara’s surprise, her classmates began to defend her to the teacher.

Then one Sabbath, when Sara was in church, the teacher praised her to the class. “Even though Sara is only here half the time, she gets better marks than the rest of you,” she said.

Sara believes God has blessed her for being open about her faith.

“I never have hidden my faith from my classmates,” she told Adventist Mission. “My classmates respect me and know my faith is serious for me.”

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*This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To help youth and young adults place God first.” For more information, go to the website: [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org).*



# Standing for the Truth



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 7:23–25; Rev. 12:6, 14; Jude 3, 4; Rev. 2:10; Acts 5:28–32; Ps. 19:7–11; 1 John 5:11–13.*

**Memory Text:** “‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life’ ” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

The modern Turkish seacoast city of Izmir was once the biblical city of Smyrna, mentioned in the book of Revelation. This ancient city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants flourished in the late first and second centuries. It was a prosperous city, and it was fiercely loyal to Rome.

Once a year, all the citizens of Smyrna were commanded to burn incense to the Roman gods. Evidently, in the second century, Smyrna had a thriving Christian community, as well, and many were not going to comply. Polycarp, an early church leader, was martyred in Smyrna's public square, burned at the stake for refusing to betray his Lord by burning incense to the Roman gods. When asked one last time to disavow Christ, the old man replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?”

Throughout the centuries, men and women have been willing to experience martyrdom rather than give up their faith in Christ. Their sacrifice rekindles our courage. The story of their commitment to Christ renews our own commitment. This week we will look at some biblical principles that motivated the Waldenses and later Reformers, such as Huss and Jerome, to stay faithful to the Lord no matter what—even at the threat of death from the same power that killed Polycarp: Rome, but now in the papal phase.

\* *Study this week's lesson, based on The Great Controversy, chapters 4–6, to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.*

## Persecuted Yet Triumphant

**Read** Daniel 7:23–25 and Revelation 12:6, 14. What prophetic time periods are referred to in these passages?

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Whenever God's people remain faithful to Him, Satan is enraged. Persecution often follows. The prophet Daniel described a time, still future to him, when the medieval church would "make war against" and "persecute" God's people (*Dan. 7:21, 25, NKJV*). The prophet John described this same period as a time when God's church would be forced to flee into the wilderness, where she would be "nourished for a time and times and half a time" (*Rev. 12:14, NKJV*). Revelation 12:6 adds, "The woman [the church] fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God" (*NKJV*). God's people were nourished in the wilderness. His Word strengthened and sustained them as the great controversy raged on during this long and dark period of papal domination.

God's people found a "place prepared" for them by God. In life's greatest challenges, God always prepares a place for His faithful followers. During the times of their greatest trial, His people have found refuge in His love and care. (*See Psalm 46.*)

The 1,260 days and the time, times, and half a time in Revelation 12:6, 14 are both referring to the same period ( $3\frac{1}{2}$  times or years  $\times$  360 days per year = 1,260 days). Biblical prophecy is often written in symbols. In the prophetic portions of Daniel and Revelation, one prophetic day equals one literal year. We find this day-year principle in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

The day-year principle rests not on these two texts only, but on a broad scriptural foundation. William Shea, chronologist and Old Testament scholar, gives twenty-three lines of biblical evidence throughout the Old Testament for this principle. Bible interpreters have used it throughout the centuries.

The Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths were tribes that believed doctrines differently than Rome's official teaching. The 1,260 days began when the last of these barbarian tribes, the Ostrogoths, were driven out of Rome in A.D. 538. This period of spiritual darkness continued until A.D. 1798, when the Napoleon's general Berthier removed the pope from Rome. Countless Christians were martyred during this long period because they obeyed the Word of God. Even in death, they triumphed. In Christ they were free from the guilt and the dominion of sin, overcoming "through the blood of the Lamb." Christ's victory over Satan on the cross was their victory. Though they died, their death is only a rest until the return of Christ.

**How has fulfilled Bible prophecy strengthened your faith?**

## Light Vanquishes the Darkness

**Read** Jude 3, 4. What's the warning here and how did it apply to the later Christian church?

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The book of Jude was written sometime before A.D. 65 to faithful Christians who were “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ” (*Jude 1:1, NKJV*). These faithful believers were urged to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, . . . who turn the grace of our God into lewdness” (*Jude 1:3, 4, NKJV*). This admonition meant even more to believers in the Middle Ages after pagan practices had flooded into the church and human traditions compromised the Word of God. For many centuries, people, such as the Waldenses, stood as champions for the truths of Scripture. They believed that Christ was their only mediator and the Bible their sole source of authority. “In every age there were witnesses for God—men who cherished faith in Christ as the only mediator between God and man, who held the Bible as the only rule of life, and hallowed the true Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 61.

**Read** Revelation 2:10. What promise does God give those who are faithful to Him in the face of death itself?

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These words were written to the church at Smyrna. One of the city's patron gods was Dionysius, the god of festivity and fertility. When the priests of Dionysius died, a crown was placed on their heads in their funeral procession. John contrasts this earthly crown placed on the head at death with the crown of life placed on the heads of those who are victorious over the forces of evil. The crown of life is presented to those who endured trials, difficulties, suffering, and death itself for Christ's sake.

The crown of life inspires these faithful believers to endure death itself for Christ's sake. The crown of life always motivates believers in challenging circumstances. It inspired the Waldenses through pain and persecution. They knew they would see Jesus one day and live with Him forever. The crown of life also speaks to us: we may go through trials now, but a crown of life awaits us as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

**What encourages you in challenging times? What frightens you? What promises can you claim for those times?**

## Courage to Stand

**Compare** Acts 5:28–32, Ephesians 6:10–12, and Revelation 3:11.  
What basic principle is found in these texts?

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One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Waldenses, and each one of the Reformers, was their absolute allegiance to God, their obedience to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to the supremacy of Christ, not the papacy. Their minds were saturated with New Testament stories of faith and courage.

With Peter and the apostles they could say, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29, NKJV*). They grasped Paul’s admonition, “Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). They took seriously Jesus’ counsel, “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (*Rev. 3:11, NKJV*). Rather than submit to the traditions of the Roman church, these stalwart men and women of faith had the courage to stand for the truths of God’s Word.

The Waldenses were one of the first groups to obtain the Bible in their own language. A moving account of their hand copying of the Bible written by Jean Leger, a Waldensian Bible copyist, contains firsthand information of their work including drawings. The Waldenses secretly copied the Scriptures in their mountain communities of northern Italy and southern France. Youth at an early age were instructed by their parents to memorize large portions of Scripture. Teams of Bible copyists worked together to laboriously copy the Bible. Many of these Waldense young adults traveled throughout Europe as merchants quietly sharing the truths of Scripture. Some enrolled in universities and, as the opportunity arose, shared portions of the Scriptures with their fellow students. Guided by the Holy Spirit, at the right moment when they sensed a receptivity on the part of some honest seeker, select portions of their precious Scripture passages were given away. Many paid for their fidelity and devotion with their lives. Although the Waldenses did not understand every Bible teaching clearly, they preserved the truth of God’s Word for centuries by sharing it with others.

“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, / That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (*Prov. 4:18, NKJV*). Solomon compares the path by which God leads His children to a sun that rises higher and higher. If God simply threw a cosmic switch and the sun shone instantly in all its brightness, it would blind us. After darkness engulfed the world for centuries, God raised up men and women, committed to His Word, who continued to search for more.

**How can we, reflecting the light of Christ, shine in our own community? Do we?**

## The Morning Star of the Reformation

**Read** Psalm 19:7–11, Psalm 119:140, Psalm 119:162, and Jeremiah 15:16. What similar attitudes did David and Jeremiah have toward the Word of God that were, really, the cornerstone of the Reformation?

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Each of the Reformers “rejoiced” in God’s Word. They “delighted” in doing God’s will. They “loved” His law. One of the most significant foundational truths of the Reformation was the joy that studying the Scriptures brought. Bible study was not a laborious task. It was not a legalistic exercise. It was not a rigid requirement but a delight. As they studied the Scriptures, they were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“The character of Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scriptures. It was the Bible that made him what he was. The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul. An earnest, reverent study of the Scriptures, bringing the mind of the student in direct contact with the infinite mind, would give to the world men of stronger and more active intellect, as well as of nobler principle, than has ever resulted from the ablest training that human philosophy affords.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 94.

**Read** 2 Timothy 2:1–3. What counsel did the apostle Paul give to Timothy regarding sharing the Word of God?

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The truth of God’s Word and the joy of salvation in Christ so filled the hearts of the Reformers that they had to share it. John Wycliffe spent his life translating the Word of God into English for two reasons alone: the living Christ changed Him through the Word, and the love of Christ motivated him to share what he had learned with others.

Before Wycliffe, very little of the Bible existed in English. Though he died before Rome got to him, the papacy, undeterred, dug up his remains, burned them, and threw his ashes into a river. But just as those ashes were dispersed by the water, so God’s Word, the water of life, spread far and wide as a result of His work. Thus God used Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation.”

## Cheered by Hope

**Read** Hebrews 2:14, 15. How did believers in the Middle Ages experience the reality of the great controversy?

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What was it that cheered the faithful Waldenses during the horrible persecutions they faced? What gave Huss and Jerome, Tyndale, Latimer, and the martyrs of the Middle Ages courage to face the flames and the sword? Faith in the promises of God. They believed Christ's promise: "Because I live, you will live also" (*John 14:19*). They found His strength sufficient for life's greatest trials. They even found joy through fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. And their faithfulness was a powerful witness to the world.

They looked beyond what was to what will be. They knew that, through the resurrection of Christ, death was a defeated foe. For these courageous men and women, the stranglehold of death was broken. They clung to the promises of God's Word and came away victorious.

**Read** John 5:24, John 11:25, 26, and 1 John 5:11–13. What assurances do these promises give you personally? How do they help us in the trials of life?

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John Huss would not falter in the face of imprisonment, injustice, and death itself. He languished in prison for months. The cold, damp conditions brought on a fever that nearly ended his life. Nevertheless, "the grace of God sustained him. During the weeks of suffering that passed before his final sentence, heaven's peace filled his soul. 'I write this letter,' he said to a friend, 'in my prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death tomorrow. . . . When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we shall again meet in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself toward me, how effectually He has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials.'—Bonnechose, vol. 2, p. 67. In the gloom of his dungeon he foresaw the triumph of the true faith."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 107, 108.

The apostle Paul's admonition speaks to us with increasing relevance today. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (*Heb. 10:23, NKJV*). As the promises of God sustained His people in ages past, so they sustain us today.

**What might it mean to lose everything for Christ? What, in the end, do you really lose? (See Mark 8:36.) What lessons can we learn from the Waldenses and the Reformers that can sustain us in earth's final conflict?**

**Further Thought:** “God permitted great light to shine upon the minds of these chosen men, revealing to them many of the errors of Rome; but they did not receive all the light that was to be given to the world. Through these, His servants, God was leading the people out of the darkness of Romanism; but there were many and great obstacles for them to meet, and He led them on, step by step, as they could bear it. They were not prepared to receive all the light at once. Like the full glory of the noontide sun to those who have long dwelt in darkness, it would, if presented, have caused them to turn away. Therefore, He revealed it to the leaders little by little, as it could be received by the people. From century to century, other faithful workers were to follow, to lead the people on still further in the path of reform.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 103.

“In another letter, to a priest who had become a disciple of the gospel, Huss spoke with deep humility of his own errors, accusing himself ‘of having felt pleasure in wearing rich apparel and of having wasted hours in frivolous occupations.’ He then added these touching admonitions: ‘May the glory of God and the salvation of souls occupy thy mind, and not the possession of benefices and estates. Beware of adorning thy house more than thy soul; and, above all, give thy care to the spiritual edifice. Be pious and humble with the poor, and consume not thy substance in feasting. Shouldst thou not amend thy life and refrain from superfluities, I fear that thou wilt be severely chastened, as I am myself.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 105, 106.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is “progressive light”? Why does God reveal truth gradually? How do these principles apply to God’s church today?
- ❷ How do new discoveries of truth relate to previous truths that God’s people have understood? Why must new light never contradict old light?
- ❸ No matter where you live, your culture is going to promote values, ideas, and moral codes that in some way conflict with what the Bible teaches. After identifying these areas of conflict, how do you see yourself and us, as a church, dealing with these challenges? How do we remain good citizens while at the same time not succumbing to whatever warped values our culture proclaims?
- ❹ How does John Huss’s letter impact your thinking today? What impresses you about this letter?

## Tale of Two Neighbors

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mussa's religion taught that it is wrong to raise pigs for sale. But Mussa worked as a pig farmer.

Nicolonaga's religion taught that it is wrong to divorce for any reason except sexual immorality. But Nicolonaga married three times and, on top of that, had three common-law wives at different times.

The two men, who were neighbors, lived lives that were far from their professed religious beliefs. But God had a plan for them in Mozambique.

One day, one of Mussa's pigs entered Nicolonaga's vegetable garden and caused considerable damage.

Nicolonaga was furious and demanded a fistfight. He won the brawl, and Mussa limped away bloodied and battered. But Mussa did not intend to give up. He vowed revenge through witchcraft. "You have thirty days to prepare for your death," he told Nicolonaga.

The next day, Nicolonaga woke up seriously ill. He spoke about Mussa's threat to his friends from the Seventh-day Adventist church, where he had once worshipped.

As Nicolonaga's condition steadily deteriorated, he grew worried. After 15 days, he asked church members to pray for him, and the pastor organized a prayer team to visit his house.

But Nicolonaga did not get better. Another week passed, and his options seemed few.

With the clock ticking down on Mussa's 30-day deadline, the pastor called for a night of fasting and prayer for Nicolonaga.

Early the next morning, Mussa knocked on the door of the pastor's house. He told a fantastic story about how his gods had fought with Nicolonaga's God, and Nicolonaga's God had won. He said he could no longer take Nicolonaga's life. He wanted to become a Christian.

"I want to worship Nicolonaga's God," he said.

Nicolonaga recovered from his illness, and both he and Mussa joined an Adventist baptismal class. Both gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism. Today, both are powerful forces for good in their region of Mozambique.

"God is powerful, and He answers the prayers of those who seek Him in faith," said Nelson A. Quenesse, the pastor.

After all, he said, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (*Heb. 11:6, NKJV*).

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*Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.*



# Faith Against *All* Odds



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 119:162; John 16:13–15; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 3:23, 24; Rom. 6:15–18.*

**Memory Text:** “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (*Psalms 119:11, NKJV*).

**T**he Protestant Reformers had something twenty-first century people desperately need—a purpose for their lives. In his book, *The Empty Self*, renowned American psychologist Philip Cushman discusses people who live purposeless lives. Their beliefs are shallow. Little of real significance matters to them, and they have nothing worth dying for, so they have little worth living for.

But the men, women, and children of the Protestant Reformation were dramatically different. They had an abiding purpose worth living for. What they believed mattered, and they were not willing to compromise their integrity. Their core beliefs were an inseparable part of them. To deny these beliefs was to deny their very identity. In the face of death itself, they had an inner peace.

In this week's study, with examples from the Reformation, we will explore how the life-changing teachings of Scripture provide the basis for genuine purpose and true meaning in life. Understanding these eternal truths will prepare us for the final crisis in the great controversy between good and evil. The battle the Reformers fought is not yet over, and we have been called to pick up where they left off. We, too, can discover a God big enough for every challenge we face, a God who gives our lives meaning and purpose as nothing worldly ever could.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 7–11 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 4.

## God's Word Alone

**Read** Psalm 119:103, 104; Psalm 119:147; and Psalm 119:162. What was David's attitude toward God's Word? How did this impact the Reformers, and how does it influence our lives today?

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The Bible was the foundation of the Reformers' faith and the essence of their teaching. They understood that they were handling the inspired "word of God which lives and abides forever" (*1 Pet. 1:23, NKJV*). They treasured every word. As they read its pages and believed its promises, their faith was strengthened and their courage renewed. "So with all the promises of God's word. In them He is speaking to us individually, speaking as directly as if we could listen to His voice. It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power. They are leaves from that tree which is 'for the healing of the nations.' Revelation 22:2. Received, assimilated, they are to be the strength of the character, the inspiration and sustenance of the life. Nothing else can have such healing power. Nothing besides can impart the courage and faith which give vital energy to the whole being."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 122.

The Scriptures shine joy upon our sorrow, hope upon our discouragement, light upon our darkness. They give direction for our confusion, certainty in our perplexity, strength in our weakness, and wisdom in our ignorance. When we meditate upon the Word of God and by faith trust its promises, God's life-giving power energizes our entire being physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

The Reformers saturated their minds with Scripture. They lived by the Word, and many of them died because of the Word. They were not casual, complacent, careless Christians with a superficial devotional life. They knew that without the power of God's Word, they would not withstand the forces of evil arrayed against them.

John Wycliffe's passion was to translate the Bible into the English language so that the average person could read and understand it. Because that was illegal, he was tried for his faith, condemned as a heretic, and sentenced to death. At his trial, Wycliffe made an earnest appeal. "With whom, think you, are ye contending? With an old man on the brink of the grave? No! With Truth—Truth which is stronger than you, and will overcome you."—Wylie, book 2, chapter 13, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 90. Wycliffe's dying words were fulfilled as the light of God's truth dispelled the darkness of the Middle Ages.

**In what ways have the Scriptures comforted you in times of trial?**

## Passing on God's Word

**Read** 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 and 2 Corinthians 2:14. What do these passages tell us about the confidence Paul had, despite the challenges he faced in proclaiming the truth of God's Word?

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The apostle Paul faced overwhelming odds in his work of spreading the gospel; yet, he had the confidence that God's Word would eventually triumph, "for," as he said, "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor. 13:8).

The Reformers faced similar trials; yet, by faith they remained faithful to God's Word. An example of courage in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds is William Tyndale. Tyndale's greatest desire was to give England an accurate, readable translation of the Bible. He determined to translate the Bible from the original languages and correct some of the errors in Wycliffe's translation about 140 years before. Eventually Tyndale, too, was arrested and tried. Many of his Bible translations, which were printed in Worms, Germany, were seized and publicly burned. His trial took place in Belgium in A.D. 1536. He was condemned on the charge of heresy and sentenced to be burned. His executioners strangled him while they tied him to the stake and then burned his body. His dying words were spoken with zeal in a loud voice and were reported as, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." God miraculously answered Tyndale's prayer.

Within four years of his death, four English translations of the Bible were published. In 1611 the King James Version of the Bible was printed, and it was largely based on Tyndale's work. The 54 scholars who produced the work drew heavily from Tyndale's earlier English translation. One estimate suggests that the Old Testament of the 1611 King James Bible is 76 percent Tyndale's translation, and the New Testament is 83 percent. In 2011 the King James Version of the Bible celebrated its 400th anniversary by passing the milestone of one billion Bibles in print. The King James Version has impacted tens of millions of people around the world. Tyndale's sacrifice was well worth it.

No matter how difficult it seemed or how challenging the circumstances were, Tyndale and his Bible-believing colleagues trusted that God was working out everything according to His will. Tyndale's life made a difference for eternity.

**Read Daniel 12:3 and Revelation 14:13. How do these texts apply to Tyndale's life in a powerful way? Now think about your own life and your impact on others. What encouragement do these texts give regarding the opportunity you have to influence others for eternity?**

## Enlightened by the Spirit

One day while studying in the university library, Martin Luther came to a turning point in his own life. He discovered a Latin copy of the Bible. He never knew before that a book like this even existed. With sheer delight, he read chapter after chapter, verse after verse. He was amazed at the clarity and power of God's Word. As he pored over its pages, the Holy Spirit illuminated His mind. He sensed the guidance of the Holy Spirit as truths obscured by tradition seemed to leap off the pages of Holy Writ. Describing his first experience with the Bible, he wrote, "O that God would give me such a book for myself!"

**What** principles can we take from the following texts regarding how we should interpret the Bible?

*John 14:25, 26* \_\_\_\_\_

*John 16:13–15* \_\_\_\_\_

*2 Peter 1:20, 21* \_\_\_\_\_

What's so powerful in these verses is the assurance that the same Holy Spirit that inspired Bible writers guides us as we read Scripture. He is the divine interpreter of divine truth. Unfortunately, many professed Christians today downplay the supernatural element in the Bible and exaggerate the human element. Since Satan can no longer keep the Bible from us, he does the next best thing: strip it of its supernatural character, make it merely good literature or, even worse, an oppressive tool of religion to control the masses.

The Reformers saw clearly that the Holy Spirit—not the priests, prelates, and popes—was the infallible interpreter of Scripture. There is an interesting exchange recorded between John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, and Mary, Queen of Scots.

"Said Mary: 'Ye interpret the Scriptures in one manner, and they [the Roman Catholic teachers] interpret in another; whom shall I believe, and who shall be judge?'

" 'Ye shall believe God, that plainly speaketh in His word,' answered the Reformer; 'and farther than the word teaches you, ye neither shall believe the one nor the other. The word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, which is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places, so that there can remain no doubt but unto such as obstinately remain ignorant.' "—David Laing, *The Collected Works of John Knox*, vol. 2, pp. 281, 284, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 251.

## Christ Alone . . . Grace Alone

**Read** Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 3:23, 24; Romans 6:23; and Romans 5:8–10. What do these verses teach about the plan of salvation?

God has provided salvation as a gift. His Holy Spirit leads us to accept by faith what Christ has so freely provided through His death on Calvary's cross. Jesus, the divine Son of God, offered His perfect life to atone for our sins.

Divine justice demands perfect obedience. Christ's perfect life stands in place of our imperfect lives. The divine law we have broken condemns us to eternal death. The Bible is clear. Through our sinful choices, we have "fallen short" of God's ideal for our lives. We have sinned. Left to ourselves, we cannot meet the just, righteous demands of a holy God. As a result, we deserve eternal death. But there is good news. The apostle Paul assures us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 6:23, NKJV*). It is a gift, undeserved; if it were by works, we would earn it, and if there is any one truth that shines out of the gospel, it is that we cannot earn salvation.

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformers discovered Christ and Christ alone as their source of salvation. It was then that Luther began to preach the message of Christ's saving grace. Crowds flocked to hear his heartfelt, life-changing messages. His words were like a drink of cold water in the barren desert of their lives. The people were shackled by the traditions of the medieval church and kept in bondage with centuries-old rituals that provided no spiritual life. Luther's biblical messages touched hearts, and lives were changed.

As Luther read the New Testament, he was overwhelmed with the goodness of God. He was amazed at God's desire to save all humanity. The popular view taught by church leaders at the time was salvation as partly a human work and partly God's work. Luther discovered that Christ's death on the cross was all-sufficient for all humanity.

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

What a powerful and wonderfully written summary of the gospel, that we could be justified by a righteousness "in which we had no share." What a promise!

**If salvation is the work of God in Christ, what role do our good works play in the Christian life? How can we affirm the importance of good works in our experience without making them the foundation of our hope?**

## Obedience: The Fruit of Faith

**Read** Romans 3:27–31; Romans 6:15–18; and Romans 8:1, 2. What do these verses teach us about salvation through Christ’s righteousness alone?

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A new wind was blowing through the Christian church in the days of Luther. Tens of thousands of people were taught to look away from their sinful selves and look to Jesus instead. No doubt these people, looking at themselves and what they were like, saw only things to discourage them. What believer today doesn’t have the same experience? That’s why we need to look, instead, to Jesus.

God’s grace changes us. One day, John Wesley attended a Moravian meeting in London. Wesley sat amazed as he heard Luther’s introduction to Romans read. For the first time in his life, he began to understand the gospel. Something stirred within, and he felt strangely drawn to this Christ who had given His life for him. He exclaimed, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”—John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (London: Stephen Couchman, 1793), p. 331.

**Read** 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 3:18, Colossians 1:10, and Ephesians 4:18–24. What vital truths do these passages reveal about the Christian life?

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The Reformers systematically studied the Word to discover more truth. Not content with the status quo, nor a rigid religious experience with little or no growth, they were constantly yearning to know Christ better. Many Bible-believing Christians in the Middle Ages paid an extremely high price for their commitment. They were tortured, imprisoned, exiled, and executed. Their properties were confiscated, their homes burned, their lands ravished, and their families persecuted. When they were driven from their homes, they looked for a city “whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb. 11:10*). When they were tortured, they blessed their tormentors, and when they languished in dark, damp dungeons, they claimed God’s promises of a brighter tomorrow. Although their bodies were imprisoned, they were free—free in Christ, free in the truths of His Word, free in the hope of His soon return.

**When you look to yourself, what hope of salvation do you have?**

**Further Thought:** “God’s faithful servants were not toiling alone.

While principalities and powers and wicked spirits in high places were leagued against them, the Lord did not forsake His people. Could their eyes have been opened, they would have seen as marked evidence of divine presence and aid as was granted to a prophet of old. When Elisha’s servant pointed his master to the hostile army surrounding them and cutting off all opportunity for escape, the prophet prayed: ‘Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.’ 2 Kings 6:17. And, lo, the mountain was filled with chariots and horses of fire, the army of heaven stationed to protect the man of God. Thus did angels guard the workers in the cause of the Reformation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 208.

“When powerful foes were uniting to overthrow the reformed faith, and thousands of swords seemed about to be unsheathed against it, Luther wrote: ‘Satan is putting forth his fury; ungodly pontiffs are conspiring; and we are threatened with war. Exhort the people to contend valiantly before the throne of the Lord, by faith and prayer, so that our enemies, vanquished by the Spirit of God, may be constrained to peace. Our chief want, our chief labor, is prayer; let the people know that they are now exposed to the edge of the sword and to the rage of Satan, and let them pray.’ ”—D’Aubigné, book 10, chapter 14, quoted in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 209.

Justification by faith, the great truth that Luther discovered anew, is the foundation of the gospel, the truth upon which our hope of salvation rests. His hymn “A Mighty Fortress” powerfully articulates the gospel: “Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing, Were not the right man on our side, The man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He, Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.”—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), no. 506.

**Discussion Questions:**

- ① How can we explain the balance between grace and law, between faith and good works?
- ② Why do you think it is so easy to let our minds slip into legalism? How would you define legalism? Why is it so detrimental to our Christian faith?
- ③ Are there dangers if the concept of “salvation by grace” is not rightly understood? Where might that misunderstanding lead?
- ④ What do some people mean when they use the term “cheap grace”? Is grace ever cheap?

## Letters to the Rich and Famous

By REBECA RUIZ LAGUARDIA

A Spanish housewife read a startling passage that prompted her to embark on a 35-year letter-writing campaign to proclaim Jesus' coming to Spanish royalty, actors and singers, and the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

The missionary initiative was born when the housewife, my mother, Pilar Laguardia, read, "Men in business life, in high positions of trust, men with large inventive faculties and scientific insight, men of genius, teachers of the gospel whose minds have not been called to the special truths for this time—these should be the first to hear the call. To them the invitation must be given."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 230.

Reading the statement, my mother wondered, *How can I, a simple housewife, reach these people?* Moments later, she hatched a plan. She would listen to interviews with prominent people on television and the radio and read them in newspapers and magazines. She would seek any hint that they were interested in spiritual matters and introduce them to God. My mother found many opportunities. As soon as she heard someone say "I wish I had faith" or "I'm agnostic" or "I have an emptiness inside," she wrote a letter.

My mother has lost count of the number of letters that she has mailed to Spanish presidents and government ministers, bishops, priests, actors, singers, authors, journalists, and inmates. In addition to Fidel Castro, recipients include Spanish King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, Italian tenor Al Bano Carrisi, and authors Paulo Coelho and José Saramago. She never had trouble finding mailing addresses, even before the internet. Sometimes, newspaper articles offered clues. Other times, she called television stations and prisons.

Many people have responded. Madrid's mayor wrote, "I'm reading the Conflict of the Ages series, and I'm in the chapter 'The Awakening in Spain' in *The Great Controversy*. It's very interesting, and I will continue reading."

A bishop expressed gratitude for *Steps to Christ* and the Conflict of the Ages and wrote, "May divine mercy do what's needed to bring us light."

Another bishop said, "I want to study the Bible better and to serve God better. Maybe I need to correct some of my interpretations of the Bible."

Isabel, a physician who gave up her career to enter a cloistered convent as a nun, kept contact with my mother by phone and mail for months. In her first letter, she said, "You can send me all the Bible materials you want." So, my mother did, and a seed was planted. The results are in God's hands.

"The important thing is to plant seeds," my mother says. "The Lord says, 'Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days' " (*Eccles. 11:1, NKJV*).

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# The Two Witnesses



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 11:3–6; Zech. 4:14; Rev. 12:5, 6, 14, 15; Dan. 7:25; Isa. 54:17; Ps. 119:89; Rev. 11:15–18.*

**Memory Text:** “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (*Isaiah 40:8, NKJV*).

Through the centuries, God's Word has been dissected, doubted, and discarded. It has been chained in monasteries, burned in public squares, and torn to shreds. Its believers have been ridiculed, mocked, imprisoned, and even martyred. Through it all, God's Word has prevailed.

The medieval church persecuted faithful, Bible-believing Christians. Yet, God's Word illuminated the darkness. Oppression and persecution did not stop the proclamation of the Word of God. As English Bible translator William Tyndale was tried for his faith, he was asked who aided him most in spreading God's Word. He pondered the question and then answered, “the Bishop of Durham.” The magistrates were shocked.

Tyndale explained that on one occasion, the bishop purchased a supply of his English Bible translation and publicly burned them. What the bishop did not know at the time was that he was greatly aiding the cause of truth. He had purchased the Bibles at a much higher price than usual. With such a large purchase, Tyndale was able to print many more Bibles than were burned. Truth crushed in the dust has risen again and again to shine in all its brilliance.

This week, we explore one of the most vicious attacks on the Scriptures and the Christian faith. During the French Revolution, blood flowed in the streets of France. The guillotine was set up in Paris's public square, and thousands were slaughtered. Atheism became the state religion. Nevertheless, the witness of God's Word could not be silenced.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 12–17 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, May 11.

## Two Witnesses

**Read** Revelation 11:3–6. List five identifying features of the two witnesses you discover in this passage.

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In Zechariah 4, the prophet saw two olive trees on either side of a golden lampstand—the same imagery that we find here in Revelation 11. Zechariah is told that this represents “ ‘the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth’ ” (*Zech. 4:14, NKJV*). The olive trees feed oil into the lampstand so that it continues to give light. We are reminded of what the psalmist wrote: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (*Ps. 119:105, NKJV*). Oil represents the Holy Spirit (*Zech. 4:2, 6*). John’s vision in Revelation 11 is describing God’s Word being proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit to lighten the world.

These two witnesses can prophesy and keep rain from falling for as long as they predict. They can turn water to blood and smite the earth with plagues. By the word of God, Elijah said no rain would fall on Israel, and in answer to his prayer, there was no rain for three and a half years (*see James 5:17*). Then he prayed to God, and rain returned after the false prophets of Baal failed to end the drought (*1 Kings 17, 18*). Moses, through the Word of God, brought plagues of all kinds on the Egyptians, including turning water to blood, because Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go free (*Exodus 7*).

Those who seek to harm the Scriptures will be consumed by the fire that comes from their mouth. God says, “ ‘Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them’ ” (*Jer. 5:14, NKJV*). God’s Word pronounces judgment upon all those who reject it. His word is like fire in the mouth.

In John 5:39, Jesus declares that the Old Testament scriptures testify (bear witness) of Him. He also says that the gospel will be proclaimed “as a witness” to the whole world (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*), and the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, is the basis of that witness. A word from the same root (*martyrs*) as the words for witness used in these two verses appears in Revelation 11:3.

Who are these two witnesses? In view of these biblical points and the characteristics given in Revelation 11, we can conclude (not dogmatically, however) that the two witnesses are the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, communicating God’s light and truth to the world.

**Many Christians today tend to downplay the Old Testament, to label it irrelevant and not needed, because we have the New Testament. What is so terribly wrong with that attitude?**

## Prophetic Time Periods

**Compare** Revelation 11:3 and Revelation 12:5, 6, 14, 15 with Daniel 7:25. What similarities do you see in these prophetic periods?

The two witnesses “ ‘will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth’ ” (*Rev. 11:3, NKJV*). This is the same time period as the 42 months during which the “Gentiles” (those who oppose God’s truth) will tread the Holy City underfoot (*Rev. 11:2*). The enemies of God tread underfoot God’s truth for 1,260 days ( $42 \times 30 = 1,260$ , each day symbolizing a year in apocalyptic prophecy), and God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments, prophesy against them during this same time.

As we already have seen (see lesson 4), Daniel 7:25 says the little-horn power that would arise out of the breakup of the Roman Empire would persecute God’s people “ ‘for a time and times [literally, “two times”] and half a time’ ” (*NKJV*). A “time” is one year (360 days). So, three and a half times equals 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:6, 13 talks about 1,260 days of persecution for the people of God. Revelation 12:14 talks of a time, times, and half a time. Revelation 13:5 talks about 42 months. We find both 42 months and 1,260 days mentioned in Revelation 11:2, 3. All these prophecies describe different aspects of the same historical time period.

When the authority of Scripture is neglected, other (human) authorities arise instead. This often leads to persecution of those who uphold the Word of God, which happened during the time of papal domination from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798, when the medieval church descended into deep spiritual darkness. The decrees of men substituted for the commandments of God. Human traditions overshadowed the simplicity of the gospel. The Roman Church united with the secular power to extend its authority over all of Europe.

During these 1,260 years, the Word of God—His two witnesses—were clothed in sackcloth. Their truths were hidden under a vast pile of tradition and ritual. These two witnesses still prophesied; the Bible still spoke. Even amid this spiritual darkness, God’s Word was preserved. There were those who cherished it and lived by its precepts. But in comparison to the masses in Europe, they were few. The Waldenses, John Huss, Jerome, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, and a host of other Reformers were faithful to God’s Word as they understood it.

**What are some of the teachings today, held by many Christians, that are based on tradition and not on the Word of God?**

## The Two Witnesses Are Killed

**Read** Revelation 11:7–9. Remembering that the language is symbolic, what do these verses predict would happen to God’s two witnesses, the Old and New Testaments?

By A.D. 538, the pagan Roman Empire had collapsed. Justinian, the Roman emperor, surrendered civil, political, and religious authority to Pope Vigillius. The long period of the medieval church’s domination began. It continued until A.D. 1798. The French general Berthier, on orders from Napoleon, marched unopposed into Rome on February 10, 1798. Pope Pius VI was taken captive and brought back to France, where he died. This date marks the prophetically predicted end of the Roman Church’s secular authority, the 1,260 days or years as depicted in Daniel and Revelation (see yesterday’s study).

What a powerful manifestation of the truth of biblical prophecy! Daniel, writing more than 500 years before Christ, so accurately predicted events more than 2,300 years later. We can, indeed, trust the prophecies given in the Bible.

Meanwhile, during all this, the truth of the gospel was kept alive by the witness of the Word. But even greater challenges threatened biblical truth. The beast that ascended from the bottomless pit (Satan) made war against the Scriptures. He initiated new assaults on the Bible’s authority through the French Revolution that began in 1789.

In the French Revolution, the government officially established the Cult of Reason as a state-sponsored atheistic religion, intended to replace Christianity. A Festival of Reason was held nationwide on November 10, 1793. Churches across France were turned into Temples of Reason, and a living woman was enthroned as the Goddess of Reason. Bibles were burned in the streets. God was declared nonexistent, and death was pronounced to be an endless sleep. Satan worked through godless men to kill God’s two witnesses. Their dead bodies would “lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified” (*Rev. 11:8, NKJV*).

Egypt was a culture of many gods that denied the true God (*see Exod. 5:2*). Sodom represents gross immorality. In the French Revolution, God’s two witnesses—the Old and New Testaments—lay dead as a result of the atheism and immorality that ran rampant as normal restraints were loosed in revolution and bloodshed.

Revelation 11:9 says that the bodies of God’s two witnesses would lie unburied for “three-and-a-half days” (*NKJV*), i.e., prophetic “days” representing three and a half literal years. Atheism was at its height in the French Revolution, at least for about three and a half years. This period extended from November 26, 1793, when a decree issued in Paris abolished religion, to June 17, 1797, when the French government removed its restrictive religious laws.

## The Two Witnesses Resurrected

**Read** Revelation 11:11. What prediction does this text make about the Word of God?

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At the end of the French Revolution, God's Word would, figuratively, come to life again. There would be a mighty revival. Great fear would fall on those who saw God's Word once more become the living power of God unto salvation. At the end of the eighteenth century, God raised up men and women who were committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. People spread the message of the Bible rapidly. One such person was William Carey, who traveled to India and translated the Bible into dozens of local dialects. Propelled by the power of the Bible, missionaries were sent around the world.

It is not by accident that these worldwide mission endeavors arose after the French Revolution. God's Word is a living Word, and although to many it seemed "dead," it was still living in the hearts of believers and would rise again to full life, as Revelation's prophecies predicted. "The infidel Voltaire once boastfully said: 'I am weary of hearing people repeat that twelve men established the Christian religion. I will prove that one man may suffice to overthrow it.' Generations have passed since his death. Millions have joined in the war upon the Bible. But it is so far from being destroyed, that where there were a hundred in Voltaire's time, there are now ten thousand, yes, a hundred thousand copies of the book of God. In the words of an early Reformer concerning the Christian church, 'The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

**Read** Psalm 119:89 and Psalm 111:7, 8. What do these passages tell us about the Bible, and why we can trust it?

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God's Word may be attacked, or suppressed, but it will never be eradicated. Even many professed Christians undermine its authority in various ways, questioning parts of the Bible or so emphasizing the human elements that it all but loses its divine stamp, and God's truth is undermined.

We must never, in any way, allow ourselves to be seduced by these attacks on the Word of God. It is still alive today, speaking to human hearts, breathing new life into those who are willing to listen to the Word and follow its teachings.

**What prophecies in particular speak to you, personally, and why?**

## Truth Triumphant

Despite the attacks of the enemy, God's work on earth will come to a glorious climax. The gospel will be preached to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). The great controversy between Christ and Satan will end with Christ completely defeating the powers of hell. God's kingdom will triumph over evil, and sin will be eradicated forever from the universe. Revelation 11 begins with Satan's attempt through the French Revolution to destroy the Christian faith and eradicate belief in God, but the chapter ends with the triumph of God's kingdom over the principalities and powers of evil. It provides encouragement to all who go through fiery trials for the cause of Christ and His truth.

**Read** Revelation 11:15–18. According to these verses, what events take place at the close of time when the seventh trumpet sounds?

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The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord. Christ is victorious. Evil is defeated. Jesus wins and Satan loses. Righteousness triumphs. Truth reigns. We would do well to heed the following instruction: "Whatever is built upon the authority of man will be overthrown; but that which is founded upon the rock of God's immutable word shall stand forever."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 288.

**Read** Revelation 11:19. What did John see opened in heaven? And what did he see as he looked up into heaven?

---

The temple of God in heaven was opened to John's view. As he gazed into the Most Holy Place, he saw the ark of the covenant. In the Old Testament sanctuary, which was a type patterned after the great original in heaven, the glorious presence of God was revealed between the two angelic figures fashioned on the cover of the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was the law of God. Although we are saved by grace alone through faith, obedience to God's law reveals whether our faith is genuine. The law of God is the basis or the standard of judgment (*James 2:12*). This fact becomes especially important and relevant at the end of time (*see Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*).

**How does the striking contrast between the godlessness of the French Revolution and the glorious climax pictured in Revelation 11 speak to us today?**

**Further Thought:** “When the Bible was proscribed by religious and secular authority; when its testimony was perverted, and every effort made that men and demons could invent to turn the minds of the people from it; when those who dared proclaim its sacred truths were hunted, betrayed, tortured, buried in dungeon cells, martyred for their faith, or compelled to flee to mountain fastnesses, and to dens and caves of the earth—then the faithful witnesses prophesied in sackcloth. Yet they continued their testimony throughout the entire period of 1260 years. In the darkest times there were faithful men who loved God’s word and were jealous for His honor. To these loyal servants were given wisdom, power, and authority to declare His truth during the whole of this time.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 267, 268.

“When France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible, wicked men and spirits of darkness exulted in their attainment of the object so long desired—a kingdom free from the restraints of the law of God. . . . The restraining Spirit of God, which imposes a check upon the cruel power of Satan, was in a great measure removed, and he whose only delight is the wretchedness of men was permitted to work his will. Those who had chosen the service of rebellion were left to reap its fruits until the land was filled with crimes too horrible for pen to trace. From devastated provinces and ruined cities a terrible cry was heard—a cry of bitterest anguish. France was shaken as if by an earthquake. Religion, law, social order, the family, the state, and the church—all were smitten down by the impious hand that had been lifted against the law of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 286.

“Unless the church will follow on in His [God’s] opening providence, accepting every ray of light, performing every duty which may be revealed, religion will inevitably degenerate into the observance of forms, and the spirit of vital godliness will disappear.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 316.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① How are the principles of the great controversy revealed in the French Revolution?
- ② When arguing that there is no God, one person wrote that “we are free to establish our own goals and to venture across any intellectual boundaries without looking for no-trespassing signs.” Why is that phrase “without looking for no-trespassing signs” so instructive to the motives many have for rejecting God? How might such ideas help explain some of what happened in the French Revolution?
- ③ What is the significance of John’s vision of the sanctuary as it relates to final events?

# One Angel, Four Encounters

By NELSON CINCO REIS CHITAONGA  
and CALAVETE SABONETE OSSIFO

Few people can say that they have seen an angel. Oyele says he has seen an angel—not just once, but four times.

Oyele slipped away from his childhood faith as he labored for three years away from home, helping construct a 250-mile (400-kilometer) road between the cities of Mocuba and Nampula in Mozambique. It was tough work, and he sought relief in ways that he knew violated God's law.

One day, several strangers approached Oyele, who was drunk after work, and asked if he was aware that the Bible taught that the Sabbath was on the seventh day of the week. Oyele was convinced that the strangers were wrong. "Prove it to me from the Bible," he said.

The strangers, who introduced themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, opened the Bible to the fourth commandment and read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (*Exod. 20:8, NKJV*). Then they turned to Ezekiel 20:20 and read, "Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God" (*NKJV*).

Oyele read and reread the verses over the next few days. He wondered if he was reading truth from God. Even though he had gone to church since he was a boy, he had never noticed the verses before.

As he thought and prayed, a shining angel appeared at night over the house where he was staying. "Strength!" the angel said. "You are on the right path." The next night, he saw the angel again in the same place. "Strength!" the angel said. "You are on the right path." The same thing happened the third night. Oyele went to an Adventist church the next Sabbath. After that, he worshiped regularly with the Adventists.

When his three-year contract ended, Oyele returned home and was surprised to find that his wife and children had joined the Adventist Church. He had had no contact with them during his extended absence.

"What a coincidence!" his wife said when she learned that Oyele had been going to an Adventist church. "Is this by chance?"

Back home, Oyele went to the Adventist church on Saturdays and his childhood church on Sundays. He wasn't sure what to do. Then the angel appeared for a fourth time. "What you are studying is true," the angel said. Oyele decided on the spot to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

There are few Adventists where Oyele lives, but God has blessed his efforts to share the good news that Jesus is coming soon. Oyele has helped start three house churches. "Evangelize anyone, even if they're drunk," he said. "God is the one who converts, and there are many people who God has prepared to accept the gospel. They only need to be touched by you."

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.



# THE GREAT CONTROVERSY STUDY GUIDES

**Kurt Johnson, DMin**

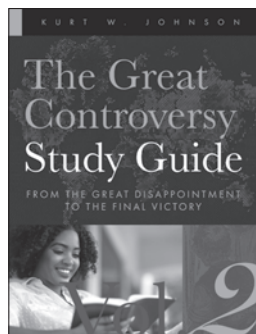
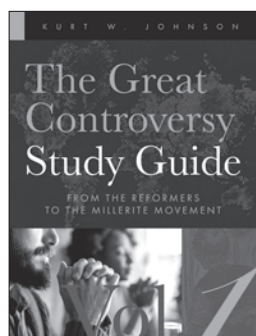
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# A STORY TO TELL



## Two options for sharing the mission story about Khachik in Sabbath School:

**Option No. 1:** Open the *Children's Mission* quarterly and show a photo of Khachik as you tell the story of how God saved his life in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Give the children a drawing of Georgia's flag, printed in the quarterly, to color as they listen.

**Option No. 2:** Make Khachik's story come alive with photos of him, Georgia, and a mission map with the Thirteenth Sabbath projects. At the end of the story, show a short video of Khachik acknowledging that his life is in God's hands.

## How will you share the mission story next Sabbath?

Learn more in the *Children's Mission* quarterly ([bit.ly/childrensmisson](http://bit.ly/childrensmisson)) and the youth and adult *Mission* quarterly ([bit.ly/adultmission](http://bit.ly/adultmission)).



@missionquarterlies



# Motivated *by* Hope



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:27, 30, 31; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; Dan. 8:14; Dan. 9:20–27; Ezra 7:7–13.*

**Memory Text:** “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.’ ” (*Isaiah 25:9, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus is one of the central themes of Scripture. It is a golden thread that runs through the Bible's sacred pages. One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the return of Christ. One in every 25 verses mentions it. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event.

After the Reformation in Europe foundered and was hampered by divisions and strife, Protestantism took root in the New World, including the United States, where many sought to pick up the mantle of truth, including the truth about the Second Coming.

Among them was a Baptist farmer named William Miller. From his study of the Bible, he believed that Jesus was coming soon, even in his lifetime, and then began preaching that message. Miller started a movement that, though facing a great disappointment, opened up to many people Bible truths that remain relevant to this day.

In this week's lesson, we will examine why the second coming of Christ has filled the hearts of believers with joy through the centuries and how we can be ready for that great event.

\* *Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 18–21 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.*

## The Promise of His Return

The Protestant Reformers and the pilgrims who left from Holland for the New World longed for the coming of Jesus. For them the second coming of Christ was a joyous event that they eagerly anticipated. John Wycliffe looked forward to the coming of Christ as the hope of the church. Calvin spoke for all the Reformers when he talked of the glorious return of Christ as “of all events most auspicious.” For faithful men and women of God, the second coming of Christ was something to be embraced, not something to be feared.

**Read** John 14:1–3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, and Titus 2:11–14. Why did these Bible passages give such hope to Christians through the centuries?

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It is easy to understand why a belief in the second coming of Christ has brought such hope and joy to Bible-believing Christians. It points forward to the end of sickness, suffering, and death. It ushers in the end of poverty, injustice, and oppression. It anticipates the end of strife, conflict, and war. It forecasts a future world of peace, happiness, and enduring fellowship with Christ and the redeemed of all ages forever.

“The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour’s parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the ‘appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ was the ‘blessed hope.’ When the Thessalonian Christians were filled with grief as they buried their loved ones, who had hoped to live to witness the coming of the Lord, Paul, their teacher, pointed them to the resurrection, to take place at the Saviour’s advent. Then the dead in Christ should rise, and together with the living be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. ‘And so,’ he said, ‘shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.’ 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 302.

**Why is the Second Coming so important to our faith? Especially because we know that the dead sleep (see lesson 10), why does this teaching take on such importance? Without it, why would we be, as Paul said, in an utterly hopeless situation (see 1 Cor. 15:15–18)?**

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## Anticipating the Time

Although the Protestant Reformers believed in the literal, visible, audible, and glorious return of Christ, gradually the understanding of this biblical truth changed. Popular nineteenth-century preachers taught that Christ would come to establish His kingdom on earth and usher in 1,000 years of peace. This led to spiritual lethargy and an apathetic commitment to spiritual values.

Similarly, Christ's disciples misunderstood the nature of the Messiah's coming. They thought that He would come as a conquering general who would break the yoke of Roman bondage, not One who would deliver them from the condemnation and shackles of sin. Thus, they failed to understand the manner of His coming.

**Read Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 1:7; and Matthew 24:27, 30, 31. What do these verses teach us about the manner of our Lord's return?**

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When Christ came the first time as a babe in Bethlehem's manger, very few people discerned His coming. But when He comes the second time, "every eye" will see Him come. Every ear will hear the trumpet blast of His return. Every human being on earth will behold His glory. We need not be deceived. The Scriptures have made the events surrounding His return abundantly clear.

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again His banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

An early Adventist leader, Luther Warren, used to tell young people, "The only way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to get ready and stay ready." The message of Christ's soon return is an urgent appeal to each one of us to examine our hearts and evaluate our spiritual lives. It is a call to godly living. There can be no neutrality in the blazing light of the glory of Christ's return.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:2–5 and Hebrews 9:28. What encouragement do these verses give us regarding the manner of Christ's coming?**

## William Miller and the Bible

Just as God used the Protestant Reformers to rediscover the truth about justification by faith in Christ alone, He used William Miller to rediscover the truth about the manner of Christ's second coming. As Miller studied Scripture, he discovered a Christ who loved him more than he could possibly imagine. With his Bible, a pen, and a notebook, he began reading starting with Genesis and read no faster than he could understand the passage at hand. By comparing scripture with scripture, he allowed the Bible to explain itself.

**Read** Isaiah 28:9, 10; Proverbs 8:8, 9; John 16:13; and 2 Peter 1:19–21. What principles of Bible interpretation do you discover in these passages?

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As William Miller compared scripture with scripture, the mysteries of the Bible were opened to him. He searched as one searching for a hidden treasure and was richly rewarded. The Holy Spirit opened the Word of God to his understanding. He approached prophecy with the same diligence in Bible study as the other biblical passages he was studying.

**Read** Daniel 1:17; Daniel 2:45; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; and Revelation 1:1–3. What do these passages teach us about understanding the prophecies of the Bible?

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The symbols in the prophetic books are not locked in mystery. A loving God has given us His prophetic Word to prepare us for the climactic events soon to unfold in this world. William Miller clearly understood that prophecy was its own best interpreter. The symbols of prophecy are made clear by the Bible itself. Beasts represent kings or kingdoms (*Dan. 7:17, 23*). Wind represents destruction (*Jer. 49:36*). Water represents peoples or nations (*Rev. 17:15*). A woman represents the church (*Jer. 6:2, Eph. 5:22–32*). The time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation also are given in symbolic language, with one prophetic day representing one literal year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). As William Miller applied these principles of biblical interpretation, he was startled at what he discovered regarding what he believed to be the timing of Christ's return.

**Why is a correct understanding of prophetic symbolism so important for our faith?**

## The 2,300 Days of Daniel 8:14

William Miller observed that events predicted by the prophets were precisely fulfilled: the 400 years of the sojourn of Abraham's descendants, Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the 70 years of Israel's captivity, and Daniel's 70 weeks allotted to Israel (*Gen. 15:13, Num. 14:34, Jer. 25:11, and Dan. 9:24*).

**Read** Mark 1:15, Galatians 4:4, and Romans 5:6. What do these verses tell us about God's timetable for the First Advent?

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As Miller studied the prophecies, comparing scripture with scripture, he concluded that if God had a divine timetable throughout the Bible, God must have a divine timetable when it comes to our Lord's second coming.

**Read** Daniel 8:14. What event was to occur at the end of the 2,300 days?

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William Miller accepted the popular view that the "cleansing of the sanctuary" was the purification of the earth by fire. He diligently studied the Scriptures to understand an event of such stupendous importance. He discovered the linkage between Daniel 8 and Daniel 9. In Daniel 8, the angel was instructed to "make this man understand the vision" (*Dan. 8:16*). By the end of the chapter, the only portion of the entire vision of Daniel 8 left unexplained (*see Dan. 8:27*) was the part about the 2,300 days. Later the angel returned to Daniel and declared, " 'I have now come forth to give you skill to understand' " (*Dan. 9:22, NKJV; see also Dan. 9:23, 25–27*). This was to help him understand about the 2,300 days.

We know this because, after bidding Daniel to " 'consider the matter, and understand the vision' " (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*), the first words of the angel were: " 'Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city' " (*Dan. 9:24, NKJV*). The word translated "determined" literally means "cut off." Seventy weeks, 490 years, are to be cut off. But from what? The vision of the 2,300 days, obviously—the only part of Daniel 8 that Daniel did not understand, and that the angel now came to explain.

And since the starting point of the 70 weeks was " 'from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem' " (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*), Miller knew that if he had that date, he could know the beginning of the 70 weeks and the 2,300-day prophecy.

## The Longest Prophetic Time Line

**Read** Ezra 7:7–13. When was the decree issued to allow Israel’s captives in Persia to go free to rebuild their temple?

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The decree was issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 457 B.C. This decree was the last of three decrees to allow the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and restore temple worship services. This third decree was the most complete and marks the beginning of the 2,300-day prophecy.

**Read** Daniel 9:25, 26. When would this entire prophetic period begin? What major events do these verses predict?

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In this remarkable prophecy, Daniel predicted that from the “going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” to the Messiah would be 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 prophetic days, or literal years. Since the decree went forth in the fall of 457 B.C., 483 years extend to the fall of A.D. 27. The word “Messiah” signifies “the Anointed One.” In the autumn of A.D. 27, Christ was baptized and received the anointing of the Spirit (*Acts 10:38*). After His baptism, Jesus went into Galilee, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled’ ” (*Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV*).

In the spring of A.D. 31, in the middle of this last prophetic week, three and a half years after His baptism, Jesus was crucified. The system of offerings that pointed forward to the Lamb of God ended with Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Type had met antitype, and eventually all the sacrifices and offerings of the ceremonial system ceased.

**Read** Daniel 9:27. How would the 70-week prophecy end?

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The 70 weeks, or 490 years, especially allotted to the Jews, ended in A.D. 34 with the rejection by the Sanhedrin of the gospel message (*Acts 6:8–7:60*).

Subtracting 490 years from the 2,300-year prophecy leaves 1,810 years for the completion of the prophecy. This leads us to A.D. 1844. William Miller and the early Adventists believed that the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was the earth, and they assumed that Christ would come to purify the earth by fire in 1844. (*See the chart on Friday.*)



**Further Thought:** Look at the following chart for the prophecies of the 70 weeks and the 2,300 days. The prophecies start in 457 B.C. and foretell the events surrounding “Messiah the Prince,” upon whom the 70-week prophecy is grounded. With that solid foundation, the 2,300-day prophecy ends in the year 1844.

2,300 days (2,300 years)		
70 weeks (490 years)	1,810 years	
457 B.C.	A.D. 34	1844

“Like the first disciples, William Miller and his associates did not, themselves, fully comprehend the import of the message which they bore. Errors that had been long established in the church prevented them from arriving at a correct interpretation of an important point in the prophecy. Therefore, though they proclaimed the message which God had committed to them to be given to the world, yet through a misapprehension of its meaning they suffered disappointment.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 351, 352.

“Yet God accomplished His own beneficent purpose in permitting the warning of the judgment to be given just as it was. The great day was at hand, and in His providence the people were brought to the test of a definite time, in order to reveal to them what was in their hearts. The message was designed for the testing and purification of the church. They were to be led to see whether their affections were set upon this world or upon Christ and heaven. They professed to love the Saviour; now they were to prove their love. Were they ready to renounce their worldly hopes and ambitions, and welcome with joy the advent of their Lord? The message was designed to enable them to discern their true spiritual state; it was sent in mercy to arouse them to seek the Lord with repentance and humiliation.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 353.

## Discussion Questions:

- 1 What lessons can we learn from William Miller’s experience? Does God at times overrule our mistaken understanding?
- 2 Why is an understanding of Daniel 9:24–27 so significant in establishing the integrity of the Bible and the divinity of Christ?
- 3 What role does understanding prophecy play in the plan of salvation? Why is prophecy so significant in the plan of God?

## Unlocking Hearts

By F. EDGAR NUNES

On a recent Sabbath, two Syrian refugees attended the worship services at the Kingston Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Canadian province of Ontario. As the church's pastor, I rejoice at the sight of any visitor, but to be able to welcome a mother and daughter who belong to another world religion was an unexpected privilege. How did they hear about us? Who invited them to our worship service?

It turned out that long before they set foot in our church, the Syrian refugees had been befriended by one of the church members, Shirley.

Shirley has a big heart for strangers, especially refugees, and she greets people with a warm smile that melts barriers away. She loves to help in any way she can, and people are moved by her kindness and compassion. They readily accept her invitations to family dinners and summer picnics. The Syrian mother and daughter, Eman and Heba, accepted Shirley's invitation to come to church on Sabbath.

After the worship service, we visited outside the sanctuary. Eman and Heba seemed happy to talk and readily accepted my offer to pray for them. Afterward, I asked if they would be interested in a copy of the Gospel of John in Arabic, printed by the Canadian Bible Society.

"I won't be offended if you say, 'No,'" I said.

The mother accepted the book.

"We believe Jesus is a prophet, so we will read the book," she said.

A few days later, Shirley called to ask if I spoke "Sudanese."

"I have another family from Africa that I would like you to visit," she said.

Shirley's genuine love and warmth for strangers keeps unlocking hearts. Her example inspires us to follow Christ's method. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Shirley mingles with people, listening, serving, and showing disinterested love and acceptance, thereby breaking down the most formidable barriers. We also can go from heart to heart as Shirley does every day.

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (*John 13:35, NKJV*). The love that reveals we are His disciples is the same power that opens the hearts of strangers and moves them to consider becoming His disciples.

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*This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." For more information, go to the website: [IWillGo2020.org](http://IWillGo2020.org).*

# Light From *the* Sanctuary



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 25:8, 9, 40; Heb. 8:1–6; Lev. 16:21, 29–34; Lev. 23:26–32; Heb. 9:23–28; Dan. 7:9, 10.*

**Memory Text:** “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (*Hebrews 8:1, 2, NKJV*).

Shortly after the disappointment of October 22, 1844, some of the Millerites came to understand that the 2,300-day prophecy didn't deal with the second coming of Jesus but with Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary.

The cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven was the fulfillment of the earthly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary. To understand this important truth better, look at the parallel between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8:

Daniel 7	Daniel 8
Babylon	-----
Media-Persia	Media-Persia
Greece	Greece
Rome	Rome
Judgment in heaven	Cleansing of the sanctuary

These parallels show the nature of the cleansing of the sanctuary, the pre-Advent judgment. This week we explore Christ's ministry in heaven.

\* *Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 22–24 and 28 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, May 25.*

## The Heavenly Sanctuary

**Read** Exodus 25:8, 9, 40 and Hebrews 8:1–6. What two sanctuaries are outlined in these verses?

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As the early Adventist believers pored over the Scriptures in the months following 1844, they understood that there are two sanctuaries mentioned in the Bible—the one Moses built and the great original in heaven. The term “sanctuary,” as used in the Bible, refers, first, to the tabernacle built by Moses, as a pattern or “type” of heavenly things; and, second, to the “true tabernacle” in heaven, to which the earthly sanctuary pointed. At the death of Christ, the typical service lost its importance. The “true tabernacle” in heaven is the sanctuary of the new covenant. And as the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 is fulfilled in this era, the sanctuary to which it refers must be the sanctuary of the new covenant.

“At the termination of the 2300 days, in 1844, there had been no sanctuary on earth for many centuries. Thus the prophecy, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,’ unquestionably points to the sanctuary in heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 417.

The sanctuary in the wilderness was a scale model or pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. The services in the earthly sanctuary foreshadowed God’s divine plan of salvation. Every sacrifice offered represented Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross of Calvary (*see John 1:29*). Through the sacrifice of Christ, we are free from the condemnation of sin. Forgiveness is ours. Our guilt is gone as we accept Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf and confess our sins (*1 John 1:9*). Jesus is not only the Lamb who died for us but also the Priest who lives for us.

Hebrews 7:25 explains: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (*NKJV*). He removes the guilt of sin and saves us from the power of sin (*Rom. 8:1–4, 2 Cor. 5:21*). Jesus’ ministry in heaven’s sanctuary is for us. As a result of His intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. We are no longer under bondage or enslaved to our sinful natures. In Christ we are free—free from sin’s condemnation and free from sin’s control. As we hold on to Christ by faith, we have the assurance of salvation.

**What does it mean for you to know that Jesus is in heaven ministering in your behalf, meaning that He is there mediating for you? Why do you need a Mediator in your behalf? Why is this truth good news?**

## In the Holy of Holies

**Read** Leviticus 16:21, 29–34; Leviticus 23:26–32; and Hebrews 9:23–28. Why was the Day of Atonement so important in ancient Israel?

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The priests ministered every day of the year, but on the Day of Atonement, called Yom Kippur in Hebrew, the eyes of all Israel turned toward the sanctuary. Leviticus 16 and 23 give explicit instructions for the Day of Atonement. All regular activity ceased. Everyone fasted. While the high priest entered the presence of God for them in the Most Holy Place, the people examined their hearts. They sought God in humility and heartfelt confession.

Anyone who was not “afflicted” on the Day of Atonement would be “cut off,” no longer part of the chosen people (*Lev. 23:27, 29*). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest took the blood of the Lord’s goat into the sanctuary and, after sprinkling it on the mercy seat, applied the blood to the horns of the golden altar and of the brazen altar, completely cleansing the entire sanctuary. When he had made “an end of reconciling,” the high priest placed his hands on the live goat and confessed Israel’s sins. Then it was led into the wilderness to be separated from the camp forever (*Lev. 16:20–22*).

The blood was transferred into the sanctuary during the daily services, showing the recording of sin (*Jer. 17:1*) and God’s taking responsibility for its ultimate disposition. Now, on the Day of Atonement, it was transferred out of the sanctuary and placed on the head of the scapegoat Azazel, representing Satan and revealing his ultimate responsibility for the sin problem.

This goat was led far into the wilderness so that, at the close of the Day of Atonement, God had a clean sanctuary and a clean people. In the heavenly sanctuary, Christ ministers for us first in the Holy Place, and now, in the Most Holy Place since 1844, at the end of the 2,300 days.

We will get through this great judgment because of Jesus, our Substitute. As Ellen G. White said, we are “justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25. As a result of this righteousness—credited (imputed) to us—we afflict our souls, which is a turning away from sin. That means we have not come to a comfortable acceptance of evil nor are we excusing or clinging to cherished sins. Instead we are growing in grace and living a life of holiness.

**What is the significance of the Day of Atonement in our lives today? Why should it make a difference in how we live?**

## The Judgment Has Come

**Compare** Daniel 7:9, 10 with Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the similarity between these two passages?

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The judgment is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (*Eccles. 12:14, NKJV*). Jesus pointed His hearers to a future time of judgment, when “ ‘every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment’ ” (*Matt. 12:36, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds, God will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (*1 Cor. 4:5*). The angelic messenger said to John, “The hour of His [God’s] judgment has come” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

**Read** Revelation 22:10–12. When Jesus returns, what is the fate of all humanity? What clear declaration is made to John?

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Since Christ comes to give out His final rewards, there must be a judgment before that, to show who will receive what reward when He comes. When Christ returns, there is no second chance. Every human being has had sufficient information to make their final, irrevocable decision for or against Christ.

**Read** Matthew 25:1–13. Why does Jesus relate so differently to these two different groups of believers?

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“When the work of investigation shall be ended, when the cases of those who in all ages have professed to be followers of Christ have been examined and decided, then, and not till then, probation will close, and the door of mercy will be shut. Thus in the one short sentence, ‘They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage: and the door was shut,’ we are carried down through the Saviour’s final ministration, to the time when the great work for man’s salvation shall be completed.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 428.

We need not fear the judgment. Through Christ, forgiveness is ours, freedom from guilt is ours, power to live godly lives is ours, and final victory is ours.

## The Good News of the Most Holy Place

**Read** Hebrews 4:14–16 and Hebrews 10:19–22. What assurance and divine invitation do these verses give to each one of us?

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Paul's point here in Hebrews is "hold fast," "come boldly," "never give up," focus your faith on Jesus, our great High Priest. In Jesus, we have all we need. By faith we may enter the heavenly sanctuary through the "new and living way" that Jesus has opened for us.

Looking into the court, we see *blood* on the horns of the brazen altar. In the Holy Place, we see *blood* on the golden horns of the altar of incense. We behold the sprinkled *blood* on the curtain before the mercy seat.

Jesus' blood prepares the way at every step. This gives us hope since we can have reunion with God only if Jesus pardons us and blots out our sins. The mercy of God is infinite, but so is His justice. And justice cannot accept Christ's sacrifice as atonement for our transgressions unless Jesus guarantees first to forgive our sins and second to blot them out.

**Read** Revelation 11:19. In the context of the great controversy, why is this vision significant? How does it show the inseparable link between the law and the gospel?

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Here in the dazzling brightness and blazing glory of the presence of God, in the throne room of the universe, at the very base of God's throne, we discover the law of God in the ark of the covenant. Here in the Most Holy Place, God's justice and mercy are revealed. No earthly power can change God's law because, among other reasons, it is enshrined in the ark of the covenant in heaven. Hebrews 8:10 says: " 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people' " (NKJV). Entering by faith into heaven's sanctuary, we find pardon for our past sins and power to live an obedient life through Christ, who died for us and writes the law in our hearts. Jesus saves us to the "uttermost" (*Heb. 7:25*). Jesus saves us totally and completely—from the penalty of sin and from its power.

**Why is Jesus' intercession such incredibly good news? As we stand before the law as the standard of righteousness, what hope would we have without the gospel?**

## Jesus, Our Advocate in the Judgment

**Read** Hebrews 10:9–14. What difference does this passage reveal between the priest’s ministry in the earthly sanctuary and Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary?

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Once and for all, Christ died upon the cross as a perfect sacrifice for sin. His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary sanctifies us. Now, having entered the Most Holy Place, He stands as our Advocate in the judgment (*see 1 John 2:1*). “Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him” (*Heb. 9:28, NLT*). Through His sacrifice and mediation, sin has been dealt with. Now He comes again for those who “love his appearing” (*2 Tim. 4:8*).

**Read** Hebrews 6:19, 20. Why does He invite us to follow Him, and what do we discover as we follow?

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“The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, ‘whither the forerunner is for us entered.’ Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption. The salvation of man is accomplished at an infinite expense to heaven; the sacrifice made is equal to the broadest demands of the broken law of God. Jesus has opened the way to the Father’s throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 489.

The plan of salvation is a complete plan to resolve the great controversy and rescue this planet from Satan’s grip. Jesus’ life revealed God’s love to a needy world and a watching universe. His death revealed the hideousness of sin and provided salvation for all humanity. His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary provides the benefits of the atonement to each one who reaches out in faith to receive them.

**How does Christ’s death on the cross relate to His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, and why is the judgment so necessary to the plan of salvation?**



**Further Thought:** Notice how Jesus' work for us in the judgment and our role are described: "Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' Psalm 51:17. And to the accuser of His people He declares: 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

"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."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.

"We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of their probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 489, 490.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① What emotions are stirred at the thought that Jesus is lifting His wounded hands for us before the Father? Why is this our only hope in the judgment?
- ② We are living in the Day of Atonement. Atonement is the work of God in saving lost sinners. Why, then, should any day dedicated to the work of God in saving sinners be good news?
- ③ Notice what Ellen G. White wrote: "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."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 2, 1908. How can you make this hope your own?

# Running From Church: Part 1

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go. Raised in a family that followed a non-Christian world religion, she had visited her own house of worship on holidays and to observe animal sacrifices for more than 40 years. So, it came as a shock when her husband and 20-year-old son, Rosen, were offered a Bible by a stranger on the street.

“Take this and come to our meeting this evening,” the stranger said.

He said refreshments also would be available.

At home, Aneliya balked at the invitation. “What are we going to do there?” she asked. “I don’t want to go. I belong to another religion.”

But Rosen wanted to go to the church.

“Come,” he said. “We’ll eat and listen to a few things.”

All five members of the refugee family went to the meeting in the European city. They exchanged greetings with church members, and they sipped tea and ate cake with them. During the church program, Aneliya heard people talking about Jesus, but she couldn’t understand the words.

*What are they talking about?* she wondered. It was a normal reaction for someone from her faith background when first exposed to the Bible.

Rosen, however, was fascinated by the meeting. Afterward, he started Bible studies with Paul, the stranger who had offered the Bible on the street.

Before long, Rosen asked his mother to come to church for his baptism.

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go.

“I don’t understand what a baptism is,” she said. “I won’t go.”

Rosen was baptized without her.

Then Aneliya and her family were evicted from their rented apartment. They had money for rent, but they couldn’t find a place to live. Church members joined the search but to no avail. Church members invited the family to stay temporarily in the children’s Sabbath School classroom.

Church was the last place Aneliya wanted to go. But she had no choice. She and the family lived in the church for seven months.

During that time, Paul visited the family and read from the Bible. Aneliya wondered why he was reading the Bible. She was convinced that only her religion’s sacred writings contained the truth. She wondered, *How will this Bible help me get an apartment? Why can’t we find an apartment?*

On Sabbaths, Paul invited the family to attend church services. Aneliya fled. When she saw the worship service starting, she ran out the door. But her 22-year-old son, Sergei, was moved by what he heard. He was baptized.

After the family found a new home, both of Aneliya’s sons began to plead with her to consider Jesus.

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# The Foundation of God's Government



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 14:6–12; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Prov. 28:9; Dan. 7:25.*

**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*).

Through intensive Bible study, Adventists came to understand the significance of the law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Looking into the heart of God's law, they also discovered the significance of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment. In fact, this commandment more than any other clearly identifies God as our Creator, the foundation of all true worship—a theme that will be especially relevant in the final days of earth's history (*see Rev. 14:6–12*).

Satan's aim from the beginning has been to thwart the worship of God through undermining the law of God. He knows that to offend “in one point” means to be “guilty of all” (*James 2:10*); so, he encourages people to transgress God's law. Satan hates the Sabbath because it reminds people of the Creator and how He is to be worshiped. But it also is enshrined in God's law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Because the law is what defines sin, as long as people seek to be faithful to God, then His law must continue to be valid, including the Sabbath commandment.

The aim of this lesson is to show the link between the sanctuary, God's law, the Sabbath, and the coming crisis over the mark of the beast. We also will explore the relevance of the Sabbath to an end-time generation.

\* *Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 25–27 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.*

## The Sanctuary and the Law

**Read** Revelation 11:19, Exodus 25:16, Exodus 31:18, and Revelation 12:17. What do these verses indicate was in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary?

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The Day of Atonement was a day of judgment. All of Israel was commanded to take part in this event by repentance, soul searching, and refraining from all work (*see Lev. 23:29–31*). On this day alone the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place to make atonement for sin. There, in the innermost apartment of the sanctuary, was the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was God's Ten Commandment law, written on tables of stone. The golden cover of the ark was called the mercy seat, where blood was sprinkled to cleanse the sanctuary from sin. God's presence was manifest in Shekinah glory above the mercy seat. Every sacrifice offered revealed God's mercy toward sinful human beings, but the Day of Atonement shows that sin is remembered until the day of judgment (*Heb. 10:3*) and that it could really be removed only through faith in the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19*). There, in the presence of God, mercy and justice beautifully combine.

Looking into the heavenly sanctuary, the apostle John saw "the temple of God . . . opened" and the "ark of His covenant" revealed (*Rev. 11:19, NKJV*). *The Great Controversy* adds this comment: "Within the holy of holies, in the sanctuary in heaven, the divine law is sacredly enshrined—the law that was spoken by God Himself amid the thunders of Sinai and written with His own finger on the tables of stone. The law of God in the sanctuary in heaven is the great original, of which the precepts inscribed upon the tables of stone and recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch were an unerring transcript. Those who arrived at an understanding of this important point were thus led to see the sacred, unchanging character of the divine law."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 434.

As the early Adventist believers studied the Bible's teaching on the sanctuary, they realized the significance of the law of God and the Sabbath in the heart of God's law. They reasoned that if the law of God was pictured in the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary, it certainly could not have been done away with at the cross.

**Think about the Sabbath, which, at 1,000 miles an hour, comes to us every week without exception. What should that tell us about the importance of the doctrine of Creation? What other doctrine has such a powerful, and reoccurring, reminder?**

## The Immutability of God's Law

**Read** Matthew 5:17, 18; Psalm 111:7, 8; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; 1 John 5:3; and Proverbs 28:9. What do these Bible passages teach regarding the Christian's relationship to the law?

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Seventh-day Adventists follow in the footsteps of the Protestant Reformers who upheld the sanctity of God's law. Note this powerful affirmation of John Wesley: "The ritual or ceremonial law delivered by Moses to the children of Israel, containing all the injunctions and ordinances which related to the old sacrifices and service of the temple, our Lord indeed did come to destroy, to dissolve and utterly abolish. . . . But the moral law, contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, he did not take away. It was not the design of his coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken, which 'stands fast as the faithful witness in heaven.' . . . Every part of this law must remain in force, upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other."—"Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," Discourse V, John Wesley's *Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1991), pp. 208, 209.

**Compare** Exodus 34:5–7 with Romans 7:11, 12; Psalm 19:7–11; Psalm 89:14; and Psalm 119:142, 172. What do these verses tell us about the relationship between God's law and God's character?

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Since the law of God is a transcript of His character, the foundation of His throne, and the moral basis for humanity, Satan hates it. "None could fail to see that if the earthly sanctuary was a figure or pattern of the heavenly, the law deposited in the ark on earth was an exact transcript of the law in the ark in heaven; and that an acceptance of the truth concerning the heavenly sanctuary involved an acknowledgment of the claims of God's law and the obligation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Here was the secret of the bitter and determined opposition to the harmonious exposition of the Scriptures that revealed the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 435.

**What are the reasons people often give to argue that we no longer are obligated to keep the Ten Commandments? What do you think is really behind it?**

## The Sabbath and the Law

**Read** Revelation 14:6, 7; Revelation 4:11; Genesis 2:1–3; and Exodus 20:8–11. What is the relationship between Creation, the Sabbath, and the law of God?

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Creation speaks of our value in God's sight. We are not alone in the universe—some speck of cosmic dust—nor are we a genetic accident. In other words, the common scientific scenario of life's origins, which has been picked up by the news media and popular culture, presents a view of our origins that is in every way incompatible with the biblical account.

We are here because Jesus created us. And He is worthy of our worship not only because He created us but also because He redeemed us. Creation and Redemption are at the heart of all true worship. Therefore, the Sabbath is vital to understanding the plan of salvation. The Sabbath speaks of a Creator's care and a Redeemer's love.

At the conclusion of Creation week, God rested in the beauty and majesty of the world He had made. He also rested as an example to us. The Sabbath is a weekly pause to praise the One who made us. As we worship on the Sabbath, we open our hearts to receive the special blessing He placed in that day only, and in no other day.

The Sabbath points us to a Creator who loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from His purpose for us. The Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in Him. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (*Ezek. 20:12, 20*). It is a symbol of rest, not of works; of grace, not of legalism; of assurance, not of condemnation; of depending upon God for salvation, not on ourselves. True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us.

The message of Revelation 14, God's end-time message for the world, calls people to rest in His love and care each Sabbath. It calls us to remember the One who created us and give Him glory. Keeping the Sabbath also is a connecting link between the perfection of Eden and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth to come. It reminds us that one day the splendors of Eden will be restored.

**Most Seventh-day Adventists have faced the charge of being legalistic, and that charge is usually connected with our keeping the Sabbath. Discuss the Sabbath as a symbol of Redemption and righteousness by faith. Why would obeying God's command to rest lead people to think we are trying to work our way to heaven?**

## The Mark of the Beast

**Read** Revelation 12:12, 17 and Revelation 13:7. How do these texts reveal Satan's wrath? Why is the devil so angry with God's end-time people?

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Revelation 12 outlines the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan down through the ages. It climaxes with Satan's final attack on the people of God. Revelation 13 introduces the dragon's two allies, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. These two powers join him in making war on God's people.

**Read** Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15 and Revelation 14:7, 9–11. (See also *Rev. 15:4, Rev. 16:2, Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:4, Rev. 22:9.*) What one key theme appears in all of these verses?

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Note the contrast. Either people worship the Creator or they worship something else. The Creator is worthy of worship (*Rev. 5:9*). The controversy between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (*Isa. 14:14, NKJV*). Satan wanted the worship belonging only to the Creator. According to Revelation 13, he succeeds through the activity of the sea beast (*Rev. 13:4*).

A comparison with Daniel 7 shows that this beast is the same as the little horn that "seeks to change times and laws" and exercises authority for 1,260 prophetic "days," that is, for 1,260 years (*Dan. 7:25; compare Rev. 13:5; see lesson 6*). The only part of God's law, the Ten Commandments, dealing with time is the fourth commandment. This church has attempted to change the day of worship from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day of the week.

For an earthly power to seek to change the day of worship, the seventh-day Sabbath, which God Himself gave as a sign of His authority (*Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20*), is an attempt to usurp divine authority at the most basic level possible. On this point, then, is the focus of the final conflict over true and false worship.

For this reason, Revelation identifies the people who are faithful to God as those "who keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*). This includes the seventh-day Sabbath, not Sunday. Those who refuse the final call of the three angels to worship God on His holy day (*Isa. 58:13*) and who worship the beast on his counterfeit sabbath, Sunday, will receive the mark of the beast (see lesson 11).

## The Three Angels' Messages

In Revelation 14:7, the first angel cries 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’ ” (*NKJV*). Heaven’s appeal is for us to give our supreme allegiance and heartfelt worship to the Creator in light of impending judgment.

The second angel declares, “ ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’ ” (*Rev. 14:8, NKJV*). Babylon represents a fallen apostate religious system that has rejected the message of the first angel in favor of a false system of worship. That’s why Revelation 14:9–11 warns against worshipping “the beast and his image.” Two opposing choices are presented here—worship of the Creator or worship of the beast. Every person on planet Earth will make their final, irrevocable decision over who has their total allegiance—Jesus or Satan.

**Read** Revelation 14:12. What are the two identifying characteristics of those who refuse to worship the beast? Why are both vitally important?

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God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in the history of the world. Through the gift of Christ’s righteousness, they will live grace-filled, obedient lives. Worshiping the Creator stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast and is expressed in keeping the commandments of God. This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or allegiance to the beast power centers in worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is the Sabbath.

These committed followers of the Savior will not only have faith “in” Jesus but will also have the faith “of” Jesus. The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the demons in hell and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot reason why, and hopes when it cannot understand. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith. It will carry us through the crisis ahead. When the final crisis breaks and we face an economic boycott, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself, the faith of Jesus will carry us through earth’s final hours until Jesus returns.

**How is God preparing your faith today for what is coming in the future?**



**Further Thought:** “In the absence of Bible testimony in their favor, many with unwearying persistence urged—forgetting how the same reasoning had been employed against Christ and His apostles: ‘Why do not our great men understand this Sabbath question? But few believe as you do. It cannot be that you are right and that all the men of learning in the world are wrong.’

“To refute such arguments it was needful only to cite the teachings of the Scriptures and the history of the Lord’s dealings with His people in all ages.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 455

“Christians of past generations observed the Sunday, supposing that in so doing they were keeping the Bible Sabbath; and there are now true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who honestly believe that Sunday is the Sabbath of divine appointment. God accepts their sincerity of purpose and their integrity before Him. But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshiping the beast and his image. As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—‘the mark of the beast.’ And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive ‘the mark of the beast.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 449.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The world is changing so quickly, so dramatically. Why must we always be vigilant so that last-day events don’t catch us unprepared?
- ❷ How does an understanding of the judgment and the law of God harmonize with the fact that we are saved by grace alone?
- ❸ What are ways you can witness to those who don’t grasp the significance of the true Sabbath and sincerely keep Sunday, the first day of the week?
- ❹ What dangers lie in the union of church and state powers? How as Christians are we to relate to the government?

## Running From Church: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After two young refugees gave their hearts to Jesus in a European city, they began to plead with their mother to consider Jesus.

“Mother, don’t you want to be saved?” asked 20-year-old Rosen.

His mother, Aneliya, erupted like a volcano. “I will never leave my religion!” she yelled, pounding on a table. “I’ll keep my religion until I die!”

Her 22-year-old son, Sergei, spoke about how Jesus was crucified for people’s sins and resurrected on the third day.

“It’s impossible that He was resurrected,” Aneliya said.

“If you believe in Jesus, and die, you also will be resurrected,” Sergei said.

One day, he read John 3:36 to his mother: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (NKJV). “We die,” he said to his mother, “but when Jesus returns, we will be raised from the graves.”

“My son, how will we be raised from the graves?” she asked.

“We will live again,” he said.

It was a big question for Aneliya. It was the biggest question on her mind. How was it possible to be resurrected and live forever?

As she listened to her sons, Bible verses that had once confused her began to make sense. She began to understand what Paul, the man who had first invited the family to church, had read to them from the Bible and what she had heard about Jesus during her first church visit. Joy filled her heart. Aneliya later understood that the Holy Spirit had entered her heart. Soon Aneliya acknowledged Jesus as her Savior. When she did that, a desire filled her to spend time with Him and to attend worship services at church.

Then her 15-year-old daughter was baptized. Aneliya had skipped the baptisms of her two sons, but she went to her daughter’s baptism. She congratulated her afterward. “Mother, your turn is next,” her daughter said.

Sergei gave Bible studies to his mother, and she also studied the Bible on her own. A thirst grew in her heart to live for Christ. Then the day came, when she was 47, that she gave her heart to Jesus in baptism. “It was with great joy,” she said in an interview. “I cannot describe my joy. It was the first time in forty-seven years that I had such joy. I believed and accepted Jesus Christ.”

Today, Aneliya is 48 and a missionary to her people. Her husband has accepted the Bible, and even his parents back in their native country are keeping the Sabbath. Aneliya also gives Bible studies to her community.

“Once I had wanted to run away from church, but now a desire has filled me to run to church,” she said. “The Holy Spirit brought me to God.”

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# Spiritualism Exposed



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 10:28; Eccles. 9:5; Isa. 8:19, 20; John 11:11–14, 21–25; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 16:13, 14; Matt. 24:23–27; 2 Thess. 2:9–12.*

**Memory Text:** “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (*1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, NKJV*).

Decades ago, stories surfaced about near death experiences (NDEs), in which people who died and were then revived gave incredible accounts of what they had seen and heard while “dead.” Millions now believe that these accounts are evidence that the dead are not really dead. This foundational belief of spiritualism is one of Satan’s most widespread and effective deceptions.

In fact, spiritualism began back in Eden with the serpent’s lie to Eve, “You will not surely die” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). This idea also lay at the root of one of the greatest spurious religious movements of the nineteenth century with the Fox sisters’ claim, later admitted to be fraudulent, that they could receive answers to their questions from spirits of the dead.

The aim of this lesson is to show that our only safeguard against Satan’s last-day delusions is a personal relationship with Christ and a solid grounding in the teachings of the Bible. This includes its teaching about death, regardless of what our eyes and ears and hearts might try to tell us.

\* Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 31–34 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.

## The Deadly Consequences of Spiritualism

The fable that death is really just entrance to a new stage of life is based on the concept of the soul's natural immortality. This pagan idea infiltrated the church early on as it moved away from its biblical foundations in an attempt to make its faith understandable to the wider Roman world. "The theory of the immortality of the soul was one of those false doctrines that Rome, borrowing from paganism, incorporated into the religion of Christendom."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 549.

**“ ‘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).**

**What** should this verse alone tell us about the supposed immortality of the soul?

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The Lord forbade His people from involvement in occultism of any kind. They were not to tolerate among them “a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (*Deut. 18:11, NKJV*). Such people were to be stoned to death (*Lev. 20:27*). The punishment seems incredibly harsh, but it was designed to protect Israel from worshiping false gods.

Witchcraft is demonic. It seduces people into false worship and counterfeits a genuine relationship with God, but it can never satisfy the deepest needs of the heart. Spiritualism is at the heart of Satan's plan to take the world captive. But Jesus, by His grace and power, sets captives free from the chains of evil that bind them.

**Read** Ecclesiastes 9:5; Job 7:7–9; and Isaiah 8:19, 20. What do these Bible passages teach us about death and communication with the dead?

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Though unbiblical, the belief that the dead go right to heaven at death has been around for so long and is so firmly entrenched that it's very difficult for people to let go of it. People use a few texts that are taken out of context to try to justify the belief. But this false teaching leaves them with no protection against the deceptions Satan can foist on them, especially in the final crisis.

**What has been your experience with trying to explain the state of the dead to other Christians? What, if anything, have you found effective?**

## Death in the Old Testament

**Read** Psalm 6:5, Psalm 115:17, 1 Kings 2:10, 1 Kings 11:43, and 1 Kings 14:20. What do these verses teach about the state of the dead?

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The Old Testament does not teach the immortality of the soul. Nor does it teach that after death the faithful soar off to the bliss of heaven for eternity and the unfaithful descend to hell, where they burn for eternity. It teaches that death is a sleep. The book of Kings uses the expression “they rested [slept] with their fathers” to describe the death of the patriarchs. The Psalms call it the “sleep of death” (*Ps. 13:3; compare Ps. 90:5*). Referring to death, Job speaks of not awaking from sleep (*Job 14:12*). The psalmist adds, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (*Ps. 17:15, NKJV*).

When the Assyrian army was defeated and destroyed, the death of the soldiers is called their “final sleep” (*Ps. 76:6, CJB*). The idea of the dead as disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living is not a biblical concept at all but pure paganism.

A failure to understand the truth about death leaves us open to the deceptions of Satan. “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

**Read** Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:25, 26. What elements about the state of the dead are added by these verses?

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Death is a rest in sleep until the resurrection. There are no disembodied spirits hovering around to communicate with the living. Although the pagans believed in a spirit world, the Israelites understood death as a sleep until resurrection morning.

Though we mourn for the dead, think this way about those who die in Christ: they close their eyes in death, and then, regardless of how long it takes until Jesus returns, the next thing they know is the Second Coming. The first thought they might have at the resurrection is *Wow! Jesus really did come back soon after all!*

## Death in the New Testament

**Read** John 11:11–14, 21–25; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54; and 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17. How do the New Testament writers' descriptions of death compare with those in the Old Testament?

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Both the Old and New Testaments use the symbolism of death as a sleep. At least 53 times in the Bible, the word “sleep” is equated with death. The Bible writers concur that there is no conscious existence in an immortal soul that leaves the body immediately after death.

The New Testament adds another dimension, one already hinted at in the Old: the glorious resurrection at Christ's return.

The Gospels emphasize that eternal life is in Christ alone. All the demons in hell cannot rob believers of their assurance of eternal life. Christ conquered death on the cross. The grave can no longer hold its victims. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee that all believers will one day be resurrected from the grave at His return.

Look at these words of Paul: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (*1 Cor. 15:16–18, NKJV*). How does one make any sense of these verses if the dead, at death, already are in the bliss of heaven? What does Paul mean that they “have perished” if, in fact, they already are in heaven?

Instead, Paul's whole point is that Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our resurrection and that without the Resurrection, “your faith is futile; you are still in your sins,” and the dead remain in the ground, perished.

These verses fit in perfectly with other Bible texts about the hope we have in the resurrection at Jesus' return when we will receive the “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (*1 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*). If, however, the dead already are in heaven, why does Peter speak of an inheritance “reserved in heaven” for us? Clearly, New Testament believers eagerly looked forward to the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, and this hope inspired them to faithfulness in the trials of life.

**Why is the resurrection such a powerful hope for the Christian faith? What if we had the cross but no resurrection? What hope would we have? Why, then, is the resurrection such an important part of our faith?**

## Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 1

**Read** Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:7–9; Revelation 13:13, 14; and Revelation 16:13, 14. What kind of deceptions will people face in the last days?

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The devil will use “signs and wonders” and spectacular miracles to deceive multitudes just before the coming of Jesus. Commenting on the deceptive power of demonic spirits, Ángel Rodríguez makes this telling statement: “Their power of persuasion is to be found not in the content of their message but in the power of supernatural manifestations called ‘signs’ or ‘miracles.’ They perform/do (*poieō*) signs, thus appealing to the affective side of human beings rather than to their discretionary and rational abilities. The fact that these signs are performed by demons shows that the unifying force of the message of the three demons [dragon, beast, and false prophet] is spiritualistic in nature—God is not their source or origin. As the cosmic conflict approaches its closure, demonic power will enter the arena of human history in an unprecedented way. Spiritualism, whose very foundation is the non-biblical teaching of the immortality of the soul, will nearly take the world captive.”—“The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

**Why** is it dangerous to trust our emotions? What roles do they play, good and bad, in our faith experience? How might Satan bypass our thinking processes and appeal to our feelings?

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“Satan has long been preparing for his final effort to deceive the world. . . . Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. . . . Except those who are kept by the power of God, through faith in His word, the whole world will be swept into the ranks of this delusion. The people are fast being lulled to a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 561, 562.

Our sole security is in Jesus and His Word. It’s not hard to see how millions, even billions, who do not understand the state of the dead could be swept away by delusions involving the idea that the dead live on after death.

**Even now, what are some common deceptions that those who understand that the dead sleep are protected from?**

## Spiritualism in the Last Days: Part 2

Our hope of salvation is rooted in Christ. His bloodstained hands beckon us to accept the sacrifice so freely provided at infinite cost. Soon Christ will return to claim His own. Titus 2:13 calls the second coming of Christ “the blessed hope.”

Satan’s goal is to destroy this hope. He will perform miracles, signs, and wonders, anything and everything that could lead people away from Bible truth and salvation in Christ.

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). In the final struggle, Satan is going to do all that he can to prevent people from either keeping the “commandments of God” or having “the faith of Jesus,” or both. Hence, the need to be careful of any teaching that, even if accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles, would turn us away from either of these two characteristics of the remnant.

**Read** Matthew 24:23–27; 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12. What do these passages tell us about Satan’s deceptive power and manner of working?

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In the last moments of time, Satan will enact his final deception: “Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the government of heaven. By these agencies, rulers and subjects will be alike deceived. Persons will arise pretending to be Christ Himself, and claiming the title and worship which belong to the world’s Redeemer. They will perform wonderful miracles of healing and will profess to have revelations from heaven *contradicting the testimony of the Scriptures*.”

“As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13–15.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624 (emphasis supplied).

**Why is understanding the truth about how Christ returns, as well as the state of the dead, so important in order not to be deceived?**



**Further Thought:** A recent book by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven*, is premised on the idea that, at death, the dead remain alive in some kind of conscious existence, with “near death experiences” (NDEs) being used as part of the “proof.” One example: “Another girl, who had an NDE during heart surgery, said she met her brother in the afterlife—which surprised her because she didn’t have a brother. When she later recovered and told her father, he revealed to her for the first time that she did, indeed, have a brother, but he had died before she was born.”—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Heaven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2021), p. 69. Strobel struggles, however, to harmonize the idea of an immediate afterlife with the clear biblical teaching that only when Christ returns do Christians receive their final reward.

We have been warned: “Many will be confronted by the spirits of devils personating beloved relatives or friends and declaring the most dangerous heresies. These visitants will appeal to our tenderest sympathies and will work miracles to sustain their pretensions. We must be prepared to withstand them with the Bible truth that the dead know not anything and that they who thus appear are the spirits of devils.

“Just before us is ‘the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.’ Revelation 3:10. All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. Satan ‘works with all deceivableness of unrighteousness’ to gain control of the children of men, and his deceptions will continually increase. But he can gain his object only as men voluntarily yield to his temptations. Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defense. ‘Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee’ (verse 10), is the Saviour’s promise. He would sooner send every angel out of heaven to protect His people than leave one soul that trusts in Him to be overcome by Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.

## **Discussion Questions:**

- ① What subtle spiritualistic influences might Satan be using to influence the mind? What role does mass media play?
- ② How would you share your faith with a friend who just lost a loved one and believed that this person was in heaven? What is appropriate to say, and what is not appropriate?

# Unreached Town in Nigeria

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The Nigerian town of Umuacha is located at a strategic crossroads. The town boasts a big market that attracts daily crowds from neighboring towns. But it lacked a Seventh-day Adventist church.

The absence of an Adventist church was astonishing because Adventist churches had been established more than 70 years earlier in all of the surrounding towns. Even the headquarters of the Adventist Church's Aba North Conference was located nearby. But Umuacha had no church.

Why?

The first church opened in Umuacha more than 80 years earlier, and it resolved to be the only church in town. As the years passed, however, townspeople sold their land to outsiders who, in turn, constructed their own churches. The oldest church accepted the newcomers, but all declared that Adventists, who worshiped on a different day, would never be welcome.

Adventist churches in the neighboring towns struggled to reach Umuacha. When they sought to organize evangelistic meetings, no one would give them a meeting place. Hopes were raised when the church in nearby Mba conducted a two-week evangelistic meeting outside the town and afterward opened a branch Sabbath School. But the Sabbath School closed after only three months. Later, Mba young people held Bible studies that brought several Umuacha families to the Mba church on Sabbaths. But the families stopped attending when their neighbors threw stones at them.

In 2021, the Aba North Conference laid new plans for evangelistic meetings in Umuacha but again struggled to find a site. One landowner agreed to host tent meetings but then abruptly changed his mind. Additional attempts provided unsuccessful that year and in 2022. It seemed hopeless.

Then a church member, Christian, made a new attempt to find a site. While searching, he met Chilaka, the owner of a school.

"You who are running around, what are you looking for?" the school owner asked.

"It seems that I am looking for you," Christian replied.

After a discussion, the school owner offered the property for the meetings. Christian gratefully accepted.

For a month, Adventist preachers proclaimed the Word of God in Umuacha. They were joined by a medical team that cared for the sick. In the end, 29 precious souls were baptized. Then someone donated land, and an Adventist church opened in Umuacha.

"Today, the church is progressing to the glory of God," said Caleb Uchenna Onyendi, evangelism director for the Aba North Conference.

God's timing is perfect, he added, pointing to Exodus 9:5, which says, "Then the LORD appointed a set time, saying, 'Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land' " (NKJV). The Lord did just that in the town of Umuacha.

# The Impending Conflict



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 14:7, 9, 12; Rev. 4:11; Rev. 13:1, 2; Rev. 12:3–5, 17; Rev. 13:11–18.*

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

There is a relatively new medical device called a biochip or VeriChip, about the size of a grain of rice, that can be implanted in a patient. The biochip contains information about the patient's medical history, which can then be obtained by passing an external scanner across the area where the biochip or VeriChip has been inserted. Some Christians see this as part of a conspiracy to enforce the mark of the beast. For others, the mark of the beast has to do with the bar codes on cans of food, or it is a mysterious number on dollar bills that supposedly adds up to 666. For some it has to do with the Masonic order, the Illuminati, black U.N. helicopters, or the United Nations.

The aim of this week's lesson is to reveal the coming conflict over worship. Satan will challenge God's authority by attempting to undermine God's law. Specifically, the Sabbath will become the center of a global conflict over worship. Satan hates the Sabbath because he hates the Creator. He will use coercion, pressure, and force to break our commitment to Christ. There will be a collision of beliefs over the true and false day of worship. God's final appeal is an appeal to faithfulness to Christ despite persecution, an economic boycott, imprisonment, and a death decree. This week's study emphasizes Jesus' strength to take us through earth's final conflict.

*\* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 35 and 36 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 15.*

## Revelation's Final Conflict

The message of Revelation is much more than cryptic symbols, strange beasts, and odd images. It speaks of eternal truths given by a loving God to an end-time generation. The conflict between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship. It will come to its final climax over worship.

**Compare** Revelation 14:7, 9 with Revelation 4:11. What is the overarching theme of Revelation in this conflict between good and evil?

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Throughout Revelation, worship and creation are indissolubly linked. Revelation 14:7 calls us to worship the Lord of all creation. Against the backdrop of evolution, which has taken the world by storm during the past two centuries, the Sabbath is an eternal reminder of our identity. It constantly reinforces that we are created beings and our Creator is worthy of our allegiance and worship. This is one reason the devil hates the Sabbath so much.

**Read** Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12. How does worshipping the Creator find its final expression?

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Worshipping the Creator through keeping the commandments of God stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast. God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him despite the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in history.

“While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

Revelation 14:12 states that these committed followers of the Savior will have “the faith of Jesus.” The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep that it trusts when it cannot see. It perseveres when it cannot understand. It is a gift from Jesus that we receive by faith and will carry us through the impending conflict.

**The seventh-day Sabbath is so foundational a symbol of God as Creator that it goes back to Eden itself. Thus, to seek to usurp it, as Rome did (see Dan. 7:25), is to seek to usurp the authority of God at the most foundational level possible, God as Creator. How does this truth help us see why it will be such a controverted point in the last days?**

## The Coming Crisis

The mark of the beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the fiercest and very worst stage of Satan's war against God. Ever since Jesus died on the cross, the enemy has known he was defeated, but he is determined to take as many as possible down with him. His first strategy in this campaign is deception. When deception does not work, he resorts to force. He is ultimately behind the decree that anyone who refuses to worship the beast or receive his mark will be put to death.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for obeying God's command. Jesus said it would happen even among believers.

**Read** John 16:2, Matthew 10:22, 2 Timothy 3:12, and 1 Peter 4:12. **What did the New Testament church experience, and how does that apply to Christ's end-time church?**

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Throughout Christian history, persecution was common. It happened in pagan Rome but was especially evident in the vicious persecution of Bible-believing Christians by the medieval church. The mark of the beast is the final link in this hellish chain. Like past persecutions, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship.

The prophecy indicates that persecution will start with economic sanctions: no one can buy or sell unless they have the mark. Anyone who refuses to receive the mark will eventually be placed under a death decree (*Rev. 13:15, 17*).

The devil already is preparing professed Christians to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes by encouraging them to make compromises in their lives. When it appears that the whole world is following the beast in wondering admiration (*Rev. 13:3*), suddenly the scene changes, and the prophetic camera focuses on God's people. Revelation 14:12 gives us this picture. "Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (*NKJV*). God's people live lives of godly obedience. By His grace, they stand firm when everything is shaking all around them. While the world is following the beast, they "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (*Rev. 14:4, NKJV*). By the power of Christ, they triumph over the powers of hell arrayed against them.

As we saw in lesson 9, the central conflict between good and evil is over worship. The beast uses deception and, when that fails, force and coercion.

**How quickly now do you allow, if at all, economic considerations to compromise your Sabbath keeping?**

## Identifying the Beast: Part 1

**Read** Revelation 13:1, 2. Where does this beast rise from, and who gives it authority?

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The book of Revelation identifies the dragon primarily as Satan. Revelation 12:3–5 says the dragon attempted to destroy, “as soon as it was born,” the “male Child,” who was later “caught up to God and His throne” (*NKJV*). It was the devil, working through pagan Rome, who tried to destroy Christ (*see Matt. 2:16–18*). The archenemy of God and humanity works through political and religious institutions to accomplish his purposes.

About this beast power we’re told, “The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority” (*Rev. 13:2, NKJV*). This prophecy was precisely fulfilled hundreds of years later when the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople, in modern-day Turkey. This left a power vacuum at the former throne or seat of the caesars, the imperial city of Rome. Thus, pagan Rome gave the beast its seat, or capital city.

Isaac Backus stated, “By removing the seat of the empire to Constantinople, . . . Constantine made way for the bishop of Rome to exalt himself above all men upon earth, and above the God of Heaven.”—*The Infinite Importance of the Obedience of Faith, and of Separation from the World*, p. 16, quoted in Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 3, p. 213. According to Thomas Hobbes, “the Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof.”—*Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 386. A careful analysis reveals that the sea beast of Revelation 13 is an apostate religious power that rises out of Rome and becomes a worldwide system of worship (*Rev. 13:3, 4*). This beast is not a person; it is a religious organization that has substituted the truth of God’s Word for human decrees.

**Read** Revelation 13:1, 6. What key word is used to identify the beast power?

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The Bible defines *blasphemy* in John 10:33 and Luke 5:21 with two examples: (1) a man pretending to be or claiming to be God, and (2) a man claiming the power to forgive sins. These accusations against Jesus were unjust because He is truly God and, therefore, has the right to forgive sins. The Roman Papacy has two distinctive doctrines that the Bible calls blasphemy: its claims that its priests have the power to forgive sins and that the pope has the prerogatives of God on earth.

## Identifying the Beast: Part 2

Rather than worshipping the beast, God's people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshipping Him. Their obedience springs from their heart of love. They are committed to Him because they know how committed He is to them.

**Read** Revelation 13:5. Write this identifying characteristic in the space below.

Recall from lesson 4 that God gives us a key for understanding prophetic time—one prophetic day equals one literal year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). Calculating the time period of 42 months mentioned in Revelation 13:5 using the 30-day Hebrew month equals 1,260 prophetic days or literal years.

The Papacy exercised great influence from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. But when Berthier, Napoleon's general, took the pope captive in A.D. 1798, the prophetic period of papal supremacy ended, and Revelation's prophecy was fulfilled: "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity" (*Rev. 13:10, NKJV*). The blow to the Papacy was extremely serious but not fatal. According to Revelation 13:12, the deadly wound would be healed. The Papacy's influence once again would be felt worldwide.

Today, world leaders welcome the pontiff as an ambassador of the church of Rome and visit him regularly at the Vatican. In a world of unprecedented instability, the scene is being set for the Roman pontiff to become the acclaimed moral leader of the world who can bring people together. During his speech on June 6, 2012, to more than 15,000 people gathered in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI declared, "Sunday is the day of the Lord and of men and women, a day in which everyone must be able to be free, free for the family and free for God. In defending Sunday we defend human freedom."—[https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20120606.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120606.html) (accessed October 10, 2022). *The Great Controversy* clearly reveals where this movement will one day ultimately lead: "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. . . . They will be accused of disaffection toward the government. Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. In legislative halls and courts of justice, commandment keepers will be misrepresented and condemned."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 592.

**However hard it is now to see something like this happening, look at how quickly our world can change. What should these changes tell us about how quickly end-time events can come upon us?**

## The Beast From the Earth

**Read** Revelation 13:11–18. How does this second beast differ from the first beast of Revelation 13?

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The first beast rose out of the sea; the second beast comes “up out of the earth” (*Rev. 13:11, NKJV*). The sea represents “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (*Rev. 17:15, NKJV*). The earth, then, represents a sparsely populated area of the world. This second beast arises near the close of the prophetic period during which the first beast exercises authority (*Rev. 13:5*). That is, it rises to prominence around A.D. 1798.

The United States precisely fits this description. It declared its independence in A.D. 1776, adopted its constitution in A.D. 1789, and was recognized as a world power by the late nineteenth century.

John continues, “He had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11, NKJV*). Horns in Bible prophecy symbolize power. Unlike the first beast, this beast has no crowns on its horns, suggesting it is not a monarchy. The two horns represent the two primary governing principles that are the source of the United States’ power and success—political and religious liberty.

**Read** Revelation 13:11, 12. What change do you see in this beast, and how does it speak?

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This gentle, lamblike nation ultimately speaks like a dragon. It exercises “all the authority of the first beast” (*Rev. 13:12, NKJV*) and abandons its principles of religious liberty, causing “the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast” (*Rev. 13:12, NKJV*). The United States will lead out in requiring everyone on earth to worship the first beast by recognizing the Papacy’s spiritual and secular authority. According to this prophecy, the United States forms an image to the beast—a union of church and state—and it will require everyone to worship this image.

What’s fascinating is that at the time when first identified as this beast power, the United States was nowhere near the military and economic behemoth it was to become and remains now.

**Think about the political instability in America today. How might that one day lead to the fulfillment of this prophecy?**



**Further Thought:** Worshiping the beast and its image alludes to Daniel 3, in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were commanded by the king of Babylon to bow down to a golden image or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Ancient Babylon, modern Babylon—the issue is worship. True worship springs from a mind taught by God’s Word, a soul transformed by His love, and a heart filled with His Spirit. Then we will not be “conformed to this world” but live according to God’s will, which is found in His Word. That is our only safety!

“God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan’s constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 591.

“In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 593.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** How can we live in the expectation of the coming of Christ and share that hope without becoming alarmists?
- 2** Dwell more on the question of worship. What does our daily life, our daily routine, tell us about who or what we worship?
- 3** How can we help ourselves and others face the future with confidence and not with fear?
- 4** What practical difference does understanding last-day events make in our lives today?

## No to Pork, Yes to Sabbath

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Sara thought about the Seventh-day Adventist Church as she helped her mother sell pork and beer in Mozambique in southeast Africa.

*Why do Adventists go to church on Saturday?* she wondered.

As a small girl, Sara had gone to the Adventist Church several times with her big brother, who was an Adventist. But then he had moved to another town, and she had gone back to the church of her mother.

As she worked with her mother, memories about the Adventist Church returned. She thought about Adventist neighbors who had moved next door. Sara decided to ask them why they went to church on Saturday.

The neighbors welcomed Sara's question, and they opened the Bible to the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8–10. Sara read, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work" (NKJV). She also read other verses about the holiness of the seventh-day Sabbath. She saw that Jesus worshiped on the seventh day when He lived on earth. She decided to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

Mother was furious when Sara told her that she would no longer sell pork and beer on Saturdays. She forbade Sara from going to the Adventist Church. Sara went anyway. She wanted to honor her mother as God commands in the fifth commandment (*Exod. 20:12*). But she also realized that it was more important "to obey God rather than men" (*Acts 5:29*).

Tensions escalated further when Sara stopped selling pork and beer altogether. She explained to Mother that God does not condone the eating of unclean meat, such as pork (*Lev. 11:7*), or the drinking of alcohol (*Prov. 20:1*). Furthermore, she said, the Bible teaches that "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (*1 Cor. 10:31*), and selling products unapproved by God would not glorify Him.

Mother threw Sara out of the house. With nowhere to go, Sara left town and moved in with her Adventist brother and his wife and their sons. Her heart was heavy. *Is this the cost of following Jesus?* she wondered.

Sara's brother presented her case to leaders at his church. Through their efforts, an Adventist pastor met with Mother. She listened carefully to what he said. She didn't agree with him on everything. But her face softened as they spoke. She said Sara could return home.

Today, Mother still does not share Sara's convictions. Sara is praying for the Holy Spirit to touch her heart. She knows that the God who gave her a fuller understanding of His love can do the same for her mother.

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*Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the good news of Jesus' soon coming in Africa and around the world.*

# Earth's Closing Events



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 8:32; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Rev. 7:1, 2; Rev. 14:1; Joel 2:21–24; Hos. 6:3; James 5:7, 8; Rev. 18:1–4.*

**Memory Text:** “Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding” (*Proverbs 23:23, NKJV*).

Suppose you had a daughter driving home from college for summer vacation. As you wait for her to arrive, you anxiously monitor the weather reports. You become worried as the weather rapidly deteriorates. Storm clouds loom on the horizon. Winds blow fiercely. The heavens open and rain pours down. Trees are blown over. Soon the main road home is impassable. Then you hear from one of your neighbors that it is possible to get through on a secondary road. Cars can navigate around some downed tree limbs. Although communication is difficult, you are able to get a text message to your daughter, carefully detailing how she can get home safely.

More than anything else, Jesus wants to take us through the storms of life and get us home. Ellen G. White writes, “A storm is coming, relentless in its fury. Are we prepared to meet it?”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 315. The purpose of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ministry in heaven's sanctuary is to ensure that we get home. The prophetic messages of Daniel and Revelation are divine instructions, especially for an end-time people, to help us through life's storms so that one day we can feel the warm embrace of a loving Savior.

The aim of this week's lesson is to reveal what the prophetic Word says about the closing events and discover anew Christ's strength to take us through earth's final conflict and get us home.

*\* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 37 and 38 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.*

## Loyalty to God and His Word

**Read** Proverbs 23:23, John 8:32, and John 17:17. What common thread runs through these verses?

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Throughout the ages, the great controversy has been a battle between truth and error. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (*John 8:44*). Jesus is the author of all truth. He declared, “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ” (*John 14:6*). The truth that sets us free from Satan’s deceptions is found in God’s Word. The Bible unmasks Satan’s strategy and reveals God’s plans. Scripture is a lamp to our feet (*Ps. 119:105*). The psalmist declares, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (*Ps. 119:130, NKJV*). He then adds, “The entirety of Your word is truth” (*Ps. 119:160, NKJV*).

**Read 2** Peter 1:16–21. What assurance does the apostle give us regarding prophecy? What illustration does he use to show the importance of God’s prophetic Word?

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We have not followed “cunningly devised fables.” The prophecies of God’s Word light up the road ahead. They help us distinguish truth from error. Without the Bible, we would be left to the whims of human opinion and easily be deceived. “The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness. Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions. . . . The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. . . . None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

**Consider the questions in the quote above. What will enable us to stand in the final crisis? What distracts us from studying God’s Word? How might we be compromising truth for personal pleasure?**

## Sealed for Heaven

In the coming crisis over worship, God's faithful people will not yield to worldly pressures (*Rev. 14:12*). They will be sealed by the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 4:30*) and cannot be moved. In ancient times, seals attested to the authenticity of official documents. They were a distinctive, individualized mark. Since the final conflict centers on worship and God's authority as revealed in His law, we would expect God's seal to be embedded in His law (*compare Isa. 8:16*).

**Read** Exodus 20:8–11. What elements of a seal are contained in the Sabbath commandment?

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Here we have three elements of an authentic seal: (1) the name to whom the seal belongs, “the LORD thy God;” (2) His title, the One who “made”—the Creator; (3) and His territory, “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.” A seal is sometimes called a sign in the Bible (*Rom. 4:11*). The two words are interchangeable. As God's sign or seal in the heart of God's law, the Sabbath is at the center of the final conflict over worship (*Ezek. 20:12, 20; Rev. 12:17*).

**Compare** Revelation 7:1, 2 and Revelation 14:1 with Revelation 13:16, 17. Where are the seal of God and the mark of the beast received? Why do you think there is a difference?

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The seal of God is placed on the forehead. The forehead is a symbol of the mind and represents a conscious decision.

The mark of the beast is received either in the forehead or in the hand indicating that people are convinced intellectually and by their own choice accept Satan's lies or, alternatively, they conform to false worship to avoid being killed.

The devil hates those who are obedient to God. The great controversy comes to a climax when the dragon (Satan) wages war on the believing remnant, who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*). They are settled in their loyalty to Christ.

**Why is day-by-day faithfulness to the Lord the key to being prepared when the final crisis arrives?**

## Whom Do We Worship?

In the last days, the great controversy will be played out, in a dramatic way, over worship. Do we worship the Creator, or do we worship the beast and its image? There is no middle ground. The first angel of Revelation 14 urges men and women to “ ‘worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). In further support of heaven’s appeal, the third angel reveals the dire consequences of worshipping the beast: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation” (*Rev. 14:10*). By contrast, those who worship the Creator are described as keeping “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

Creation is the basis of true worship (*Rev. 4:11*). Since God “created all things through Jesus Christ” (*Eph. 3:9, NKJV*), Satan hates the Creator and has attempted, through earthly powers, to change the Sabbath, the memorial of Creation (*Dan. 7:25*). The coming conflict over the law of God focuses on authority. If Satan can eradicate Sabbath worship, he will declare that his authority is greater than God’s authority. To accomplish this, Satan will attempt to convince or coerce the entire world to accept a counterfeit Sabbath.

However hard it may be now to see this happening, as we have noted before, the world is changing dramatically. The COVID-19 crisis showed us that, overnight, our world can become a different place. Though we don’t know the details that lead to the mark of the beast, it’s not terribly hard to imagine. The world is very unstable, and with the amazing technology out there now, what the Bible warns about can, indeed, come to pass more quickly than we might now imagine.

**Read Revelation 13:13–17. What specific penalties are inflicted upon those who do not receive the mark of the beast?**

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Those who are faithful to Christ, as opposed to following the beast and its image, will face economic penalties as well as the threat of death. Humanity remains what it has always been: corrupt, power-hungry, and violent. However much we don’t yet know about exactly how the final events will unfold, it should not be too hard to envision end-time persecution. Though written in another context completely, these words in John say it all. Talking about Jesus, John wrote that He “had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (*John 2:25, NKJV*).

**Think about the corruption of humanity and the evil that humans are capable of doing. Why does this show how easily final events could come about? Also, even more important, what should this sad truth teach us about guarding our own hearts?**

## The Early and Latter Rain

**Read** Joel 2:21–24 and Acts 2:1–4, 41–47. What prediction was fulfilled in the first century? What impact did it have?

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The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost powerfully launched the Christian church. Three thousand were converted in a day. Acts records miracle after miracle of God's transforming grace: "Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (*Acts 4:4, NKJV*). Only 120 believers gathered to pray, but prayer made a dramatic difference. Rapidly the church added thousands of believers. Even "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (*Acts 6:7, NKJV*). Yes, even many priests became followers of Jesus.

When the disciples were fiercely persecuted in Jerusalem, they "went everywhere preaching the word" (*Acts 8:4, NKJV*). Churches were planted throughout all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (*see Acts 9:31*). After his conversion, the apostle Paul proclaimed Christ throughout the Mediterranean world. In Thessalonica, some Jews opposed to the gospel made this astonishing statement: "'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too'" (*Acts 17:6, NKJV*). What a powerful testimony to what the early church was able to accomplish. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples reached the then-known world in a relatively short time. Joel's prediction of the early rain was fulfilled at Pentecost, but the latter rain will fall with greater power to ready earth's final harvest.

**Read** Zechariah 4:6; Zechariah 10:1; Hosea 6:3; and James 5:7, 8. According to these verses, how will the work of God on earth be finished?

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The terms "early" and "latter" rain are taken from Israel's harvest cycle. The early rain fell in the fall of the year to germinate the seed. The latter rain fell in the spring to ripen the harvest. This describes the work of the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel. "As the 'former rain' was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the 'latter rain' will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

## The Loud Cry

**Read** Revelation 18:1–4, Habakkuk 2:14, and Matthew 24:14. How do these verses say God’s work on earth will be finished?

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The angel announcing the fall of Babylon has “great authority.” Like the angels of Revelation 14, this angel represents human messengers. This angel reveals the glory of God so fully that it illuminates the entire earth. The Greek word for authority or power in the New Testament is *exousia*. It often refers to Christ’s triumph over the principalities and powers of hell. 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 over the principalities and powers of hell. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28, He once again sends them out with “ ‘all authority . . . in heaven and on earth’ ” to “ ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, 19, NKJV*).

Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, going forth with the authority of the living Christ who in His life and death triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell, the New Testament church lightened the earth with the glory of God. In a few short years, the disciples proclaimed the gospel to the then-known world (*Col. 1:23*).

At the end time, the Holy Spirit will be poured out in unprecedented power, and the gospel will be spread rapidly to the ends of the earth. Thousands will be converted in a day, and God’s grace and truth will impact the entire planet. In this way, the world will be warned and the gospel, and the hope it offers, will be spread worldwide.

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

**What is holding back the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the latter rain, and the loud cry? However small our role as individuals might be, what role can we fill in being open and receptive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?**



**Further Thought:** As early as 1851, Adventist pioneers identified the second beast of Revelation 13:11–17 with the United States of America. But it must have been difficult back then to see how the United States could cause all the world to worship the first beast (*Rev. 13:12*). Even by the 1880s the entire United States Navy consisted of just forty-eight aging ships.

But since the end of the Cold War, no power matches the United States militarily. And though Americans have enjoyed wonderful freedoms, as times get harder, it's not difficult to see those freedoms being trampled on—or even completely undermined. Many believe that even now we are seeing this happen.

“All who refuse compliance [in observing the false sabbath] will be visited with civil penalties, and it will finally be declared that they are deserving of death. On the other hand, the law of God enjoining the Creator's rest day demands obedience and threatens wrath against all who transgress its precepts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 604.

“As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. Men of talent and pleasing address, who once rejoiced in the truth, employ their powers to deceive and mislead souls. They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren. When Sabbathkeepers are brought before the courts to answer for their faith, these apostates are the most efficient agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse them, and by false reports and insinuations to stir up the rulers against them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 608.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is an understanding of last-day events so important in the coming crisis? How are the Scriptures a safeguard from deception?
- ❷ Democratic societies worldwide have been bastions of religious freedom for centuries. How might that change rather quickly?
- ❸ Look at Ellen White's statement above. What choices are you making today that could result in your being with those professed Adventists tomorrow?
- ❹ How does the second angel's message change under the loud cry, and what personal preparation can we make for receiving the latter rain to finish God's work on earth?

## Reaching Russian Speakers

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ukrainian national Vadym Krynychny moved to Portugal to install air conditioners. Two decades later, he was ministering to the needs of Ukrainian refugees as the pastor of a Russian-speaking church in Spain.

What happened?

“We started with just a few members, but our church has become a center of influence for many,” said Vadym, 44. “This is a blessing from God.”

After leaving Ukraine, Vadym and his wife, Alina, established a successful air-conditioning business in Portugal and obtained Portuguese citizenship.

But 12 years into their new life, their path changed abruptly when they were asked to help a newly arrived family who didn’t speak Portuguese. Vadym and Alina invited the Russian-speaking family to attend church with them, and the family also accepted an offer to study the Bible together. Three months later, the family gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism.

Vadym and Alina were delighted, and they sought out more Russian speakers to help. In 18 months, they formed a house church of 20 people. Vadym preached every Sabbath, and Alina oversaw the music. “On Saturday evenings, we were exhausted from the day’s activities,” Vadym said. “But we were filled with an inexpressible satisfaction, joy, and happiness.”

The couple sensed that God was calling them to a new purpose. Their sole desire was to win souls for God’s kingdom. Closing their business, they moved to Sagunto Adventist College in neighboring Spain. Vadym graduated four years later with a master’s degree in theology.

Vadym formed a group of 20 Russian speakers that met every Sabbath afternoon for Bible studies while he worked as an intern pastor in Valencia, a city near the college. Visitors to the group were invited to church. Before long, about 10 visitors were attending church services regularly, and the Sabbath afternoon group kept growing. “We noticed that people had a need to gather with their own language group,” Vadym said.

When the number of Russian-speaking church members reached 26, a Russian-speaking church was born in Valencia with the support of the Adventist Church in Spain and the Inter-European Division, whose territory includes Spain.

“Our idea was to serve all Russian-speaking people, no matter whether or not they are Russian citizens, and to bring them to Jesus,” Vadym said. “God has abundantly blessed us in our mission.”




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*Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering next Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the Euro-Asia Division, the home of many Russian speakers. Thank you for planning a generous offering. This mission story will conclude next week.*

# The Triumph of God's Love



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 22:11, 12; Jer. 30:5–7; Ps. 91:1–11; Jer. 25:33; Rev. 21:2; Rev. 20:11–15.*

**Memory Text:** “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (*Revelation 21:3, 4, NKJV*).

**W**e can face the future with hope. Although challenging times are coming, whatever suffering we must go through, whatever hardships we must endure, whatever sorrows we experience, if we have hope a better day is coming, we can live life today with purpose and joy. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president during 1933–1945, one of the most difficult periods of U.S. history. He was paralyzed by polio and unable to walk unaided. He once wrote, “We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction, that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.” Albert Einstein, one of the world’s most brilliant men, wrote, “Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.” Alfred Lord Tennyson, a popular English poet during Queen Victoria’s reign, once wrote, “Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering ‘It will be happier.’ ”

In this quarter’s final lesson, we will see Christ’s steadfast love during the most exciting time in the history of the universe and His complete triumph in the great controversy. The Bible’s last book, Revelation, gives us hope for today, tomorrow, and forever.

\* *Study this week’s lesson, based on chapters 39–42 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, June 29.*

## Hope in the Time of Trouble

**Read** Revelation 22:11, 12; Daniel 12:1, 2; and Jeremiah 30:5–7. What events occur just before the Second Advent?

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The close of human probation is followed by a time of trouble “ ‘such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.’ ” Revelation 16 describes seven last plagues that will be poured out on the wicked world. But, as with the plagues that fell on Egypt, God’s people will be shielded from them. Note the promise in Daniel: “ ‘And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book’ ” (*Dan. 12:1, NKJV*). This must be referring to the “book of life” (see *Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; Rev. 20:12, 15; Rev. 22:19*). If we have stayed faithful to Jesus, our names will not be blotted out of the book of life (*Rev. 3:5*).

**Read 1** John 3:1–3, John 8:29, and John 14:30. What is the only sufficient preparation for the coming time of trouble?

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In the time of trouble, God’s people have a personal relationship with Jesus so deep that nothing can change it. Their consummate desire is to please Him in all things so that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will be as pure as He is pure. There was nothing in Christ’s heart that responded to Satan’s deceptions. We can reflect this aspect of His character, as well.

**Read** Psalm 27:5, Psalm 91:1–11, and Revelation 3:10–12. What reassuring promises does God give us for the time of trouble?

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There are some who have misunderstood the concept of living through the time of trouble without a mediator. Jesus ceases His mediation in heaven’s sanctuary when everyone has made their final decision for or against Him. But this does not mean we are alone during this time, trusting our own strength. Jesus has assured us He will be with us always (*Matt. 28:20*). Faith trusts when it cannot see and believes even when the world around us is falling apart. During the time of trouble, our faith strengthens and our longing for eternity increases so that our one desire is to live forever with Jesus.

## Hope in Jesus' Soon Return

**Read** John 14:1–3 and Titus 2:11–14. In the light of the challenges of the future and the coming time of trouble, why are these verses so encouraging?

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Jesus' words, " 'Let not your heart be troubled,' " are His reassurance that He will never leave us and is coming again to take us home. This world is not our home. A better day is coming. Once in every 25 verses, the New Testament speaks of the return of our Lord. When the days are dark and the oppressive enactments of a church-state power threaten our lives, the promise of Christ's coming fills our hearts with hope. This is the "blessed hope" that has inspired the faithful people of God in every generation.

**Read** Revelation 6:15–17 and Isaiah 25:8, 9. Contrast the attitudes of the saved and the lost revealed in these verses. What explains the difference between these two mindsets?

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The wicked realize the horrible consequences of sin while the righteous have accepted the marvelous provisions of grace. Rebellion against God leads to fear, guilt, condemnation, and eventually eternal loss. Our response to His saving grace leads to forgiveness, peace, and joy eternally at His glorious return.

**Read** Revelation 15:3, 4 and Revelation 19:7. How will the redeemed respond to the glorious salvation provided so freely through Christ?

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"The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. . . . That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.

**Read** Revelation 12:17; Revelation 17:13, 14; and Revelation 19:11–16. Carefully notice the progression of these verses. What does the progression in these verses say about earth's last war and Christ's ultimate victory?

## The Millennium on Earth

Revelation 19 ends with a dramatic portrayal of the return of Jesus and the destruction of the wicked. But the story is not over. Revelation 20 introduces us to a period lasting 1,000 years, known as the “millennium.”

**Read** Revelation 20:1–3. What is Satan’s fate when Jesus returns?

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The imagery in Revelation 20:1–3 is symbolic. Satan is not literally bound with a chain and locked in a pit. For 1,000 years, he is confined to this desolate, depopulated earth, bound by the circumstances he himself has created. In 2 Peter 2:4, we read that Satan and his angels were reserved for punishment by “chains of darkness.” Satan will be confined to the earth by a chain of circumstances, with no one to tempt. For 1,000 years, he will see the devastation, destruction, and disaster that his rebellion has created.

The Greek word translated “bottomless pit” is the same word from which we get our English word “abyss.” It also is the same word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe the earth at Creation. “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep” (*Gen. 1:2, NKJV*). In the Septuagint, the word “deep” here is the Greek word *abyssos*, “abyss.” It describes a desolate earth. The “bottomless pit” is not some subterranean cavern or some yawning chasm somewhere out there in the universe. Satan’s work of sin and destruction, along with the tremendous chaos preceding the Second Coming, has brought the earth back to a dark, disorganized mass like its condition at the beginning of Creation.

**Read** Jeremiah 4:23–26 and Jeremiah 25:33. How does the biblical prophet describe this scene?

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The prophet here emphasizes the catastrophic destruction at the second coming of Christ and that no person is left alive on earth during this thousand-year period. Satan and his evil angels are left to contemplate the havoc caused by his rebellion. The entire universe recognizes anew that the wages of sin is death. God deals with the sin problem so that it will never rise again (*Nah. 1:9*). There are three prime ways God does this. First, He reveals His limitless love, passionate desire, and relentless efforts to save all humanity. Second, He reveals His justice, fairness, and righteousness. Third, He allows the universe to see the ultimate results of sin and rebellion.

## Judgment in the Millennium

**Read** Revelation 20:4–6. What are the righteous doing during the 1,000 years, and why is it important?

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During the millennium, the righteous will have an opportunity to observe firsthand God's justice and love in how He has dealt with the sin problem. Who doesn't have questions they would like to ask God about a lot of things? Now, during the millennium in heaven, the redeemed get to ask those questions. If a loved one or close friend is absent from heaven, the saved have the opportunity to understand God's decisions more fully. In a new way, more forcefully than ever before, the redeemed will grasp God's powerful attempts to save every person who has ever lived. They will realize anew that everyone who is lost has missed out on heaven because of their own personal rejection of Christ. Only then does God bring final judgment—the second death, which is eternal destruction—on the lost.

**Read** Revelation 20:7–9. How do the 1,000 years conclude? What is the fate of Satan and his followers?

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For 1,000 years, Satan has had no one to tempt or deceive. He and his angels have been alone to reflect on the deadly consequences of sin. At the end of the millennium, the wicked dead are resurrected to face the judgment and receive their final reward (*Rev. 20:5*).

Now Satan has a vast army of followers. Although Satan has suffered defeat after defeat in the great controversy, he is encouraged as he sees the huge throng of the lost. Not yet ready to end his rebellion, he goes out to deceive these “nations.” Satan inspires them to make one last great effort to overthrow God and set up their own kingdom. The term “Gog and Magog” is used to symbolize Satan and the unsaved of all ages. Satan and his followers surround “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (*Rev. 20:9, NKJV*).

At the close of the millennium, not only are all the wicked raised to life, but the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descends to earth from heaven (*Rev. 21:2*)! The saints have been living and reigning with Christ in the New Jerusalem for the millennium. Now, at the end of the 1,000 years, the city descends to earth along with God, Jesus, the angels, and all the redeemed. Everyone is present for the final battle of the great controversy. Sin is about to be eradicated once and for all!

**What does the timing of the final judgment say about God's character?**

## Two Eternities

**Read** 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10, 11; and Revelation 20:11–15. What do they say about why the wicked are raised to life again?

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To resolve the sin problem so evil never arises again, everyone must be convinced that God has been fair and just in all His ways. Ultimately, every knee shall bow and acknowledge God's justice in the great controversy, even Satan and his evil angels, and that there was never any justification for rebellion against God. Notice this insight from Ellen G. White: "As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart—all appear as if written in letters of fire. . . .

"The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 666, 668.

**Read** Revelation 20:9; Psalm 37:20; and Malachi 4:1, 2. What insights do these passages give us about the ultimate destruction of sin and sinners and the reward of the righteous?

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The good news is that Satan and his evil angels will be destroyed in the lake of fire. Sin and sinners will be consumed. According to Revelation 20:9, they will be devoured, destroyed, and not eternally tormented. The next verse uses the expression "forever and ever." Depending on the context, the word "forever" does not always mean "endless" but, until something is completely accomplished. (*See Exod. 21:6; 1 Sam. 1:22, 28; Jude 7; and 2 Pet. 2:4–6.*) For the lost, the destruction itself, not the act of destroying, is eternal. God is not the eternal torturer.

**In the end, one of two eternities await us all. The lost, unfortunately, receive the "wages" they have earned—eternal death. Why, then, is our only hope of not getting what we deserve, which is death, found in trusting in Jesus' righteousness?**



**Further Thought:** “There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home. . . .

“There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 675, 677.

“With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God’s handiwork. With undimmed vision they gaze upon the glory of creation—suns and stars and systems, all in their appointed order circling the throne of Deity. Upon all things, from the least to the greatest, the Creator’s name is written, and in all are the riches of His power displayed.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 677, 678.

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① Why do you think God has allowed sin to go on for so long? At the same time, no human being suffers in this world longer than their own existence here. That is, no one suffers more than his or her own lifetime. How short is a human lifetime compared to the thousands of years of sin? How might this perspective help us deal with the difficult question of evil?
- ② How does the thousand-year period known as the millennium fit into the plan of salvation? Think about what it says about the character of God that—not until all of the redeemed will have had a chance to see the justice and fairness and love of God—will final judgment be brought upon the lost.

## Refuge for Russian Speakers

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Ukrainian pastor Vadym Krynychny faced a major challenge finding a building for a Russian-speaking church in the Spanish city of Valencia. But, with prayer, he managed to lease a hall seating 100 people in the city center for a token 500 euros (US\$550) a month.

“It is worth much more,” Vadym said.

The hall was large for the initial group of 26 worshipers, but Vadym got to work on outreach programs. The church began to host a get-together with a meal on Sundays. Russian-speaking children were invited to special activities. Additional programs were organized around such holidays as New Year’s and Easter. Concerts proved especially popular, filling the church to overflowing and sometimes requiring the rental of a larger hall.

The church forged strong ties with the local Russian-speaking community and became a center for Russian speakers. About 80 percent of Spain’s estimated 400,000 Russian speakers live in Valencia and along the nearby Mediterranean coast. Of those 400,000 people, at least 500 are Adventists.

But the first person baptized at the new church was not from Russia or another former Soviet republic. The woman was born in Iran and had been raised in a non-Christian world religion. She spoke Russian fluently after studying for 12 years in the former Soviet republic of Belarus, and she came to the church after someone invited her off the street.

After 25 baptisms and several former Adventist families recommitted their hearts to Jesus, weekly church attendance stood at 65 adults and 40 children when the conflict erupted in Ukraine in 2022.

Vadym realized with astonishment that the church was well positioned to help people fleeing the conflict. The church quickly used its local connections to establish a refugee center. In the first two months of the conflict, 200 people visited the center, receiving lodging and food. About half of them were Adventists. Since then, many more people have received assistance.

“Many have come to us, knowing no one in Spain,” Vadym said. “But they come to us because we speak Russian, and they seek something familiar.”

He credited God for positioning the church to help refugees even before the conflict started. He said he longed to share the hope of Jesus’ soon coming with them and all Russian speakers in Spain. “We are concentrating all our efforts on meeting the needs of these people,” he said.




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*Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath will help spread the gospel in the Euro-Asia Division, the home of many Russian speakers. Thank you for planning a generous offering.*

The Gospel of Mark, our study for this quarter written by Thomas Shepherd, can be divided into two halves. Most of the first eight chapters deal with the question of who Jesus is. The answer is displayed in Jesus' teachings and miracles, which clearly reveal that He is the Messiah. The second half of the book (*Mark 8:31 until the end of the book*) answer the question of where Jesus is going. The answer, of course, is to the Cross. This gospel shows us the darkness that Christ experienced—the cost of our salvation. But the Cross is not the end of the journey. After His resurrection, Jesus plans a meeting with His disciples in Galilee—and, as we know, the Christian church began. It is a remarkable story, told in a terse, fast-moving style with little commentary from Mark himself. Mark simply tells the story and then allows the words, the deeds, and the actions to speak for themselves, regarding the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is our prayer that you will be blessed by this study.

## Lesson 1—The Beginning of the Gospel

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Failed Missionary** (*Acts 13:1–5, 13*)

MONDAY: **A Second Chance** (*Acts 15:36–39*)

TUESDAY: **The Messenger** (*Mark 1:1–8*)

WEDNESDAY: **Jesus' Baptism** (*Mark 1:9–13*)

THURSDAY: **The Gospel According to Jesus** (*Mark 1:14, 15*)

**Memory Text**—*Mark 1:14, 15*

**Sabbath Gem:** This week's lesson will focus on the identity of Mark as recorded in Scripture, from his early failure to becoming a restored missionary.

## Lesson 2—A Day in the Ministry of Jesus

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **"Follow Me"** (*Mark 1:16–20*)

MONDAY: **An Unforgettable Worship Service** (*Mark 1:21–28*)

TUESDAY: **More Sabbath Ministry** (*Mark 1:29–34*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Secret of Jesus' Ministry** (*Mark 1:35–39*)

THURSDAY: **Can You Keep a Secret?** (*Mark 1:40–45*)

**Memory Text**—*Mark 1:17*

**Sabbath Gem:** The emphasis in the beginning of the Gospel of Mark is on action, particularly of Jesus' healing of people. Mark often uses the word *immediately* to illustrate the fast-action movement of Jesus' ministry.

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