

APRIL-JUNE

**Q**  
**2002**

# God's Encrypted Message to You



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide  
for Young Adults



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# God's Encrypted Message to You

APRIL-JUNE 2002

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## Welcome to CQ's World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

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## This Quarter's Illustrator



Matthew Moores, a freelance cartoon illustrator based in Sacramento, California, has produced work for documentary films, magazines, newspapers, and radio stations. Currently attending California State University at Fullerton, where he is pursuing a degree in animation and illustration, Matthew's goal in life is "to make a daily relationship with Christ more appealing to the younger generation. With all the glitter that clouds the eyes of children today," he says, "we need to redirect their focus back toward the everlasting goal."

# Getting the Most Out of CQ

## FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. CQ's purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the Adult Bible Study Guide find that because CQ deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

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Circulation of CQ is about 65,000.

## POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
  - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
  - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
  - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
  - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
  - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
  - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
  - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

## CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the Church.*

# Doom or Deliverance?



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“No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.”

(Dan. 2:27, 28, NIV).

# D-Day

## INTRODUCTION

Luke 12:40

The apocalypse. What is it in ten words or less? five hundred words? A hard word to spell, let alone define. Entire books have been written about it, and still it is one of those fuzzy concepts we are all going to dig into one of these days. Take a class sometime. Not right now, of course, what with a term paper to complete, a part-time job, and things aren't going all that well with your boyfriend. And besides, people who have taken the class still don't seem to know any more about it than you do.

We all want to understand Daniel and Revelation. To interpret prophecy. To foresee what the future holds, at least what will happen next year. But is predicting all apocalyptic prophecy is about? If that's all it is, it will have to take a back seat to *The National Enquirer*, which sets forth the next year in clear, concise writing with drawings and photos. You don't have to figure out all the murky stuff about monsters and dragons and something coming out of the sea, or how many calendar days is a time and a time and a half a time.

Whether you call it the apocalypse or Doomsday, there is something in its finality that makes me uneasy. It is the end of the world, that big D-Day in the sky.

Your grandparents will remember D-Day during World War II. The invasion of Europe by the Allies: the American ground troops launching their big push, the British fleet, bombers, tanks. The beginning of the end. D-Day—Doomsday for the Nazis; deliverance for the Allies. The drama and

**Still, it is one  
of those  
fuzzy concepts.**

importance of it was felt even in little towns when cars with speakers on top drove through the streets and a loud commanding voice, coming from everywhere and nowhere, announced, "This is D-Day."

The apocalypse points to the ultimate D-Day. Given my own clouded knowledge and the scope of the apocalypse, I have fears. In the last days, "men's hearts [fail] them for fear" (Luke 21:26, KJV). Fear of the unknown, of change, of my own frailties, of fear itself, and most of all, of my own ignorance.

Suppose I do get it all figured out in my finite, human way so I know what is going to happen and when. Is this why the apocalypse is threaded through the Bible like a golden cord? Jesus didn't say, "Know this"; He said, "Be ready." The Millerites had it all figured out down to the day. Clad in robes, they waited on Ascension Hill. The sun came up, the sun went down, and the Lord did not come. Hopes dashed, potatoes undug, they faced a hard winter.

## Disturbing Now, Wonderful Then

### LOGOS

Dan. 2:28; 7:15-18; Matt. 24:15, 16; Luke 24:27; 2 Thess. 2:3-8

Interpreting apocalyptic prophecies can best be defined in reverse order.

Prophecy is one of God's methods of revealing His message to His people. Prophecy and prediction are not the same thing. Sometimes God's message includes elements of prediction, but this is not a necessary characteristic of prophecy. Prophecy is just God's message to His people.

*Apocalyptic* is a specific genre of prophecy. The most important characteristic is that it is prophecy—a message from God to His people. Some scholars suggest we should place all prophecy on a line with some works closer to the side of apocalyptic, others closer to the classical prophecy side, all sharing general characteristics. Elements that would move a work closer to the apocalyptic side include symbolism, visions, conversations with spiritual beings and angels, cosmic catastrophes leading to the kingdom of God, and the freedom and power of God to intervene in human affairs.

Interpretation is the question that most concerns us, especially as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Much of what we believe and the beginnings of our church are based on the understanding (or misunderstanding) of apocalyptic prophecy. The rich symbolism of apocalyptic prophecy excites the imaginations of everyone from fire-and-brimstone evangelists to Hollywood scriptwriters. Excitement is not bad, but there must be a solid base. If the interpretation does not come from the Bible, we are in danger of becoming confused with what sounds pleasant or feels good instead of what God intends us to understand.

Four texts illustrate the principle that the interpretation must come from the Bible. Daniel 2:28 says the message and the interpretation come from God. Daniel 7:15-18 has the interpretation given in the same context of the vision. Those who were directing Daniel in the vision interpret it for him immediately. Matthew 24:15, 16 is an example of the Bible interpreting some place other than the immediate context. And last, Jesus, in Luke 24:27, uses all available Scripture to teach two disciples the interpretation of the prophecies concerning Himself. The Bible itself (including Jesus' own example) indicates that it is to be the source of any interpretation.

Andrew Hill states that much of the confusion comes because we mistake the vision of the prophet for his message.<sup>1</sup> The vision was the occasion for the message, not the message itself. In vision Zechariah (1:8-11) sees horses in a grove of myrtle trees. If the vision were the message, then we would assume that the Israelites listening to Zechariah were to keep their eyes on the myrtle trees looking for a group of horses. This was not Zechariah's message. Verses 14-17 make the message clear. God was still concerned about Jerusalem. To interpret apocalyptic prophecy, we do not have to know the meaning of every symbol. If the meaning is given, then we are on a solid biblical foundation for our interpretation. If it is not

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given, then at best we should be cautious in our interpretation. Perhaps the symbol is used to obscure rather than to reveal (e.g., Dan. 12:4; Rev. 10:3, 4).

The second principle in interpreting apocalyptic prophecy is linear thought, an idea in direct opposition to many Eastern ideas becoming popular. These cyclical or circular ideas (such as reincarnation) indicate that everything repeats or returns.

The Bible teaches that things happen in a straight line, from point A to point B. In Daniel 2:28, for example, Nebuchadnezzar's vision is meant to show what will happen in the latter days—some future point in history. Daniel 7:15-18 gives the interpretation of Daniel's vision beginning at his time and continuing with “ “four kings who will arise” ” (verse 17, NASB). We have a sequence of events leading to a conclusion in the future. Second Thessalonians 2:3-8 illustrates this point best. Paul states that before point B (the Second Coming) there must be point A (the apostasy, etc.), indicating a chronological chain of events that has an established sequence.

**Prophecy and prediction  
are not the same thing.**

“Unlike classical prophecy, apocalyptic writing attempts to answer contemporary questions and dispel current doubts by describing the time between the disturbing *now* and the wonderful *then* as a divinely controlled delay of inevitable victory.”<sup>2</sup> We will find Christ to be the focus and theme of apocalyptic prophecy, the bridge between the “disturbing now” and the “wonderful then.” Interpreting apocalyptic prophecies will be a thrilling, awe-inspiring experience that will inevitably draw us closer to God's Son.

## **REACT**

1. Are there symbols in apocalyptic prophecies that we have perhaps over-defined or given a definition not directly taken from the Bible? Explain your answer.

2. Is it a linear or circular idea that a prophecy has an immediate interpretation for the time it was given and an extended interpretation for later times? Explain your answer.

3. What are the dangers, if any, in giving a prophecy a dual application?

4. Why does the Bible contain so much apocalyptic literature? Why doesn't it just give a straightforward testimony, speaking plainly, rather than using potentially confusing symbols and images?

5. Do you agree with the statement: “Interpreting apocalyptic prophecies will be a thrilling, awe-inspiring experience that will inevitably draw us closer to God's Son”? Why, or why not?

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1. Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), pp. 312, 313.

2. Lee J. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc., 1995), pp. 40, 41.

Monday  
April 1

## Study, Study, Study

### TESTIMONY

Matt. 24:2, 15; Luke 21:20

"Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who 'hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.'"<sup>1</sup>

"While the Jews desired the advent of the Messiah, they had no true conception of His mission. They did not seek redemption from sin, but deliverance from the Romans. They looked for the Messiah to come as a conqueror, to break the oppressor's power and exalt Israel to universal dominion. Thus the way was prepared for them to reject the Saviour. . . .

"They had studied the prophecies, but without spiritual insight. Thus they overlooked those scriptures that point to the humiliation of Christ's first advent, and misapplied those that speak of the glory of His second coming. Pride obscured their vision. They interpreted prophecy in accordance with their selfish desires."<sup>2</sup>

"It was the last day of Christ's teaching in the temple."<sup>3</sup> His ministry was coming to a close. A vast throng had gathered to hear Him teach. "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20,

NIV). "Not one stone here will be left on another" (Matt. 24:2, NIV).

Later, His disciples plied Him with questions about the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming.

"Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them,

they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves."<sup>4</sup> "Christ urged upon His disciples the importance of prophetic study. Referring to the prophecy given to Daniel in regard to their time, He said, 'Whoso readeth, let him understand.' Matt. 24:15."<sup>5</sup>

**"They had studied the prophecies, but without spiritual insight."**

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 584, 585.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 29.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 610.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 628.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 234.



# Stumping the Wise Guys

## EVIDENCE

Dan. 2:27, 28

The wise guys of Babylon were stumped. They couldn't guess what the king's dream was, let alone interpret it. King Nebuchadnezzar didn't suffer fools lightly. By his hand was the great city of Babylon largely built, including the Hanging Gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Among those he went to for answers were enchanter, magicians, and diviners. The word "enchanter"<sup>1</sup> is translated from the Aramaic *ashephin*, for astrologer or practitioner of magic arts. Magicians were priests who claimed to possess occult knowledge. "Diviner" is translated from the Greek *pytho* from which we get the word "python."<sup>2</sup> A python guarded the Delphic oracle, which was used to predict the future. They were said to have a "python spirit" (see Acts 16:16).

Imagine the scene as Daniel enters the room. Young and inexperienced, he's certainly no match for the king's counselors. But it isn't age, wisdom, or experience that we should look to in times of trouble and doubt. Because he put his confidence in Daniel and his God, King Nebuchadnezzar would be used by God to chastise the Jewish people without allowing their

Wouldn't it be nice to fall into such an opportunity?

loss as a nation. We, too, need to put our confidence in the one true God.

Daniel was officially and primarily considered a statesman, not a prophet. He received visions from God, but did not hold the office of a prophet (Matt. 24:15). He was a young man (perhaps college age) at the time of this dream, which marked the beginning of his career as minister and advisor to the king.

What an opportunity for one so young and just beginning his career. Wouldn't it be nice to fall into such an opportunity right out of college? Yet Daniel had been preparing for just such a chance well before his captivity began.

Daniel was quick to point out that he could not interpret the dream, but gave the credit to God. He showed that false systems of knowledge are worthless, but a willing heart can be used of God to do great things.

## REACT

1. What false systems of knowledge do people use today?
2. In what ways had Daniel been preparing for the role God laid out for him? Be specific.

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 329.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

# How to Approach Prophecy Fearlessly

## HOW-TO

Dan. 2:27, 28; Rev. 21:1-7

As a young boy, I would page through history books transfixed by the accounts of past events. Of particular interest to me were the facts and photos related to World War II. However, it was later that I realized that something was missing amidst the facts, figures, and photos. Not until I listened to my grandfather share his stories of the European theater did I feel a sense of reality about the war. Having a relationship with someone who was involved transformed and personalized my view of World War II.

This concept applies to the study of apocalyptic prophecy. Facts and figures are fine, but the emphasis should be upon Jesus. Not only is He the focus of these prophecies, but His life and His promises give us a sense of reality about the future that is otherwise missing. Our approach to interpreting apocalyptic prophecy should be grounded in our relationship with Jesus, *the*

**The key to interpreting  
apocalyptic prophecy is the  
knowledge of Jesus Christ.**

Revelation. With that in mind, here are some tips to begin your study:

● **Ask God for insight.** Human reasoning is often flawed. The best way to heed the warnings of Revelation 22:18, 19 is to pray for understanding. As Daniel says, “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (Dan. 2:28, NIV). Though many of the symbols seem mysterious, be assured that Jesus is revealed through them.

● **Work with a team.** Discuss and study with friends, take a class, or attend a seminar on prophecy, and refer to Bible study aids. If you’re still struggling on an issue, press a professor or pastor on the tough issues until you feel satisfied.

● **Begin with the end.** Typically it spoils the fun to read the end of a book first, but I would suggest doing so before you dig into apocalyptic prophecy. Check out Revelation 21:1-7; 22 before delving into the four beasts, seven heads, and 24 elders. You will see the prophecies framed in the context of a Savior who loves us relentlessly and longs to proclaim, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3, NIV).

This is the fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies, the beginning of the most beautiful chapter of all—eternal life with our Savior and Friend, Jesus. Focus on this ultimate reality, and the Lord promises to take care of the details. The key to interpreting apocalyptic prophecy isn’t so much the knowledge of signs and symbols as it is the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

# The Joy of Prophecy

Thursday  
April 4

## OPINION

Luke 21:20, 21

Almost every winter afternoon I snap on my cross-country skis and head down the trail following the ridge along Blackberry Lake. I ski because I enjoy it, and I enjoy it because I don't think very much about Megan. Megan is a girl on our local high school ski team who can ski 5 kilometers in less than 18 minutes. Fighting a back injury, I take almost an hour to go that same distance, so I don't think about speed. I think about the bright snow falling past the white birches, and my blue skis skimming by giant, mossy stumps of an ancient pine forest.

Maybe I haven't been as smart about prophecy. Discouraged by trying to interpret all the symbols and understand the time charts, I lost the joy and stopped studying it at all.

Yet, what good is our fixation on knowing the whole scenario in advance? Most events cannot be fully understood until we face them. Jesus told His followers, "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then . . . let those in the city get out" (Luke 21:20, 21, NIV). At the time He spoke, Christ's words couldn't have made a great deal of sense, but when history unfolded 70 years later, Christians understood it when they saw it.

More important, in our search for predictions, we've missed out on other experiences we could take from the study of prophecy.

A friend helped me see things in a new light when she shared that she likes to leave room for mystery when it comes to God. Fritz Guy speaks of Revelation as "a right-brain composition to which many people have insisted on giving a left-brain interpretation. It is not a piece of encryption to be decoded, but a song of hope by which to be captivated, an epic poem by which to be inspired and energized."<sup>\*</sup>

Maybe if we didn't pressure ourselves to predict, we'd be less put off by prophecy and could actually enjoy spending time reading it. It would become less a drill and more a joy. Then we could use this time of opportunity. To read. To study. To store up scriptures in our minds. To come to know God as a personal friend. If we do this, then when prophecy unfolds, we too will know it when we see it.

**She likes to leave room for mystery when it comes to God.**

## REACT

1. Why aren't Bible scholars always able to give a clear picture of prophetic events?
2. How can we put the joy back into our study of prophecy? Be specific.
3. Beyond prediction, what are some of the benefits of studying end-time prophecy?

<sup>\*</sup>Doug Morgan and Bonnie Dwyer, "Fear Not: Apocalypse Now Means Something Very Different," *Spectrum* 28 (Winter 2000), p. 26.

# Meaning Is Everything

## EXPLORATION

Dan. 2:28; 7:15-18

### CONCLUDE

The prophecies recorded in the Bible constitute God's messages to His people. Among those prophecies, perhaps the type of most interest and concern to Seventh-day Adventist Christians is apocalyptic prophecy. In visions, prophets conversed with spiritual beings, saw many symbolic images, and witnessed end-time events. For us, interpretation of these apocalyptic prophecies can be especially difficult because of the symbolic nature of many of the images and ideas. But following the Bible's instructions for how to study prophecy and test our understanding of it, we can begin to find the answers to our questions about what will happen in the future.

### CONSIDER

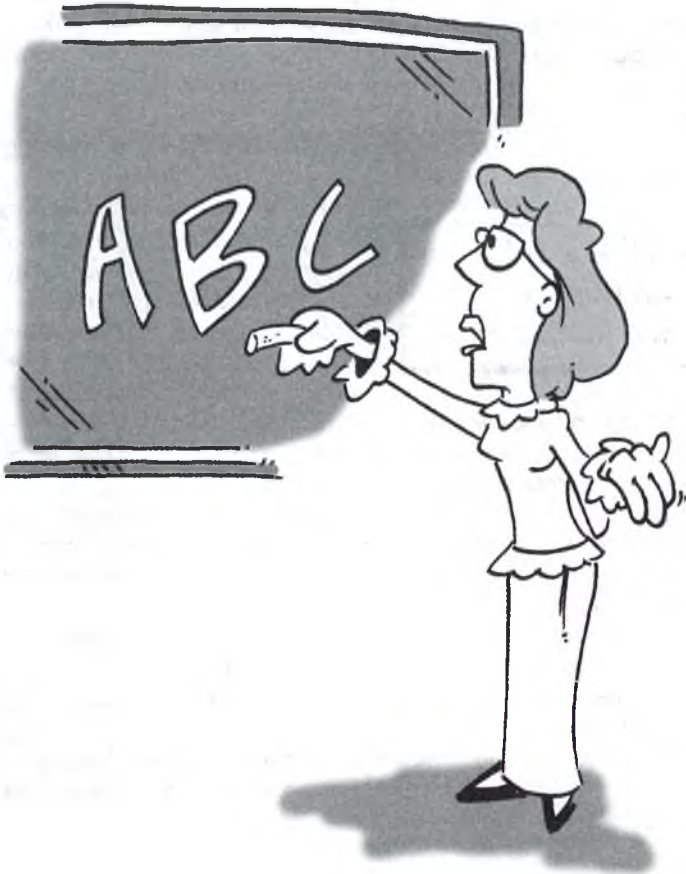
- Interviewing a number of friends, family members, and co-workers about their understanding of apocalyptic prophecy, and writing a summary report of their comments to share with your Sabbath School class.
- Using paints or crayons, colored pencils or chalks, to illustrate several of the key symbols used in apocalyptic prophecy.
- Viewing a video that depicts a large-scale disaster (such as a volcano eruption, giant storm, or earthquake) and making a list of the apocalyptic messages and images used in the film.
- Waking up early one morning to take a walk and watch the sunrise. At the moment the sun rises, imagine what it must have been like to be Daniel or John receiving a revelation from God.
- Making a list of words and phrases that have several distinct meanings depending on context or tone. Think about how we interpret their meanings when we hear them.
- Designing a poster-size chart to illustrate the biblical principles of prophecy interpretation.
- Sitting in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and meditating for 30 minutes on God's message to you.

### CONNECT

Daniel 10; 11; 12; Revelation 1; 22:6-21.

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 39-44; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, chapter on "True Education."

# The ABCs of Prophecy



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“ ‘ “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” ’ ” (Dan. 7:27, NKJV).

## **INTRODUCTION**

John 6:44

Robert Louis Stevenson was once quoted as saying “Keep your fears to yourself, but share your courage with others.” I would revise this quote for the Christian audience by supplanting the word “courage” with the word “faith.” Particularly in the context of sharing the prophetic messages of Daniel 2; 7 with nonbelievers.

In the past few decades our church has seen immense growth in membership, but has the state of our collective spirituality realized similar gains? If not, could certain tactics employed in our methods of corporate evangelism hold any responsibility?

Much of our current evangelistic approach emphasizes the eschatological. Appeals are often made to listeners to accept Christ so they do not miss out on the Second Coming. “Accept him now, because He may come back tomorrow!” Though this may be true, I am concerned that by playing to an individual’s fear of hell, we may be creating a dangerous and humanistic substitute for a genuine conversion. A true conversion should be based on a conviction

of personal sins we have committed and repentance toward God, not a so-called repentance to protect from some impending doom that is to befall the world. Although I suppose this is a bonus!

The true motivation to avoid hell is connected to a realization of our sins, not our fears. We need to cultivate evangelistic approaches that use prophecy to focus properly on this reality. In other words, sin is the cause of this coming destruction, and deliverance from sin is the gospel answer that frees us from this fate.

I realize that not all of our evangelistic efforts are based on fear, and I do not think we spend too much time and effort on prophetic issues. In the name of prophecy, however, we have on occasion substituted fear and manipulation for the work of the Holy Spirit.

The fear factor may add numbers to our church membership, but will it add numbers to the kingdom? We don’t need deliverance from the future, but deliverance from sin and its deadly results.

**Will the fear factor  
add numbers to  
the kingdom?**

# A Trustworthy Forecast

## EVIDENCE

John 14:29

“Use your own judgment and never listen to the weather forecast!” That was my friend’s conclusion after a rather sad and disappointing day. He had listened to the forecast and decided that this was the ideal day for washing his only bedding. The forecast had predicted a bright and sunny day. After he washed and spread his bedding on the line to dry, the weather suddenly turned sour and decided to rain the whole day. My friend—having trusted the forecast—ended up knocking at my door that evening, seeking a night’s accommodation. I am sure my friend is not alone; you too may have been fooled at one point or the other by weather forecasts.

Not so with God’s forecasts outlined in prophetic literature in the Bible, which are always accurate to the letter. Among the most amazingly accurate forecasts of the world’s history are those recorded in Daniel 2; 7. In these complementary chapters God gives us a forecast of the world’s destiny. Herein are recorded accounts of the rise and fall of world powers culminating in the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom. Consider these: exit Nebuchadnezzar’s (later Belshazzar’s) Babylon (Dan. 2:38; 5:24-28; c.f., 7: 4); enter Darius with the Medo-

**“Never listen to the  
weather forecast!”**

Persian reign (Dan. 2:39; 5:30, 31; 7:5); followed by Alexander the Great with the Greeks (Dan. 2:39; 7:6). Later the resilient Romans appear, represented by iron (Dan. 2:40), and the dreadful and terrible animal (Dan. 7:7ff) that had the powerful horn which could speak—representing the papal power that arose from within the Roman Empire. The key to understanding these events is in the principle expressed by Jesus: “ ‘I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe’ ” (John 14:29, NKJV). Indeed all these have come to pass and are historical realities giving us no chance to doubt God’s forecast. “ ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away’ ” (Matt. 24:35, NKJV).

The prophecy of Daniel 2 tells us that we are living at the feet of the image—the mixture of clay and iron (verse 42), and since it is also recorded that the “ ‘interpretation is sure’ ” (verse 45, NKJV), any time now God will establish His eternal kingdom of which the coming of Jesus shall be the icing on the cake. “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place’ ” (Matt. 24:34, NKJV).

Monday  
April 8

## A Personal Testimony

**LOGOS**  
Daniel 2; 7

They call me Daniel.

I was brought over from Israel when I was a kid. And, sure, I tested well and I came from a good family. I guess that was the original reason I was singled out by then-King Nebuchadnezzar. His son Belshazzar is king now. And let me tell you, the apple sure fell far from the tree this time. Bel grew up with a silver spoon and has none of the respect or honest humility his father had.

So you want me to tell you about dreams. Well, I've had a few. In fact, that is how I first was recognized, so to speak. I was a wise man. Even in those days, wise men had regular meetings and the dues weren't that much. You had a reasonable say in the running of the government, which was nice. This was the first time I got the special newsletter telling me about the king having a

**Something impressed me  
that I could answer him.**

dream. If the wise men ever wanted a chance at not having their membership revoked, the king forgetting his dream was it (i.e., he threatened to cut us into pieces and to turn our homes into public restrooms if we failed to interpret it). Something impressed me that I could answer him. I went and told him so. He let me have overnight to think on it, and I counseled with friends from my Israel days. We had a special prayer session and slept on it. The Lord revealed the whole thing to me, even its meaning.

The king was so pleased that he gave me a governorship and a weekend house on the coast. The Wise Men Club gave me a free lifetime membership. I told them it wasn't me but the God I worship, but they insisted.

To tell you the truth, I didn't know how the king would react. Telling a powerful person like Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom would come to an end was not my idea of discretion. He was threatening to kill us if we didn't tell him but what would he do to me? A responsibility comes with knowing prophecy and that is to tell it. Seeing him react so positively told me that God had His hand on everything that I did. This was a real faith booster to me.

Another dream occurred not too long ago. I bring this one up not because the visions were similar, but because their meanings were. This one had beasts coming out of an angry sea. It was shocking to say the least, but I saw a more spiritual element brought out this time. The beasts were making war with God's people. I am here to say that the Lord triumphed in the end.

Both dreams had to do with the full history of humankind and the kingdoms of



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this world. And in both of them, God's kingdom was set here on earth at the end, invincible for all time. For me it was very comforting to see that there was a plan. I mean, if you could have seen the destruction of Jerusalem and its beautiful temple! These were God's people being taken into captivity. The world knew us as worshipers of the living God, and here we were being taken into captivity. I understand now that God in His infinite wisdom has a plan for me and the rest of His people. I have hope today because of this plan.

Let me give you some guidelines in picturing the images that I describe. God gave them to me as symbols, and I left them that way. For all the people who will read this, it was the simplest way to preserve the message over time. They are not in symbols to confuse or to prevent them from being understood. They are open to interpretation by all. A living relationship with God is needed to take this information and apply it to your life. And since we are talking about the Almighty, He will provide explanation and understanding; you can trust in that. You may take such power from chapters 2 and 7 of my story, because you know the end of the game. You know the results of the battle. There is nothing else to wonder about. Sure, you have the everyday stuff, but in the big picture you know that the Lord is Creator and Redeemer of all.

I'm sorry, but I don't have any more time to talk. Belshazzar summoned me to the palace. Apparently something's been written on the wall, and he wants me to read it for him.

## **REACT**

1. What does this experience mean to you today in the decisions you make?
2. Is prophecy of more value to those inside or outside the Church? Explain your answer.
3. How would we know if God were trying to communicate with us through dreams today? Why are various types of communication with the supernatural popular in current movies and literature?
4. What is a living relationship with God, and how do you achieve it?
5. To what extent do you think Daniel understood the implications of the prophecies he interpreted?
6. What is your reaction when you realize that Jesus is coming sooner than you think?
7. What effect, if any, does the study of the prophecies in Daniel have on your faith in the precision of God's timing?

Tuesday  
April 9

## Prophecy— An Expression of God

### TESTIMONY

Amos 3:7

Many people, even Christians, are frightened by prophecies found in Daniel and Revelation. But God did not intend it to be that way. The prophecies were sent for His children. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7, NKJV).

In Daniel 2; 7 God provided his servant Daniel an overview of the earth's history. In these passages, truths are revealed to the believer. First, God is ultimately in control. "In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counter play of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will."<sup>1</sup>

Second, the historical fulfillment of prophecies as foretold in Daniel 2; 7 provide evidence to the believer to trust God in prophecies that have not yet been fulfilled. Finally, God uses prophecy to provide warnings. "We have reached the period

**"In the word of God the curtain is drawn aside."**

foretold in these scriptures. The time of the end is come, the visions of the prophets are unsealed, and their solemn warnings point us to our Lord's coming in glory as near at hand. . . . Today the kingdom of this

world absorbs men's thoughts, and they take no note of the rapidly fulfilling prophecies and the tokens of the swift-coming kingdom of God.

"'But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.' While we are not to know the hour of our Lord's return, we may know when it is near. 'Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.' 1 Thess. 5:4-6."<sup>2</sup>

In an effort that none should be lost, God always provides a glimpse into the future through His prophets.

### REACT

1. How can you witness to others through Daniel 2; 7? Be specific.
2. God always sends warnings through His prophets. What does this reveal about His character?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 500.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 235.

# Wait for God's Final Victory!

## HOW-TO

Dan. 7:27

Throughout history, God has provided for His people the revelation of future events with the purpose of maintaining that He governs the universe and that everything is under His control. In Daniel's time, the Jews had been taken into captivity. In these circumstances God gives a message of impact and hope: finally He will establish His kingdom on earth and the domain will be given to His people.

This same message is for us, God's people. Someday in the future we will be exiled. It is there that the message of our King's final victory should remain in us so that our faith is affirmed and we may not be dismayed by the difficulties of the end times. As members of God's people, we should not fall in apostasy like the Jews of Daniel's time; on the contrary, we should live in the same form as he did:

**1. To consecrate our lives entirely to Christ (Dan. 1:8).** We should propose every day not to contaminate our life with the vanities of this world, and each act of our life should have the clear approval of God.

**2. To know our Savior.** To achieve this one must spend time with whom one wants to know. It is necessary to form a friendship, and this brings as a result full trust in The Friend. Daniel knew God was his Friend, and for that reason he was not afraid in being presented to the king to request time to reveal the dream and its interpretation (Dan. 2:16). Every day of his life was a walk with Jesus, to feel Him and to live with His presence by his side, giving God the opportunity to make decisions for him, and sharing sadness and happiness.

**Daniel knew God  
was his Friend.**

**3. To praise God.** The first thing Daniel did after knowing the dream was to give glory to God (Dan. 2:20-23). It is necessary to be grateful to God, because He loves and protects us. Let our songs of praise constantly rise to our Father.

**4. To await the second coming of Christ.** This event should cause us to watch and not to be dismayed, to be constant in Jesus, and to want in great manner that His return occurs very soon.

## REACT

1. To what extent is this world really under God's control at the moment? How does your answer to this affect your daily Christian experience?

2. Is it really possible to have a daily walk with Jesus and to "feel" Him? If so, what steps can we take to achieve this? If not, how do you suggest we can best relate to Him?

Thursday  
April 11

## Prophecy — Real or Imaginary?

### OPINION

2 Tim. 2:15

One of the most difficult things for Christians to understand is prophecy and its relevance to their current state of affairs. We are charged with the responsibility to be light bearers to the world. This suggests that we should understand the happenings of the times we are living in and be able to articulate those implications clearly.

Many of us are aloof from the reality of the times in which we live, and are content in being caught up with life without giving consideration to our biblical beliefs as they relate to prophecy. The book of Daniel outlines prophecy in such a way that we can understand the events that are taking place in our world today.

It seems that the church corporate may at times be swept away with the material attractiveness of the world and misplace the foundation upon which our mission is based. We know, however, that God's leading will direct us to do what is ultimately right. Is prophecy real? As we explore Daniel, we see where the fulfillment of these prophecies took place, and so,

**There will never be a one-world government as it was in the days of Babylon.**

students of history, we can agree that prophecy has become real.

Though the struggle of this world may get many down, there is hope that there will be victory. This is contingent on the acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Without a doubt, the acceptance of Jesus as your personal Savior will change your life to the point that prophetic study will be explored and truth embraced. This will help to guide the Christian along the perilous journey of life on this sinful earth.

Everything that is happening today points toward Christ's second coming. Prophecy in Daniel talks of the changing political times and their impact on the people of this world. We have been impacted and can see, as the political climate has changed over the past 50 years, the path to world peace and unity. Prophecy talks about this and we can see that the United Nations is becoming more vocal in the affairs of most countries around the world. Is this just a coincidence?

There will never be a one-world government as it was in the days of Babylon. However, we can see the natural progression of the attempts of humankind to fulfill prophecy. Let us look to God, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and be unshakeable in our beliefs, as we await the second coming of Christ.

### REACT

1. How can the Church help nonbelievers understand the relevance of prophecy in their lives?

2. What role, if any, is the United Nations playing in the fulfillment of prophecy?

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*John G. F. Carey, Nassau, Bahamas*

# Love in a Dream

## EXPLORATION

John 14:29

## CONCLUDE

The prophecies in Daniel do much more than forecast the rise and fall of four world kingdoms. They do more than provide us with an accurate road map of the future. And though it is important that they prove the validity of the Bible, it is more important that they help us see the character of God as a compassionate Father, who does all He can to remove the fear of the unknown from His children. The fruits of prophecy, studied with prayer, are faith in God and His Word, hope in the soon coming of our Lord, and trust that He will ultimately deliver His children.

## CONSIDER

- Making a chart listing the prophecies of Daniel and the exact year they were fulfilled. Decorate it with drawings or cut outs of the image, beast, or visuals God used in the prophecy.
- Exploring the Internet for the word "prophecy." Analyze what you've found by comparing and contrasting it with what you've learned from the Word of God.
- Sharing the comforting message of the rock cut out of the mountain without hand in Daniel 2:34 (Christ's second coming) with someone who is terminally ill or discouraged.
- Taking a walk and finding a stone to represent the rock spoken of in Daniel 2:34. With a colored marker or paint, inscribe "Daniel 2:34" on it and place it where it will serve as a reminder of Jesus' second coming.
- Inviting someone to the nearest series of evangelist meetings or Revelation seminar and attending with them.
- Composing a song of praise to God for His diligent care over you.
- Singing or reading some hymns that deal with prophecy.

## CONNECT

*Prophets and Kings*, chaps. 38-43.

Mark Finley, *Unleashing Daniel's Mysteries*; Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, chaps. 2, 3.

# The public Defender



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“A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened’ ” (Dan. 7:10, NIV).

# My Judge Is My Savior

## INTRODUCTION

Heb. 9:24

"I don't want to get to know Him." That is exactly what my friend Anthony said. "Why should I get to know a God who only looks out for all the wrong things I do? And then He writes them all in His big book so He can make you pay for them in the end. I know the difference between right and wrong. I do not need God."

Anthony was a dependable, hardworking, and kind man. He just didn't want to believe in a God who judges. I always had a difficult time describing God to him. My God was too distinctly different from his. My God talks to me when I feel I have lost myself. My God picks me up when I make a mistake and tells me I am forgiven. My God tests me and gives me the strength to overcome—but He also judges me.

**My God tests me and  
gives me the strength  
to overcome.**

I don't know if Anthony ever really got to know God, but years later I still think about his God-of-judgment concept. I know God is Judge. I know God is love. If He is both, why does He write down all the sinful things we do? And why does He save them all for the judgment? How does He balance justice and love? And how do I explain this to my friend Anthony?

"The law of the Lord is perfect" (Ps. 19:7, NIV). It is a complete description of God's character. If we are His, then we have to look and act like Him, like His law. I am judged on a perfect standard. Those who know me know that I am far from perfect. And every day I realize the many ways in which I do not act according to His law. This is when the desperation sets in.

"Converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7). God's law changes us? *He* changes us. As I continue to study, I understand how He changes me. There is no need to fear the judgment. The Lord who died for me, forgives me, and changes me, is the same One who judges me.

Let us look forward with certainty "for Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence" (Heb. 9:24, NIV). Anthony, Jesus stands before God for you so that you may live.

Sunday  
April 14

## Our Advocate Before the Judgment Seat

### LOGOS

Gen. 3:8-18; Ps. 95:5, 10; Dan. 7:10, 22; John 5:24, 25; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:24; Rev. 20:12, 13

It was my own poor judgment that had prompted me to take what now seemed a ridiculous dare. During my senior year at a boarding academy, I had been working on a nearby farm known for quality hay and fine cattle. I was college-bound material, nearing my readiness to take on the world. But before I went, I attempted a ridiculous dare to execute a sharp, ninety-degree right turn in fourth gear on a huge tractor, as my roommate had done. There I was, looking down at a piece of expensive farm equipment with a broken axle, lying in a ditch on the side of the road.

My mind raced: Would I be fired? Would all my hard-earned money for school have to pay for the damages? What would Big Red, the farm manager, say? What would the farm owner say? How much does a tractor cost anyway?

As I made my way to the field to confess to Big Red what I had done, I rehearsed how I would explain what I'd done, to offer some way to pay for my mistake. To my surprise, as I confessed my sorrowful deed to Big Red, I was met with the smile and comfort of a true and forgiving friend. He not only forgave me, but he pleaded my case before the judgment seat of

**I attempted a  
ridiculous dare.**

the farm owner and saw to it that my debt was paid in full. He kept me on his team that year and thereafter always treated me as if I had never "sinned."

As we read our Bibles this week, the picture we get of Jesus and how He treated His erring children is much like my picture of the actions of Big Red back on the farm as I stood before him in awe of his great capacity to forgive.

The apostle Paul says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10, NKJV). In the end we will all have to appear before the judgment throne of God, who alone will determine our final destiny.

And the awesome part of the story is that He longs to reveal His great capacity to forgive sinners like you and me. All we need to do is come to Him in repentance and confession of our wrongs rather than try to hide behind excuses, which do nothing to correct our wrongs.

"Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24, NKJV). And if we will accept His offer of forgiveness and help, He will plead our case as well.

The story that the Bible tells is that Jesus Christ is Creator and Sustainer of all



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that is and was and is yet to be. Yet He delights to hear even our smallest prayers and to supply our petitions. He is interested in all the events of our daily lives.

The Scriptures are clear about the subject of the judgment. " 'A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. . . . Until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom' " (Dan. 7:10, 22, NKJV).

And then in Revelation 20:12, 13, we read, "I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (NKJV).

Yet the message of love from the Savior is that He wants to plead our case before His Father on our behalf if we will by faith come to Him with our broken lives and confess the wrongs we have done. Jesus says to us, " 'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live' " (John 5:24, 25, NKJV).

Let's face it: each of us has made a wreck of things in one way or another when we look at our lives. And with the day coming fast upon us when we all shall stand before the judgment seat of God to give an answer for our efforts, we need to have a Friend like Jesus on our side who will help us stand victorious. He personally has seen to it that our debt has been paid in full. Rather than reject us, He promises to keep us on the team, to treat us as if we never sinned.

## **REACT**

1. In His role as our Advocate, just exactly what does Jesus do for us?
2. How does God view the individual who stands before Him without an advocate in the judgment?
3. What false views of God the Father could arise from the idea of Jesus being our Advocate before Him?
4. What would you say to someone who asks you to explain the final judgment?

Monday  
April 15

## **“This Same Jesus . . . Shall So Come”**

### **TESTIMONY**

Acts 1:11

“While the disciples were gazing upward to catch the last glimpse of their ascending Lord, He was received into the rejoicing ranks of heavenly angels. As these angels escorted Him to the courts above, they sang in triumph, ‘Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth: O sing praises unto the Lord, to Him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens. . . . Ascribe ye strength unto God: His excellency is over Israel, and His strength is in the heavens.’ Psalms 68:32-34, margin.

“The disciples were still looking earnestly toward heaven when, ‘behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.’ Acts 1:10, 11.

“The promise of Christ’s second coming was ever to be kept fresh in the minds of

**“Christ laid aside His  
royal robes and garbed  
Himself with humanity.”**

His disciples. The same Jesus whom they had seen ascending into heaven, would come again, to take to Himself those who here below give themselves to His service. The same voice that had said to them, ‘Lo, I am with you always,

even unto the end,’ would bid them welcome to His presence in the heavenly kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

“The same Jesus who has been our Advocate, our friend at court, pleading the cases of all who accept Him as their Saviour, will come the second time to be admired in all them that believe.”<sup>2</sup>

“As in the typical service the high priest laid aside his pontifical robes and officiated in the white linen dress of an ordinary priest; so Christ laid aside His royal robes and garbed Himself with humanity and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. As the high priest, after performing his service in the holy of holies, came forth to the waiting congregation in his pontifical robes; so Christ will come the second time, clothed in garments of whitest white, ‘so as no fuller on earth can white them.’ Mark 9:3. He will come in His own glory, and in the glory of His Father, and all the angelic host will escort Him on His way.”<sup>3</sup>

“All heaven will be emptied of the angels, while the waiting saints will be looking for Him and gazing into heaven, as were the men of Galilee when He ascended from the Mount of Olivet. Then only those who are holy, those who have followed fully the meek Pattern, will with rapturous joy exclaim as they behold Him, ‘Lo this is our God.’”<sup>4</sup>

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 32-34.

2. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 2.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 33.

4. *Maranatha*, p. 291.

# To Judge a Judge

## EVIDENCE

Rom. 14:10

Why do we need a judgment? The easy answer is because of sin. Without sin there is no need to separate truth from error, good from evil. Look at the first sin in Genesis again. Just eight verses after the first sin took place a judgment was rendered. God could not allow the sin, under the law, to go unpunished. So, throughout the history of humanity, there has been the need to separate right from wrong.

Some of the famous judges of the Bible were Moses, Deborah, Samson, and Solomon, to name a few. What do these people have in common besides being judges? They were all appointed by God to judge according to His law.

As followers of Christ, too often we feel we know God's law enough to pass sentence on others. Are we guilty of this sin? Look at Galatians 6:1, 2. The Bible charges us to help each other out through love, not condemnation. That applies to all people, not just Adventists. So, how do we approach someone who "is overtaken in any trespass" (Gal. 6:1, NKJV) in a way that is not condemning?

The answer is found in the scripture basis for the day. If we show contempt for our brother or sister, then we are judging. If we show love in spiritually restoring our brother or sister, then we are building them up. Judging will put a stumbling block for others, and we might even cause them to fall further into sin (Rom. 14:13). So, what does this have to do with the final judgment?

In today's legal system, a verdict is always rendered by the judge or jury. The books of our lives will be opened. All our good deeds and evil deeds will be brought out into the open. I am glad that Jesus Christ is the Judge. He has the right to do so because He created us, and His Father gives Him the authority. This right was never given to us! So let's leave the judging to God, and we will have nothing to worry about because of the promise in 2 Timothy 4:8.

The books of our lives  
will be opened.

## REACT

1. What does the phrase "to judge" represent?
2. How is gossip related to judging?
3. If we are saved entirely through God's grace, why do books have to be opened in the judgment showing our good and evil deeds?
4. What limitations are there to the legal metaphor of the judgment?

## Judgment: Fear or Joy?

### HOW-TO

Rev. 20:12, 13

This is a subject that we need to look at often to remind us that we want our names written in the book of life. Here is a statement that helps put this into perspective. “Let everyone who professes the name of Christ consider the fact that he must meet every act of injustice, give an account for every harsh word, at the judgment seat of Christ. It will not be pleasant to review the words that have been spoken that have wounded and bruised souls, to review the decisions that have worked against souls for whom Christ died. Every action will come into judgment, and the spirit that prompted it will be made manifest.”\*

We can have three views of the final judgment. First, we can be afraid of it because of our sins, which are always before us as David felt in Psalm 51:3. Second,

**Show God and others that you believe this promise.**

we can become so numb to the first view that we can ignore, forget, or think that we are going to heaven so the final judgment is not that important. The final view that we can have about the

judgment is joy, not because we have arrived, but because we know we are living up to the light that we have and that our sins have been covered by the blood of Christ.

You may be thinking, *How can I be joyful about the final judgment?* Try the practical applications that follow, and you will be surprised with the results.

● **Ask yourself daily, “What would Jesus do?”** When you do this and answer the question honestly, you will definitely be living up to the light you have received.

● **Strengthen your faith.** For example, next time you are short of money and don’t know how you are going to pay your bills, really believe on the promise that “God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19, NKJV). Show God and others that you believe this promise by not panicking, but by listening to what God tells you to do.

● **Begin to think of the final judgment as a joyful occasion.** This will be joyful for all of us because at this time sin will be destroyed forever. The blood of Christ will pay for all our sins, and we will never see the results of sin again.

### REACT

1. What happens if your bills are due, you have no money, and you’re listening for God to tell you what to do—but you hear nothing?

2. What expectations can/should we have of God?

\**Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 224.

# Judgment Is Not Meant to Be Condemnation

## OPINION

1 Cor. 11:32

The mere mention of the words “Judgment Day” seems to cause apprehension. To some it is synonymous with Doomsday. God’s people should view the final judgment altogether differently. We must keep in mind that our God is a God of infinite love, mercy, and supreme justice. We must also remember that our beloved Messiah wants to restore us to His Father’s kingdom of peace.

What a joy it is to know that the One who will sit on the judgment seat is also the One who has prepared our defense. For this magnificent Counselor has already paid the price for our guilty verdict so that we can be found innocent. “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.”\* What great mercy!

Why, then, does God judge the saints? “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’ So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:11, 12, NIV). Heaven’s justice system would fail if its only purpose were to condemn the lost. It would give no consideration for those saved souls who must put closure to their own sins and suffering. In other words, judgment is vital to the cleansing and healing process.

**It may not be as  
bad as it sounds.**

The judgment is not the desire of retribution by a vengeful, unsympathetic tyrant, but the yearning for reconciliation of a loving and patient Father. Reconciliation encompasses repentance, confession, atonement, and forgiveness. Reconciliation is vital to true peace. In order for peace, we need to be reconciled to God and to one another. But this can be achieved only through His perfect Son. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, we can address our sins in constructive ways. Instead of carrying the burden of condemnation, we can confidently invite Christ to repair our sinful nature without fear of condemnation. “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32, NIV).

Yes, all must be judged. The judgment of heaven, however, deals in restorative justice. Its intent and aim is not to punish but to restore, to reconcile. It is meant to mend broken relationships, rehabilitate wounded souls, and pardon repentive hearts. “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3, NIV). Subsequently and ultimately, order is restored and everlasting peace reigns.

\**The Desire of Ages*, pp. 4, 5.

## Here Comes the Judge

### EXPLORATION

John 5:24

### CONCLUDE

This week's lesson presents a typical view of judgment—confused. Isn't the idea of record-keeping of one's deeds legalistic? And what do we do with the text, "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life'"? (John 5:24, NKJV). We're all sinners in need of salvation. Perhaps judgment isn't what God does to us; it's what God allows us to do to ourselves.

### CONSIDER

- Listing the criteria you would use to judge one of your children or parents. What would you overlook? Would it be different from the criteria you'd use to judge an enemy?
- Spending some time at a local courtroom. Attend a few trials and listen carefully to what the judge and lawyers say. Is their relationship the same as the relationship between Jesus and God the Father?
- Interviewing co-workers or friends, asking them to define the work of God in the judgment.
- Watching a few episodes of Oprah on television. Study her guests' advice on how to build and maintain a healthy mind and body. Then ask yourself, *Do I really want to be in charge of my life?* Perhaps that job is better suited to One who can ultimately save you.
- Reading a few books about famous (or infamous) court cases of recent history. Think about the following: What really decided the outcome? Did innocence and truth truly prevail? Then think about what makes God the perfect Judge.
- Memorizing Matthew 7:1-5. This may not only alter the way you judge others, but may also shed new light on how God judges you.
- Purchasing or making a wooden gavel. Set it where you'll see it every day to remind you that you act as your own judge when it comes to the hope of eternal life. The sound that you hear when you break one of God's rules is made by the gavel God is allowing you to hold tightly in your own hands.

### CONNECT

Matthew 5:1-12.

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 87; *The Great Controversy*, chap. 42.

# Good reasons for Hope



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"As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. 'Son of man,' he said to me, 'understand that the vision concerns the time of the end' "

(Dan. 8:17, NIV).

# Hope in a Fear-Torn World

## INTRODUCTION

Daniel 8

Rondi Aastrup, an English teacher at Greater Boston Academy, Stoneham, Massachusetts, says readers of the Old Testament know that there is a side of God that is not so reachable or comforting. This side of God becomes angry and destroys disobedience. This side of God seems opposed to the more accessible view of God, but I am beginning to understand that we must become reconciled to it.

Let us remember that God is love and therefore there is still a good reason for hope in a hopeless world torn apart by sin. God loved us before we loved Him. The Almighty God reins in heaven and earth and is in full control of our affairs.

We ask the question: Is there any hope for us in this condition as we face the end of the road? It seems that all of our efforts have fallen short, and only God can change the world. Yes, there is hope for the world, an answer for the world. As long as there is love there is hope.

Shirley\* went to China as a student missionary, leaving her friend John behind. There was no communication between them for about nine months, and John began to imagine the worst. One night he dreamed that Shirley had perished in a train crash. Fear gripped his heart, only to wake up and find out that it was but a dream. Then he asked himself, *What if it actually happened?*

The following morning, John received a letter from Shirley, saying in part, "You are fearfully and wonderfully made!" His heart was elated and his fears vanished.

**There is a side of God  
that is not so reachable  
or comforting.**

Our world has conditioned us to worry over many things. That is why Jesus says, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt. 6:27, NIV). He also urges us through His prophet Isaiah to "'Fear not, for I am with you; . . . I will uphold you with My righteous right hand'" (Isa. 41:10, NKJV). Even now, with terrible times coming ahead of us, we can rest assured in God's promises that He will be with us.

Will you trust Jesus Christ? I will. Just hold on!

\*Shirley and John are fictitious names in this article.



# Taking Away the Daily Sacrifice

## EVIDENCE

Dan. 8:11-13

The sanctuary consisted of the following parts: the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place, representing the steps in the process of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification, respectively. In Christ's ministry, these parts symbolized the substitutionary sacrifice, the priestly mediation, and the final judgment, respectively.

God's people worshiped Him in the courtyard, while the priests ministered in the Holy Place. Those who entered here saw themselves reflected in the golden walls around, reminding them that the eyes of the Lord see all. The priests could look up and see that they served under a red skin (Exod. 36:19). Christians, too, are a nation of priests that serve Jesus under His blood.

The Most Holy Place, the tabernacle's most sacred area, represents the presence of God. The wall separating the courtyard and the Holy Place illustrates human separation from God. All the sanctuary services represent the sinner's journey back to God. In Genesis, sin entered the world and humankind was evicted from Eden; in Revelation, sin is eradicated and humanity is restored to communion with God.

The sanctuary had only one door, representing Jesus Christ, the only way to God. Jesus declares: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV; see also 10:9).

The sinner came to the door of the courtyard with a spotless animal to sacrifice for personal sins. He laid his hands on the head of this innocent animal and confessed his sin, thereby transferring his sin to the animal. He would slay the animal with his own hand and shed its blood, representing the ultimate sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God—Jesus Christ. The altar where the animal was burnt represents the cross where Jesus was sacrificed for the sin of the world.

**Christ is the  
Sanctuary.**

Christ is the Sanctuary. He is the Door and the spotless Lamb, our High Priest, the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Living Water in the laver, and the Rock upon which is written the laws of God in the ark. His blood makes it possible for us to approach the Father. We have no fear for the future because His death and resurrection took away the daily sacrifice.

## REACT

Why were the priests to cleanse themselves at the laver before entering the sanctuary?

Monday  
April 22

## Hope in Fear

### LOGOS

Daniel 8

I am a student cum literature evangelist. While away from college, I canvass in the city of Nairobi, taking our publications to offices and schools. In the course of selling the books, I have discovered that I do not make as many good sales on books of the apocalypse as I do on the other books of health and temperance, family relationships, and other aspects of spiritual growth. While discussing this lack of interest in the prophecy books, many of my customers indicate that the apocalypse books are terrifying and that the messages therein are hard to understand.

Do you also believe so? Why would a caring God want to frighten us and give us a message that is difficult to understand? In Daniel 8 we see Daniel afraid when he received the vision and confessed not to have understood the message (verse 27).

I was walking home from the city center of Nairobi recently when a man approached me, claiming to be a plainclothes police officer. The man had police

**I was terrified to realize  
that I was being kidnapped.**

handcuffs and showed me his police identification card. He interrogated me for a short time before inviting me into a car, where other men were waiting for further interrogation. They promised to drive me home, where they would ascertain my true identity, but I was stunned when they began to head off to an unknown destination. I was terrified to realize that I was being kidnapped. They drove farther out of the city center as I sat helplessly in the back seat of their car. Then I felt a sudden reassurance: *I am not alone!* I told myself. *There is One who is watching this whole episode from above, and He knows exactly how to deliver me from the hands of my captors.*

I bowed my head to honor the Majesty of heaven, and with praise and thanksgiving on my lips, I asked for deliverance. I spent the remaining time after my prayer preaching the salvation of God to my captors. When I could preach no more, I shouted for help from motorists passing by. Help came immediately. A vehicle behind the car I was in carried genuine plainclothes police officers. They pulled up in front of the car I was in and drew their guns, forcing my captors to surrender. The Word of God clearly says, "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11, NKJV).

God does not promise that we will have it easy in this world, but that He cares enough to walk with us every step of the way. Because the future is oftentimes uncertain and sometimes bleak, God chooses to reveal His secrets to His faithful servants. The events that are to take place shortly before the second advent of our

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Savior Jesus Christ can be very terrifying, but God says, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10, NIV).

One of the most significant lessons from Daniel 8 is the symbolic representation of the continual, all-the-time, high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary.

That Jesus is our High Priest is the message of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 3:1 invites us to consider Jesus “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (NKJV). We were all doomed to eternal death when our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned but God sent His One and Only Son Jesus Christ to save us (John 3:16). We were all taken hostage by our sins and by the devil, but when Christ offered Himself up on the cross, He led all of humanity free. Christ is still ministering on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. However, Jesus is also ministering to our everyday needs. The Scriptures tell us that He is an ever-present help in time of need (Ps. 46:1).

For ages Christ’s priestly ministry in heaven has been made difficult, but the prophecy has been fulfilled. For many centuries the truth about Jesus has been maligned. His freedom to help people has been limited by the false theories of paganism, secularism, and even by the mistaken emphases of certain Christian doctrines. But despite all these, He is still in control of all our affairs.

## **REACT**

1. What is the first thing you do when in trouble?
2. What is your attitude toward apocalyptic books?
3. What does Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary mean to you? Be specific.
4. Would you rather a friend give you a surprise visit or tell you he will be visiting you way ahead of time? How does this reflect on your reaction to the idea of the Second Coming?
5. What really terrified Daniel was that he *didn’t* understand. What can we learn from that?
6. Bottom line: Keep your eyes on Jesus every day and talk with Him and prophecy details will take care of themselves. Explain why you agree or disagree.

Tuesday  
April 23

## Stepping on God's Foot?

### TESTIMONY

Dan. 8:13

Ellen G. White says that the Lord had shown her that the history of God's people is going to repeat itself. She says, "Jacob's experience during that night of wrestling and anguish represents the trial through which the people of God must pass just before Christ's second coming. The prophet Jeremiah, in holy vision looking down to this time, said, 'We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. . . . All faces are turned into paleness. Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.' Jeremiah 30:5-7."\*

The scene in Daniel 8:13 will be repeated: the rebellion that causes desolation. Wickedness and evil will increase in a magnitude that has never been experienced before.

When Christ shall cease His work as Mediator on humanity's behalf, then this time of trouble will begin. Then the case of every soul will have been decided, and there will be no atonement to cleanse from sin. Then the restraining spirit of God is withdrawn from the earth. As Jacob was threatened with death by his angry brother, so will the people of God be in peril from the wicked, seeking to destroy them. And as the patriarch Jacob wrestled

**The history of God's  
people is going to  
repeat itself.**

all night for deliverance from the hand of his angry brother Esau, so will the righteous cry out to God day and night for deliverance from the enemies surrounding them.

But in all these, our Lord will come to the rescue of His people. He will manifest His power as the King of kings and Lord of lords, who reigns forever and ever. Nothing will be able to stand before His Majesty—neither the mountains nor the mighty waters. We can join Paul and say so long as the Lord is on our side, it doesn't matter who is not. Christ will return and put everything under His control as it was in the beginning. His grace is, and will be, sufficient to take us through this terrible time!

### REACT

1. It can be a scary idea that the wicked will try to destroy the people of God. How can a Christian have confidence in the face of this threat? Be specific.

2. "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NKJV). To gain a fuller understanding of this text, use a thesaurus to look up words like: "grace," "sufficient," "strength," "perfect," and "weakness" and plug those words back into the text. How can you claim this verse for your own?

\**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 201.

# What If + If Only = Hot Fear

## HOW-TO

2 Tim. 1:7

We live in a world of suspicion, regret, exceptions, and consequences. These are brewed in the kitchen of our daily lives, and we have become familiar with them. But there's more to them than just familiarity. Our everyday lives have their mathematical role-plays. Every sunrise adds to the number of days, every worry reduces the number of our days, every trust in God multiplies to the number of our days, and every prayer subtracts from the worries of our days.

How shall we deal  
with these words?

What if? If only . . .

How shall we deal with these words that cause fear to be fertile in the bed of our hearts?

**What if?** When you hear voices of regret in your heart, I suggest that you replace your negative "what if's" with the following:

- What if I arose in the morning and spoke first with the Lord?
- What if I gave a gentle smile to that weary looking face?
- What if I spoke kind words to that rude stranger?
- What if I gave to the needy as though nothing were mine?

**If only . . .** We covet things and desire them for our selfish gains: that big house for *my* family, that beautiful dress for *me*. We can replace these too. Try the following:

- If only I had that big house and shared the rooms with those AIDS orphans.
- If only I had all the food I needed and spread a banquet table for the street children.
- If only I had those beautiful clothes to distribute them to the naked.
- If only I could reach that level of education and use it to serve God with better skills.

With these, your equation will look like this: "What if's" + "If only's" = Glory to God.

God is a God of the impossible, and He can give us all we ask if only we recognize Him as God and seek the glory of His name, His worth, and His majesty. *What if* we let go of our fear of the unknown? *If only* we could open the lids of our fear kettles and let the fear run cold.

Thursday  
April 25

## Is It a Dream or a Vision?

### OPINION

Dan. 8:23

Some may say that wars erupt as a result of a disagreement in major meetings. Others would say that the people of the world have made many more sophisticated weapons and they are experimenting with them in wars. People are doing only what pleases themselves and do not consider what God Almighty thinks about their acts. Human wickedness prompted the Lord to say to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them” (Gen. 6:13, NIV).

In the present time, self-seeking has caused a lot of pain in the world by way of tribal clashes, corruption, killings, rape, kidnappings, etc. Nation warring against nation has become normal. Nations are investing heavily in arms, rather than in alleviating poverty and ensuring food security for the people of the world. The sad thing is that all these sophisticated weapons are for the destruction of fellow humans, which is seen as a

**Men and women are complacently living in obscene luxuries.**

nobler cause. I wish these weapons were made to break mountains or destroy other inanimate things. Men and women are complacently living in obscene luxuries while multitudes are dying of hunger and millions do not have basic facilities like shelter and clothing.

In His address to His disciples on the mountain, Jesus told them about the signs of His coming, saying that “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matt. 24:6, NIV).

All over the world there are wars, hatred, famine, incurable diseases—like the dreaded AIDS—and earthquakes are increasing in number and intensity. Our hearts are failing us for fear. No place is safe on the earth, even your own bedroom. The devil is at work. No wonder there is chaos in every nation and tribe—even in the family. It is therefore our responsibility as Seventh-day Adventist Christians to spread the good news about Jesus Christ and His salvation to all people and all nations for the end has come. See to it that no one is left without being told about Jesus and informed about the end-time signs.

### REACT

1. Be honest. Do you really care if people are told about Jesus? If yes, how do you *know* you care? If no, how do you *know* you don't care?
2. Is it hard to get into doing God's work of spreading the good news? Why or why not?

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Josephat Machuma, Nairobi, Kenya

# The Future Without Fear

## EXPLORATION

Daniel 8

### CONCLUDE

This week's lesson centers on a vision so frightening that it left Daniel physically ill. The vision concerned the time of the end. So if Daniel was scared, why shouldn't we be scared silly when we think about end-time events?

Here's why: because our hope is greater than our fear. We know that God is love and that He will carry us through good times and bad. "I will strengthen you and help you," He says.

So as we come into the last days of earth's history, we can shrug off the threats of the devil. We may be in for a fight, but we know we're on the winning side.

### CONSIDER

- Making a list entitled "Why I have a bright future." Write down reasons that you can look forward to tomorrow and the days beyond. Put the list on your refrigerator door.
- Going through your music collection to select the album that inspires you with the greatest sense of hope. Listen to it again.
- Watching a nightly TV news program. Evaluate each story on whether it builds hope or diminishes your hope in the future. Think about which kind of story is in the majority.
- Reflecting on times in your past when you were fearful of the future—e.g., preparing to make a public speech, or facing the first day at a new school. Were your fears fully justified? Did you ever see evidence that God helped you through these situations?
- Reading a biography of Alexander the Great and assessing the appropriateness of comparing him to the goat pictured in Daniel 8:5-8.
- Contacting a charity that brings people a brighter future. Volunteer your time, donate money, donate goods, or at the very least, visit their Web site.
- Finding the text in the Bible that brings you the most hope. Then, using materials from a craft store or around your house, decorate a plaque that will display that text in your home or office.

### CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 40.

Penny Estes Wheeler, *The Appearing*; John Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*; Norman Gulley, *Christ Is Coming!*

# Getting Acquainted



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“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NKJV).



# The First Date

## INTRODUCTION

Dan. 9:23

Beads of sweat rolled down my forehead, racing to my chin; my knees were by this time on autopilot and all I could do was stay vertical. Silly old cupid had given me a disease: I was now suffering from acute love-struckness. Your first date is a really nervous experience, *I hope I don't make a fool of myself. Will she like me?* It is scary. It affects your health. It affects your mind.

But after that first date, if all goes well, you will have a relationship. And when you are enjoying that relationship, the fear of the first date disappears in the joy of knowing and being known. Once you get over that first hurdle, a beautiful relationship is on track and you realize that the fear of the starting gun is over.

As the millennia have changed, many people—even sincere Christians—have been worrying about what is happening. In fact throughout history humanity has had a love-hate relationship with an uncertain future. They have been preparing for their first date. *When Jesus comes, I hope I don't make a fool of myself. Will He like me?* As you read the prophetic books of the Bible such as Revelation, Daniel, and Ezekiel, you cannot help realizing that trouble lies ahead. Is this awareness of a troubled future similar to a starter pistol in our relationship with God?

Silly old cupid had given me a disease.

And it was to Daniel, a man concerned about the future that God sent Gabriel with one of the most amazing messages ever, that he is greatly, humongously loved. In a world of fear the message of God is: I love you, and I want you to understand what really matters. And in Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks, the big thing happened on week 62. The date happened. God came to earth to show us that He really loves us. That is why He died for us. But this was not a one-time affair; this was the start of a relationship that can last for eternity.

The prophecies tell us the details of the date, so we need to pay attention to them. But more important than where we meet for our first date or what dress we wear is the relationship after the date. In a fearful, out-of-control, maddening world we are not alone. We are in a relationship with a powerful God who urges us to "just snuggle in tight and know that everything will be all right. I'm right here!"

## LOGOS

Ezra 7; Daniel 9; Heb. 10:8-10

The events recorded in Daniel 9 are a pertinent reminder that in these times when we expect the fulfilment of Bible prophecy, the focus of the faithful people of God is clearly to be fixed on Jesus and His atoning ministry. While Seventh-day Adventist Christians eagerly await a conclusion to the end-time prophecies we have studied for so long, we must never let go of our firm hold on the Anointed One. While we, like Daniel, pray for a rapid end to the problems in a sin-wracked world, the answer is found only in the Redeemer.

### **The Purpose of End-Time Praying (Dan. 9:2, 3)**

Daniel's studied objective in prayer was to petition the God who had given His word through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25) that Jerusalem would be desolate for a 70-year period. He understood the end of that time to have come. He was approaching the God who stated: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11, NKJV).

Daniel's purpose in prayer has little, if anything, to do with his own personal requests and needs—and everything to do with God's Name, His church, His people, His reputation, and His kingdom.

### **How to Pray in 2002 (Dan. 9:4-19)**

The most striking aspect of Daniel's prayer is the repeated confession of the sins of God's people, including his own sins. Fourteen times he declares our sinfulness. This act of corporate confession and the leader's personal identification with the sins of his people must surely be a model to all on the way to approach the God who steers the course of history and the God who will bring the appropriate fulfilment to end-time prophecies.

### **Gabriel Answers (Dan. 9:20-23)**

The swiftness of Gabriel's answer to Daniel's prayer ("while I was . . . praying" [verse 20, NKJV]) illustrates how closely God is involved with His people in times of crisis. We know God hears prayer and we are confident of His presence in our lives, both individually and corporately.

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## Jesus the Answer (Dan. 9:24-27)

The heart of the answer to Daniel's prayer is the clear reference to Jesus' act of atonement on the cross. The prophet's own perspective is significantly broadened from the current conclusion of a prophecy about a 70-year desolation of his beloved city, Jerusalem, to a 70 weeks of years (from 457 B.C. to A.D. 34) when Heaven's redemption plan is pinpointed to Calvary, outside Jerusalem, and the gospel reach is expanded to the whole world, from Jerusalem. He must have had mixed feelings about the implications of this to his understanding of his previous vision. The possibility of a stretch of 2,300 years from 457 B.C. must have been difficult to comprehend from his vantage point. But when Jesus did answer, the answer was fully acceptable.

**Daniel's prayer has little to do with his own personal requests.**

Something good happens when elderly saints pray. Indeed, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, NIV). When the whole church, young and old, pray together, there has to be a powerful effect! Something even better happens when we pray together for the final fulfillment of God's messages for His end-time church—especially when our praying is focused on, in, about, and through the returning Jesus. Maranatha!

### **REACT**

1. In what other ways does Daniel's prayer style challenge a praying people who are waiting for Jesus to come a second time? Be specific.
2. Think of someone you trust to whom you would go for help in a difficult situation. How comfortable would asking for help be if you weren't already familiar with that person through personal conversations?
3. Daily conversation with God is the key to a fearless future. Explain why you agree or disagree.
4. How many people do you individually pray for every day? Is it valuable to you to pray for others? Why or why not?

Monday  
April 29

# All Because He Loved You

## TESTIMONY

Isa. 9:6, 7; Lam. 3:22

"He was to stand between the sinner and the penalty of sin; yet few would receive Him as the Son of God. He would leave His high position as the Majesty of heaven, appear upon earth and humble Himself as a man, and by His own experience become acquainted with the sorrows and temptations which man would have to endure. All this would be necessary in order that He might be able to succor them that should be tempted. Hebrews 2:18."<sup>1</sup>

Christ could easily have called off His sacrifice, but because we are the work of His hands, He gave all to redeem us, such great love. "It was love for sinners that led Christ to pay the price of redemption. 'He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor;' none other could ransom men and women from the power of the enemy; 'therefore His arm brought salvation unto him; and His righteousness, it sustained him.' Isaiah 59:16."<sup>2</sup> Such love cannot be expressed in words. The act of leaving the splendor of heaven proves that He loved you and me and He still does.

Leaving the splendor  
of heaven proves that  
He loved you.

"In word and in deed the Messiah, during His earthly ministry, was to reveal to mankind the glory of God the Father. Every act of His life, every word spoken, every miracle wrought, was to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God."<sup>3</sup>

He did all He could do to show the Father's love when He was on earth. It is our duty to show love to fellow creatures. The more we love His creation, the more we love Him. "Our Redeemer has opened the way, so that the most sinful, the most needy, the most oppressed and despised, may find access to the Father."<sup>4</sup>

No matter what state you may be in, He did it all for you, to redeem you because He loved you. Hope is there for you and me. Thank You, Lord, for the love You gave me, for giving up all just to save me. Help me to live for You today.

## REACT

1. What does it mean to you to live for Jesus?
2. What does it mean to you to die for Jesus?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 64.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 692.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 696.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 702.

# Private and Confidential

## EVIDENCE

Dan. 9:25

King Herod,

O King, live for ever. Surely there is none wiser, none more wonderful than you.

It is with great joy that I write you, for after much study, I am now able to bring you the information you requested last year. The writings of Daniel the prophet contain the exact timing of the coming of the one who would overthrow you. As you had already suspected, this so-called messiah will be born shortly to Jewish parents from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and the lineage of David. Further, we now know that he will be born in David's city, Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

About 450 years ago, the Jewish nation was yet under captivity. The Babylonian kingdom had long been overthrown and the Persians were now the masters of the Jewish nation. Whilst the Babylonians had sought to defile the temple of the God of the Jews (Dan. 1:1, 2), the Persians were to help restore it. In fact it was almost 457 years ago to the day, when King Artaxerxes issued a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, as was spoken of by Ezra the prophet (Ezra 6:14).

It is from this point in time, great King, that Daniel's prophecy is measured. He specifically mentions that the coming of this messiah will be seven and threescore and two weeks from the issue of this decree (Dan. 9:25). We now know that these weeks are not literal, but rather each prophetic day represents an actual year (Ezek. 4:6). Thus, this period of 69 weeks (483 years) will begin in about 27 years, time. Unfortunately, we are unable to give the age of this usurper at the time of his predicted overthrow, however, we estimate that he will be between the ages of 25 and 30.

As you can see, great King, this king of the Jews, the adversary of Rome and Herod, will be amongst the Jewish newborn very soon. The wisest move, great King, would be to issue a decree ordering the death of this foe. Further, since he will be among the newborn of Bethlehem, only the young ones of Bethlehem need die (Jer. 31:15).

It is important to your future, and that of the Roman Empire, that you use all available methods to ensure this uprising does not occur. I hope this information will be of use to you.

May the King live for ever, and may I remain your humble servant,

Satan

**I hope this information  
will be of use to you.**

Wednesday  
May 1

## Invite, Know, Give, and Share

### HOW-TO

Gen. 3:15; Dan. 9:4; Matt. 7:7, 8; 24; Luke 8:24

I can easily see how the prophecies were important to the people in Daniel's time. I could see how they gave hope, assurance, and a map, if you will, of how to know who the true Messiah would be by telling them exactly when He would arrive and what He would do. But how, exactly, can I apply them today?

**1. Have faith in God and in His plan.** Trust Him and invite Him into your heart and life every day (Matt. 7:7, 8). We learn from these prophecies that God is a loving God who did not leave us in the dark about His plan for salvation. I find that very comforting. Through these prophecies of the coming Messiah, He gave us hope and assurance that He had a definite plan to redeem fallen humanity.

**2. Know the signs of the Second Coming.** Read about the signs of the Second Coming in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Revelation, and what Ellen White says. Know these signs so you will not be fooled by deceivers. By telling us exactly when the true Messiah would come, the prophecies help us distinguish Him from false messiahs. God did not want His people to be taken in by false messengers. He wanted us to follow the only One who could take our sin upon Himself and set us free (Isaiah 53; John 3:17).

**3. Remember that God is in control.** Relax and give your worries and cares to Him. God didn't want us to be afraid. These prophecies ease our fears. No

Know these signs so  
you will not be fooled.

matter how bad things in your life may be, or how awful things are in the world, God is still in control (Prov. 3:25, 26; Luke 8:24) and keeps His promises (Dan. 9:4). He will deliver His people. "I have told you these

things, so that in me you may have peace. in this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33, NIV).

**4. Share the good news with others.** These particular prophecies tell us that Jesus will win the battle. Satan may bruise His heel (Gen. 3:15), but by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Satan and death were defeated forever. Everyone who believes in Him, who accepts His gift of salvation, will have eternal life (John 3:16).

### REACT

1. What other lessons can be learned from the Messianic prophecies?
2. If someone says they are the Christ, what signs should you look for? Do you know how to keep from being deceived?

# It's Who You Know

## OPINION

Ezra 7; Daniel 9; Heb. 10:8-10

I've been married to one very special person for all of two months now. My decision to spend the rest of my life with Chantelle has been my most terrifying and exciting so far. Being a contemplative type of person, it took me what felt like forever (about five years) to decide I wanted to marry Chantelle and pluck up the courage to ask her. So much could go wrong and who was to say she would even say yes (I'm proud to say she did say "yes"—and "I do").

Relationships and commitments fall far short of the romantic happily-ever-after ideals that we would all like to believe in. Marriage seems to be a tradition that has lost meaning. We have friends, colleagues, and acquaintances going through devastating breakups, separations, and divorces. Chantelle and I have struggled through our own challenges. It can feel like running a three-legged race through a minefield—really hard work and there is a good chance that both of you are going to get badly hurt.

It's difficult not to be cynical, but how can I tell if my relationship will work? Growing up as a preacher's kid, I have similar questions about our church. Is the coming of Christ our focus in all our work? Do we really know what is going to happen? Are we guaranteed to have *the* truth? Do we even all believe the same things? Is our interpretation of prophecy correct?

These questions may not be that different from those of people like Daniel or Ezra. These men with a mission were immersed in what seemed like hopeless situations. Did they know exactly what would happen? Would God lead them? What were their fears and what made them trust God?

Perhaps it's not *what* you know, but rather *who* you know—and *how* you know them. I feel passionate about being with Chantelle. We have shared so many good and bad experiences together. I don't know what will happen in our future, but Chantelle and I share a growing relationship together that is built on a meaningful promise.

God has made a promise to us. How do you know God? Where is your spiritual journey taking you? What sort relationship and commitment do you want to have with God?

## REACT

1. What guarantees do we have of the coming of the Messiah? Be specific.
2. What difference would it make, if any, if we had the details of Christ's arrival?
3. What are the most meaningful symbols of our covenant with Christ today?

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Sheldon Allen, Cape Town, South Africa

Friday  
May 3

**R.S.V.P.**

## **EXPLORATION**

Daniel 9; Rev. 3:20; Jer. 31:3

### **CONCLUDE**

Ever since sin first created a separation between God and humankind, our heavenly Father has devoted Himself to wooing back that lost love. Like a considerate lover, He sends us an invitation to meet Him and to get to know Him better. Through prophecy He supplies all the details we need as we look forward to our next appointment with Him.

### **CONSIDER**

- Designing an invitation that Jesus might send to you, asking you to join Him for His heavenly homecoming banquet. Think about incorporating some of the prophecies about the Second Coming.
- Choosing a passage from Daniel's prayer (Dan. 9:4-19) and setting it to music. You may wish to compare several Bible versions and choose the wording you like best.
- Looking for several different birds, animals, or plants around you that go out of their way to attract attention. Compare their strategies with the things God does to attract you to Himself.
- Creating a diagram of the prophecies pointing to Jesus' first coming (see Tuesday's portion of the lesson).
- Reflecting on the circumstances and events in your life that represent God's efforts to draw you closer, to invite you to be with Him forever.
- Asking God to impress you with a particular promise or invitation to share with someone else, then finding a tangible way to express it to them.
- Paraphrasing Daniel's prayer and adapting it for yourself and/or your church today.

### **CONNECT**

*Prophets and Kings*, chap. 45.

Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, chap. 9; David B. Smith, *The Daniel Diaries*.



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# A Heavenly stand-in



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“It was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these”

(Heb. 9:23, NKJV).

## Fear of the Unknown

### INTRODUCTION

Ps. 22:24; Prov. 3:24

Have you ever been afraid, really afraid? Ever since I was a little girl, I have had a great fear of the dark and of being alone. Sometimes, at night, I would sneak down the hall and tiptoe over to my grandmother's big brass bed, and carefully, so as not to awaken her, snuggle down into the covers. I felt so safe there. Fire, flood, burglars—didn't matter. Grandma would take care of me.

A couple of years ago I found myself in a worst-case scenario. I came home and discovered my husband had deserted me. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I had to face the prospect of living alone. With the help of God, my pastor, and my best friend, I managed to get through that difficult time. But I think I was most afraid of the unknown. Would my life ever be the same? Would I ever again find someone to share my hopes and dreams?

As I write this, I find myself in a beautiful old ranch house overlooking the ocean, with a devoted and caring husband, surrounded by my loving cats. I am at peace with myself. As I look back, I never would have dreamed life would have so

**A couple of years ago I found myself in a worst-case scenario.**

much to offer. We don't always know what's around the bend for us or what God's plans are for our lives. Life here on earth has many twists and turns and unexpected endings. But we as Christians needn't waste our time in fear because we *do* know

how things are going to turn out. We need only read our Bibles and trust in our heavenly Father. Christ, our Intercessor, is in heaven right now, pleading our cases, so we may spend eternity with Him and never experience fear again.

# Where's the Zeal?

## EVIDENCE

Lev. 16:29-31; John 8:44; Acts 3:19-21; Heb. 9:24, 27, 28

From the beginning, the Day of Atonement was a holy and sacred time of repentance. In those earliest days, people fasted and prayed as they searched their hearts, knowing they had only till sundown to be forgiven and cleansed as the high priest did his work in the sanctuary (Lev. 16:29-31).

The same was true for the people of the eschatological day of atonement, which began in 1844, when Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest.

"The Millerites saw themselves as the virgins in the tarrying time. . . . They clung to the promises, studied the prophecies, distributed their publications, continued their prayer services, tabernacle rallies, . . . camp meetings—and prayer."\*

The early Adventists came to understand that the Cross was only the beginning of our salvation. Through this most loving act, Jesus became our Atoning Sacrifice. His blood covers our sins, but a record still remains in the heavenly sanctuary. This is why Christ is in the Most Holy Place right now, sprinkling His own blood on the mercy seat on our behalf (Heb. 9:24).

**The Cross was only  
the beginning.**

And not only that, as in the days of old when the high priest bore the sins of the people until transferring them to the scapegoat, so Jesus—our High Priest—bears our sins while cleansing the heavenly sanctuary. Then, when probation closes and all the sins ever confessed are erased from the sanctuary, Christ will finish His work and free Himself from the burden of our sins by transferring them to the scapegoat—Satan—the father of all lies and the origin of sin (John 8:44).

Only then, when every trace of sin is blotted out of existence, can Jesus return to earth in all His glory to execute judgment upon the wicked and bring His brothers and sisters home (Acts 3:19-21; Heb. 9:27, 28).

As the pioneers of our church searched the Scriptures, they not only uncovered new truths about the Sabbath, cleansing of the sanctuary, close of probation, and Christ as our High Priest; they also found a zeal for God that was unprecedented in the Protestant movement. This zealous love for Jesus, the burden to finish the work of spreading the gospel and preparing hearts to meet our Savior was the foundation of the early Adventist movement. What set them apart was the blessed assurance of salvation and the knowledge that soon they would see His face.

And now, more than 150 years later, how much closer are we to that glorious day? How much more zealous should we be for the cause? But, are we?

\*Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1976), p. 27.

Monday  
May 6

## Vivid Pictures of Our Future

### LOGOS

Exod. 25:8; Leviticus 16; Dan. 7:9-11, 13, 14; 8:14; 9:24; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25

God is great! He shows us vivid pictures of our future. He is faithful with His promises. His work shows the craftsmanship of one common Creator.

God's motivation is love and the want of a relationship with us. Unfortunately, we let sin get in the way of our perfect relationship with Him. To achieve this relationship, God has created ways for us to atone for our sins. He promised that One would come that would free us from the curse of death caused by sin. This Person's title was Messiah or Christ.

Before the One that God promised came, God allowed for sin to be atoned for with a blood sacrifice. This was not a replacement for Christ but a ceremony that pointed to Christ. In God's first covenant, once a year the high priest would first cleanse himself through washing and a blood sacrifice. Then he would use two goats to atone for the sins of the entire nation of Israel. One goat was killed; the other was allowed to live and be cast away. This day was called the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur.

### **The Requirement of Forgiveness (Exod. 25:8; Heb. 7:27; 9:23)**

God's desire is to be with you and have a relationship with you. Unfortunately, your sins break this relationship. In the first covenant, God established His tabernacle so He could dwell among us. It was necessary for blood to be shed to pay the price of sin, to restore the relationship. That shedding of blood was a type of what Jesus did when He died on the cross for your sins. When Jesus died on the cross, He was the perfect and permanent Sacrifice to pay the price of sin (Heb. 7:27).

### **Parallels of the First Covenant With the Cross (Leviticus 16)**

In the first covenant the Israelites had their sins paid for with the Day of Atonement, which continually pointed toward Jesus Christ. Jesus is both the perfect Priest and the perfect Sacrifice for sin.

### **The Goats at the Day of Atonement (Isa. 53:5; Heb. 9:14, 26)**

Two goats were needed on the Day of Atonement to pay for the sins of the Israelites—one to die as a payment for sin and one to live as a scapegoat. The priest would lay his hands on the goat and symbolically transfer the sins of the nation to the goat. Jesus, who was perfect, had our sins transferred to Him. He was able to be the single Sacrifice; He died for your sins and rose again to live. Today *scapegoat* has come to mean any innocent person who suffers for the crimes of others. When Jesus died on the cross, He was the perfect Scapegoat.

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## **The Priest at the Day of Atonement (Heb. 7:27)**

Once a year the priest would enter into the Holy of Holies and atone for the sins of the Israelites. He had to wash himself twice during the time because he was dirty with sin.

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron first offered a bull for his own sin. Jesus was perfect and did not need any offering for Himself because He was the perfect Priest. Jesus was not a Levite, so He was not a part of the earthly order of priests by birth. Instead, Jesus is of the order of priests from Melchizedek because His life is eternal (Heb. 7:16).

## **The Permanence of Jesus' Atonement (Heb. 9:8, 9)**

The priest's atonement was never permanent or perfect, so it was required every year. Jesus' atonement was permanent and perfect, so it will never need to be repeated.

The Israelite High Priest entered into a copy of the heavenly temple but Jesus entered into the true heavenly temple and offered up Himself as a sacrifice. Jesus once and for all paid for the sins of everyone (Heb. 7:27).

## **A New Covenant (Heb. 7:12; 9:15; 10:1, 2)**

Once Christ had come, a new covenant was needed. It was superior to the old one because the old one merely pointed to the new. The regular sacrifices of the old covenant were replaced with the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

## **Jesus Our Intercessor (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)**

Since Jesus' sacrifice was perfect and permanent, He does not need to die continually to atone for our sins. Now He is our One and Only Intercessor in heaven. The only thing that makes us worthy of the presence of God is Jesus' death and resurrection. Now Jesus presents our needs before God as our Representative and Mediator.

**God's desire is to be with you.**

In the Day of Atonement, God showed us what Jesus the Christ was going to do before He came. Jesus became the perfect Priest, the perfect Sacrifice, and took on our sin. He died and lived again. He is in heaven as our Agent.

## **REACT**

1. What is the role of the congregation at Yom Kippur? How does that reflect our role in Christ's atonement?
2. Have you ever been in the role of a scapegoat? How did you respond to it?

Tuesday  
May 7

## The Books Are Opened

### TESTIMONY

Phil. 3:9; Rev. 22:12

"The blood of Christ, pleaded in behalf of penitent believers, secured their pardon and acceptance with the Father, yet their sins still remained upon the books of record. As in the typical service there was a work of atonement at the close of the year, so before Christ's work for the redemption of men is completed, there is a work of atonement for the removal of sin from the sanctuary."<sup>1</sup>

"In the new covenant the sins of the repentant are by faith placed upon Christ, and transferred, in fact, to the heavenly sanctuary. And as the typical cleansing of the earthly was accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been

**"An investigative judgment . . .  
does not contradict . . . salvation  
by faith through grace."**

polluted, so the actual cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal of the sins by which it had been polluted, so the actual

cleansing of the heavenly is to be accomplished by the removal, or blotting out, of the sins which are there recorded. But, before this can be accomplished, there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin, and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of his atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation,—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem his people; for when he comes, his reward is with him to give to every man according to his works. [REV. 22:12.]<sup>2</sup>

"Thus those who followed in the light of the prophetic word saw, that, instead of coming to the earth at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ then entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, to perform the closing work of atonement, preparatory to his coming."<sup>3</sup>

"The concept of an investigative judgment of all who profess faith in Christ does not contradict the biblical teachings of salvation by faith through grace. Paul knew that one day he would face the judgment. He therefore expressed the desire to 'be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith' (Phil. 3:9). All who are united with Christ are assured of salvation.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 421.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 421, 422.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 422.

4. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 326.

# At-One-Ment

## HOW-TO

Rom. 8:24; Heb. 7:25

Through study of the sanctuary and the eschatological day of atonement, we see that Christ's work as our High Priest is vital to our salvation. In fact, "Jesus [entered] upon a great process of atonement equal in grace and effectiveness to His death on the cross."<sup>1</sup>

Yet many overlook the significance of the sanctuary and its relationship to our salvation. And many lack the assurance of salvation. Through the sanctuary our sin record is erased, our transgressions are transferred through the blood to our High Priest, and eventually to the scapegoat—Satan. Only then can we stand blameless before the Father, assured of our salvation.

The sanctuary is  
all about Jesus.

"The sacred work of Christ for the people of God that is going on at the present time in the heavenly sanctuary should be our constant study."<sup>2</sup> Why is this important?

**1. True personal assurance of salvation.** Once we have accepted Christ as our personal Savior and confessed and forsaken our sins, we should feel that blessed assurance, right? But many are plagued by the doubting Thomas syndrome.

Through prayerful study of the earthly sanctuary, we see Christ appearing on our behalf. By understanding the process currently taking place in the heavenly sanctuary, we know how and why we are forgiven. Through this understanding and faith in our High Priest and atoning sacrifice, sweet assurance comes. Only then can we enjoy the peace of God.

**2. Assurance for others.** Many will doubt their way into heaven, never having assurance of being saved. Many will try to work their way to heaven through the law, or by denying it, claiming their own righteousness. By sharing the blessings of the sanctuary message with others, we can share the assurance too.

Also, many claim that the Old Testament is outdated and irrelevant to our lives today. But the sanctuary is all about Jesus—from the laver (symbolizing rebirth/baptism) to the mercy seat (symbolizing the presence of God). Everything about the sanctuary points toward Christ. So, learn the details and share them with a friend. "This . . . ministry of atonement is . . . designed to remove all sin from the hearts and lives and records of Christ's dear believers and to prepare them for eternal unity, eternal 'at-one-ment' with the Father."<sup>3</sup>

Do you understand Christ's personal ministry as well as you'd like to? If not, please take this invitation to learn about what Jesus is doing for you!

1. Lawrence M. Nelson, *The Sanctuary Made Simple* (Middleton, Idaho: HJ Publishing, 1996), p. 27.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 520.

3. Lawrence M. Nelson, *ibid.*, p. 45.

## OPINION

Gal. 1:4; 1 John 2:1, 2

I am fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful (I think) places on earth: Humboldt County, northern California. The grandeur and sheer elegance of the redwoods have always left me awestruck. Walking in an ancient grove is comparable to stepping back in time. It's almost otherworldly, as if we were never meant to actually see them. They definitely have a natural calming effect on me. Who could

**Walking in an ancient grove is comparable to stepping back in time.**

worry about anything when walking among these peaceful giants?

"All creation has suffered because of man's rebellion and sin. Nature did not choose to rebel, yet God allowed it to suffer with us. It, too, looks forward in hope to the

restoration of all things just as we do. Yes, nature itself will be delivered from the effects of sin and will once again breathe freely and enjoy God's liberty, as all of us will" (Rom. 8:20, 21, *The Clear Word*).

"[Christ] is now at the right hand of God—He confirms our standing with God before the universe" (verse 34, *The Clear Word*).

I am so grateful that Christ died for me and has covered my sins with His blood so one day I may walk in the redwoods of heaven and marvel at their reverence for our Creator.

## REACT

1. In reference to Romans 8:34, how would you answer someone from outside our faith who asks if we believe we go to heaven as soon as we die?
2. What special element of nature really speaks to you? In what ways? Why?
3. Give examples of ways in which all creation suffers because of human rebellion and sin. Give counter examples of how we can work for restoration of nature here and now.
4. How can you feel more secure that Jesus' sacrifice was good enough once and for all for all your sins? Be specific.
5. What are some stumbling blocks to sharing with others about Jesus' final and perfect sacrifice?
6. How would you respond to someone who claimed that grace has made obedience unnecessary?
7. In what ways has God made us like Him with regards to relationships?
8. In what ways does sin mar our relationship with Him and with others?



# Jesus the Priest, Jesus the Sacrifice

## EXPLORATION

Heb. 9:23

## CONCLUDE

The Day of Atonement was the climax of the Jewish yearly system of religious festivals and services. It was designed as an annual illustration of the climax to the great controversy. These services involved the sacrifice of the scapegoat, the high priest standing before the ark of the covenant, the cleansing of the blood-soaked curtain before the altar of incense in the sanctuary, and the banishment of the goat bearing the final responsibility of the community's sins to the wilderness. Altogether, these activities make a kinetic, visual picture of a series of events essential to God's final answer to the question of sin in the universe.

## CONSIDER

- Creating a collage of the images of atonement described in Leviticus 16. Use color, shape, and movement to illustrate the sacrifice of the scapegoat, the cleansing of the sanctuary, the judgment of the community, and the goat left to wander in the wilderness.
- Describing, as if you were present, the progression of events in the heavenly sanctuary referred to in Daniel 7:9; Hebrews 9. Choose the objective viewpoint of a journalist, an awe-stricken angel, or your own voice.
- Writing an antiphonal chorus based on the songs and themes in Revelation 19; 20 about judgment, banishment of evil, and victory of the King of kings.
- Enacting Christ's roles as supplicating Priest, conquering Warrior, proud Bridegroom, and King of kings, as described in Revelation 19; 20. Consider sharing this role-play with your Sabbath School class.
- Planning a simple vesper program on the theme of Christ's various roles played in the final events of earth's history. Ask each attendee to take one of the roles of Christ described in Hebrews 9; Revelation 1:31; 5:6-14; 12:5, 7; 19: 6-8, 11-13. They may enact each role or describe the impact of this aspect of Christ's work on their life.
- Envisioning yourself at the judgment, as part of the scene outlined in Daniel 7:9, 10. Meditate about what you will see, what you will say and do, and how you will feel.

## CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 23; pp. 428, 485, 658.

# The Miracle Child



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“ ‘Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’ ” (Matt. 24:30, NKJV).

# The Blessed Event

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 24:44

When my sister and her husband called to deliver their news, the whole family was stunned but elated. My sister had prayed for years to be able to make this announcement. We recognized that this pregnancy was nothing short of a miracle.

During the next few months we were in constant contact. She had dreamed of this day for so long that she made sure she asked every question, researched every answer, made every preparation and left nothing (that was within her control) to chance. And I offered all the information that I could from my own experience.

**“Why didn’t you tell me it would be so painful?”**

When the baby arrived, a week and a half early, I spoke to her in the hospital. Her question, “Why didn’t you tell me it would be so painful?” caught me off guard. I suddenly realized that we really hadn’t focused much on this aspect of the birth process. Perhaps our eyes were fixed on the blessed event.

Our Lord has made astonishing efforts to draw our attention to—and fix our eyes on—the blessed hope of His return. He has given us the information we need to identify the times in which we are living, but He gives us just enough to keep us focused on the important aspect of this event. He encourages our questions and yearns to help us research the answers in His Word. He advises us to prepare our hearts and leave nothing to chance.

While we understand that we cannot know the day or hour of His return (Matt. 24:36), His Word assures us that He is still in control and that the final victory is His (verses 30, 31). He promises never to leave our side (Deut. 31:6; Matt. 28:20) so that even though we face hardship we need not fear. “Joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5, NKJV).

For my sister, the pain was overshadowed by the pure joy of holding her miracle child. She experienced firsthand the fulfillment of a promise the Lord had made to her years ago. In the same way, I want to look forward to the fulfillment of that promise, when the Lord will amaze us with the pure joy of things never before seen or conceived (1 Cor. 2:9). Until then, I will make preparations.

## Take Heed, Watch, Be Ready

### LOGOS

Matthew 24; 25

Jesus' great exposition in Matthew 24; 25 indicates His concern for His followers in two ways:

- He provided guidance for His disciples to help them discern truth from Satan's deceptions by describing signs and events that would mark the way toward His return to earth.

- He encouraged them to be ready at all times for His return.

Jesus instructed the disciples who were listening to Him to "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Matt. 24:4, NKJV). Events that were thought to be impossible were about to occur. Jesus prophesied that the early Christians and Jews must brave great hardship and suffering in the next 40 years. They would face deception in the guise of persons claiming to be Christ. Wars and conflicts would arise among nations.

**Christians for centuries to come  
would continue to experience  
the great tribulation.**

Hunger, sickness, and natural disasters would plague them. Fellow Christians and family members would betray one other (verses 6-10).

These events would

climax with the destruction of the temple, when its massive stones would be thrown down by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70. Yet Jesus said these events were only the beginning of the birth pains of tribulation (verse 8). Verse 15 speaks of an "abomination of desolation," spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (NKJV). This signified the presence of pagan Rome in the temple at the time of its destruction. People would flee from persecution and even death during those days. But in His mercy, God would shorten this tribulation, or none would survive this time (verse 22).

After Jerusalem's destruction, Christians for centuries to come would continue to experience the great tribulation described in verse 8. Wondrous events in the heavens (verse 29) occurring in 1790 and 1833 would further indicate the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. The appearance of false christs would continue to deceive the elect as in earlier generations. Jesus speaks very clearly to all generations in verses 27, 30, that He would not return to earth secretly, but in a cloud of glory that all could see. Mourning among the unrighteous inhabitants of the earth will occur at this time, as God's wrath is poured out according to His judgment (see Rev. 6:15-17).

The conclusion of Matthew 24 and the entirety of chapter 25 are devoted to instilling a sense of urgency and readiness in the reader. Matthew 24:38 indicates that until the day of Christ's return, people will continue to be preoccupied with the pursuit of personal pleasure in this world. Although Jesus is not condemning

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marriage here, He indicates that humankind will hold human relationships in higher regard than their relationship with God. It is for this reason that Jesus warns us, “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (verse 42, NKJV), and “you also must be ready” (verse 44, NIV). The three parables that follow illustrate three different aspects of readiness for the Second Advent.

**1. Personal Readiness (Matt. 25:1-13).** The parable of the ten virgins indicates the importance of personal spiritual readiness for Jesus. All the virgins were invited to the wedding feast, just as all persons are invited to partake in the plan of salvation. But at the time of calling to the reception, only those who were prepared ahead of time are allowed to attend. So it is with us. We cannot “borrow” anyone’s spiritual readiness, as the five foolish virgins attempted to do. Only our own personal relationship with God can make one ready to fellowship with Him.

**2. Interpersonal Ministry (verses 14-30).** Jesus indicates the importance of sharing the gospel message and our love for God with others through this parable. All of God’s servants have been given talents according to their abilities, and all will be made accountable for their use. Those who enabled them to multiply, or shared their love of God with others, were commended for this (verses 21, 23). Some are afraid to take the risk of using their talent, and hide it in hope of retaining what they were given. They are appropriately acknowledged by Jesus in verse 26, whereby they reap the results of squandering their gift (verse 30). Even a personal relationship with God is incomplete without accountability for the furtherance of God’s work.

**3. Acceptance of Judgment (verses 31-46).** The judgment process is described plainly in comparing the righteous and unrighteous to sheep and goats. Jesus then further describes the qualities of the sheep and goats. Love for God is evidenced by love for our fellow humanity. His followers are to feed the hungry, provide shelter and clothes for those without, and visit those who are imprisoned, alone, or sick. The unrighteous will continue to ignore the needs of those around them, being too occupied with their own selfish needs. Each action or deed we perform for those around us is directed at Jesus (verse 40). The rewards for both the sheep and goats of this parable are eternal—for the righteous, life eternal; for the unrighteous, eternal separation from God (verse 46).

## **REACT**

1. How important is it for us to interpret the prophetic signs provided in the Bible, given Jesus’ discourse in Matthew 25?
2. How are we to be prepared for the tribulation that is to face our generation and those that may follow us? Be specific.
3. What are some ways people try to “borrow” others’ spirituality?
4. How can you tell whether you are a sheep or a goat? (Factor in motivation for acts of service and conflicting tendencies.)
5. What proportion of one’s Bible study should be spent on prophecy? Explain your answer.

Monday  
May 13

## “When Shall These Things Be?”

### TESTIMONY

Matt. 24:3

I have often driven by a billboard on the side of a building overlooking a local highway that says, “It’s Time, God.” Several thoughts always come to mind. I try to imagine what the motives are for this billboard. Are they trying to say, “Lord, don’t You see what’s going on around the world today? How much worse can it get? It’s time for You to come.” Or it could be “Lord, You said You would come soon. We know You have tarried. We’ve preached Your soon return and we’re beginning to lose credibility. So we’re demanding that You come now!”

I also think back to what the disciples, late in their lives, must have thought as they recounted Jesus’ words to them in Matthew 24: “I thought He promised that we would see His coming after these signs. What is keeping Him? Jesus, it’s time.”

“Christ’s words had been spoken in the hearing of a large number of people; but when He was alone, Peter, John, James, and Andrew came to Him as He sat upon the Mount of Olives. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?’ Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great

day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to

**And some things  
were not intended  
for us to know.**

study out the meaning for themselves. . . . This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth’s history.”<sup>1</sup>

By careful and prayerful study, the Holy Spirit reveals to us hidden morsels of truth a little at a time so that we aren’t overwhelmed. And some things were not intended for us to know: “We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ. . . . Why has not God given us this knowledge?—Because we would not make a right use of it if He did. A condition of things would result from this knowledge among our people that would greatly retard the work of God in preparing a people to stand in the great day that is to come. We are not to live upon time excitement.”<sup>2</sup>

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

2. *Last Day Events*, p. 33.

# Uncertain Ground

## EVIDENCE

Matt. 24:36, 42

On May 18, 1980, Mount Saint Helens suddenly erupted, killing volcanologist, David A. Johnston, the leader of a team of scientists performing volcanic studies. Before this eruption, scientists knew two important facts: (1) Mount Saint Helens was about to erupt, and (2) no one could know for sure when.

The volcano had been dormant since 1857, but earthquakes and small eruptions began in March 1980. Most alarming, however, was the bulging north side, which rose 100 meters. The signs were there that a major eruption was about to occur, but despite assurance of the impending catastrophe, they were uncertain of the timing. These scientists helped to persuade the authorities to limit access to the area around the volcano. Because they read the signs and prepared for the event, the death toll was kept to a few, instead of the thousands that it might have been.

**Death tolls summed  
at least 21,000.**

When the disciples asked Jesus when the destruction of the temple was to occur and when He would return to claim His kingdom (Matt. 24:3), He answered that God alone knew the day and the hour (verse 36). However, He identified many signs so everyone could know the time was coming and could prepare.

Possibly one of the most striking of these signs for the disciples was that of “famines and earthquakes in various places” (verse 7, NIV). In biblical times, earthquakes were rare and terrifying occurrences equated with God’s wrath. The first recorded evidence of an earthquake appears in Numbers 16:32. It is difficult to imagine the horror the Israelites must have experienced at the death caused by an event such as they had never before imagined. For Jesus to warn of frequent earthquakes would have been a horrific prediction. Modern geologic surveys, however, show the fulfillment of His warning. In fact, the worst manifestation so far of this fact occurred in January 2001. In the space of only two weeks, El Salvador and India were both rocked by earthquakes exceeding magnitude 7 on the Richter scale. Together the death tolls summed at least 21,000.

The signs are clear, but the day and the hour are unknown. Therefore, we have been advised to prepare now. Like the virgins in Matthew 25, we cannot depend on someone else to supply the Holy Spirit (oil) for us. Rather than fear these events, however, we can receive them with joy, having confidence that one day soon Jesus will return and restore the earth and His people to their intended glory.

## REACT

1. What does it mean, specifically, to prepare for Jesus’ second coming?
2. Why is it important for us to prepare now?

## HOW-TO

Matt. 24:8; John 16:21, 22

"The pregnancy test is positive." For some, these words elicit happiness. For others, it evokes a more negative mix of emotions. As her body changes, the mother-to-be may sometimes feel puzzled or even alarmed. She finds comfort in the doctor's words, "It's perfectly normal—to be expected."

In His sermon, Jesus postscripts His words with "'All these are the beginning of birth pains'" (Matt. 24:8, NIV). The word "sorrows" translates from the Greek *odin*, which means "birth pangs." The signs of Christ's coming will be like "birth pangs"; increasing in frequency and intensity until His appearing.

**Salvation is not in knowing the chronology but in knowing God.**

"I will return." These words of Jesus may elicit happiness, fear, or simply disbelief. For the believer, each sign brings confirmation of His sovereignty and watch care. Despite the growing magnitude of the sign manifestations, the believer can trust the One who said, "This is what will happen—to be expected."

The last days before Christ's return can be likened to a woman in labor. Here are four things a mother-to-be needs to remember. In parallel form, these points say something to those who wait in this "pregnant pause" before Jesus' return.

**1. Time the contractions.** This does not mean reading the Bible to hone spiritual one-upmanship or to break the code for miracles. Timing the appearance of end-time signs only signals progression in the timeline—not absolute nearness. Salvation is not in knowing the chronology but in knowing God.

**2. Mobilize family and friends.** We must not deny those within our sphere of influence the opportunity for eternal happiness. Notice that the talent parable of Matthew 25:14-29 points out that having only a few talents does not excuse one from service.

**3. Go to the hospital.** Our salvation ranks topmost in the priorities of heaven's occupants. With the key of prayer, we can unlock a storehouse of resources and dwell securely in ultimate wisdom. (See 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 29:11.)

**4. Remember your breathing exercises.** Every sign fulfillment should not send us into a spin. By distrusting self and trusting God, we can say, "No matter the circumstance, His grace is sufficient to carry me through."

## REACT

How would you react to a church member who stores up food rations, fuel, and weapons for the time of trouble?



# Reducing Your Wait

## OPINION

Ps. 27:14, Isa. 30:41

Waiting, it seems, is a perennial problem. In the early moments of waiting for something or someone, the anticipation of the arrival can cause excitement and euphoria. We are overcome with ponderings such as *What will it be like when it arrives?* and *Will it be everything I hoped for?* It is this genuine flame of passion that is used to ignite the same sense of anticipation in those around you. Just think about it: a new car, a birthday or your girlfriend or boyfriend returning from an absence that seemed like an eternity—all evoke a strange sense of restlessness and energy that people find difficult to ignore.

**As your wait grows longer, anticipation becomes anxiety.**

As time goes by, however, things begin to change. As your wait grows longer, anticipation becomes anxiety and passion becomes pain. The questions rage even more rapidly than before. Is this really worth the wait? What if it never arrives? What if I was mistaken (I'll look so foolish to those around me.)? Waiting can rob us of any desire to act and participate. We can become lost in disdain and apprehension.

How does one safeguard against discomfort, apathy, and lackluster caused by long-term waiting? There are two keys to success.

First, get connected. Being connected means that you are in regular contact with someone who has more information than you do. With a connection to God, you will develop a bond of trust and a writ of faith. Through His Word, you will discover that the signs are present and can actually help create direction in your life.

Second, engage in exercise and activity. Those who are stagnant find the wait overwhelming. Jesus knew this. He didn't just sit around waiting for the mob to arrive, to capture Him, and to crucify Him. Almost half of the chapters of John's gospel are dedicated to the activity of our Savior during the last few days before His death. Once connected, we must act on our bond of trust.

As we work with people to meet their needs of today and to fulfill their desire for all eternity, we begin to focus our attention and their attention on the return of our Savior. Overcoming anxiety with our affinity to God and our acts of love is a certain way to attenuate our wait.

## REACT

1. Reflect on a situation when you had to wait. What made your wait so difficult? What kind of information could have made it less challenging?

2. My grandmother has been waiting a long time for Jesus' return. She could die before He arrives. How can I be motivated to wait even when I don't know how long I'll be waiting?

Friday  
May 17

# The End of Time

## EXPLORATION

Luke 12:22-34

### CONCLUDE

In 1998 my 29-year-old brother-in-law, Sam, tragically died in a drowning accident. During the mourning that followed, Christ impressed me with a thought that completely changed my outlook on the Second Coming. For Sam, Jesus has already come. Not because he went directly to heaven, but because his next waking moment will be the resurrection. The readiness described in Matthew 24; 25 applies not only to the “End of time” but also to the end of our time—our death. And there are no timelines or prophecies to predict that.

### CONSIDER

- Read the book *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life* by Laurie Beth Jones, prayerfully considering the path that God has laid inside your heart.
- Visiting a bird sanctuary, arboretum, or public garden and spending quiet time alone meditating on how God provides all your needs. Read Luke 12:22-34, in which Jesus uses birds and flowers as an example of how to live a worry-free life following Him.
- Invite some friends to join you in making a batch of sandwiches for the homeless people who gather in your town’s central park. Or choose some other activity of caring for God’s downtrodden children—read to kids, paint a house, teach an adult to read.
- Using an address card file to copy sayings and texts that remind you of the life God intended us to lead. Keep your card file handy so that each morning you can flip a card and find a motto for the day. One of my favorite sayings is: “The best way to cure the blues is to help someone else.”
- Calculating how old you will be 2,300 days from now. Write a letter to yourself to be opened on your birthday in that year. Include your goals and dreams for living a God-led life. Give the letter to a trustworthy friend or family member to keep for you until that day.
- Writing new verses for the song “Make Me A Servant” by Kelly Willard. If you don’t know the song, a simple search on the Internet will take you to many online versions of the tune and the original words. Once you’ve finalized your new lyrics, teach it to your small group or Sabbath School class.

### CONNECT

Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, 1 Corinthians 15; Ephesians 6:10-18.  
Bruce H. Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez*.

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Angela S. Abraham, Maitland, Florida

# Encrypted Messages



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“ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! ” (Rev. 12:11, 12, NKJV).

# The Woman, the Baby, and the Dragon

## INTRODUCTION

Rev. 12:17

When I was a kid, I enjoyed going to the Chinese opera with my mother. The Chinese opera has captured my fascination with its multicolor costumes, loud traditional music and singing, and its symbolism. Without some understanding of the symbols in the opera, it is almost impossible to truly appreciate the story played out on the stage. For example, the faces of the artists are painted differently to symbolize the different characters. The crafty character's nose is usually painted powder white and the courageous hero usually has upward slanting eyebrows.

The sounds created from the traditional Chinese musical instruments are also symbolic. For example, when the gong is banged three times it signals midnight, and rapid beating of a bamboo tube with a stick means the character is doing some thinking or contemplating.

The hand and body movement of the actors also has rich symbolic meaning. For example, the door opening gesture and the deliberate step-over movement will lead the audiences to instinctively know that the character is entering a room.

The book of Revelation is a book filled with symbolism. As in Chinese operas,

**When the gong is  
banged three times  
it signals midnight.**

if we were to understand the encrypted messages in Revelation, we must first understand the symbols. With the help of the Holy Spirit and many valuable references available, we can understand what God is trying to tell us in the last days of the world's history. If we study Revelation

well, we would be able to see God's hand in every segment of this world's history and develop confidence and trust in Him who is in control at all times.

It is vitally important for the Christians living in the new millenium to understand properly the message contained in Revelation. Jesus and His angels are just about to push the "Go" button for His second coming.

In Revelation 12, the symbol of a woman, the dragon, and the Baby are used for the first time. The woman clothed with the sun and the moon at her feet are symbols of her preeminence. She was in labor and just about to give birth to her Child. When she was in the most vulnerable condition, a ferocious red dragon appeared. This red dragon has seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns. It also has one third of the stars in his tail. Obviously at war with her, the dragon is poised to pounce on her and devour her Child as soon as He is born.

To understand this chapter, no fewer than 15 symbols must be dealt with. These symbols are woman, sun, moon, stars, dragon, Baby, 1,260 days, Michael, serpent, Lamb, eagles' wings, water/flood, earth, remnant/seeds.

# No Need to Fear

## EVIDENCE

Rev. 12:7-12, 17; 14:6, 7

Fear! Whether running from a snake chasing me, or freezing at the end of the high dive on my first jump, fear comes in many sizes and shapes but its results are often overwhelming. Revelation 12 graphically tells the story of how trying to overwhelm God's people with fear has been a favorite tactic of the devil since sin began. Fear of death, illness, violence, pain, or the future are just some of the ways he seeks to steal away our hope and joy. The good news is that Revelation 12 also tells the story of how God provides the strength and power to overcome both fear and Satan by relying on Him (verses 11, 12).

That's why it's so important to notice that the word "fear" has another meaning as well. In Scripture, when related to God, it means awe and reverence. It conveys the thought of absolute loyalty to God and full surrender to His will. In fact, the rebellion in heaven was prompted by Satan not wanting to revere God. "The same spirit that prompted rebellion in Heaven, still inspires rebellion on earth."<sup>1</sup> John tells us how this same rebellion would continue

**The rebellion in heaven  
was prompted by Satan  
not wanting to revere God.**

in a conflict between the remnant church and the evil power of Satan when he wrote, "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" (verse 17, NKJV).

That is why Scripture gives last-day urgency to the message, " 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come' " (14:7, NKJV). Satan well knows that everyone he can lead to neglect prayer and searching the Scriptures will be overcome by his attacks. Is it so surprising he invents every possible scheme to engross our minds and keep us from the tools which give us power? "No man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer. Especially should we entreat the Lord for wisdom to understand His Word. . . . We should study the Bible with humility of heart, never losing sight of our dependence upon God."<sup>2</sup> It is His perfect love for us that, as we learn from Him, is going to cast away the fear that Satan would like each of us to have. God is in control and His plan will finally triumph. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."<sup>3</sup>

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 500.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

3. *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

Monday  
May 20

## He Gave Us the Best

LOGOS  
Revelation 12

"Peace declared!" There would be few words more welcome than these after times of war. Bosnia/Serbia, Ireland, Nigeria, India, and Pakistan are just a few of these ongoing conflicts in today's world. Are we aware of the spiritual conflict to want to hear those words?

### The Past

In *Bible Readings for the Home*, "Satan's Warfare Against the Church" is an excellent biblical exposition of the symbolism in Revelation 12. In summary, the dragon is Satan, the woman with the bright stars and her descendants are God's faithful people, and they are at war.

Actually, Satan declared war on God's people on earth because he couldn't finish it in heaven (Rev. 12:17). He was cast out from heaven by Michael with a third of the angels who sympathized with him (verses 4, 9). By this time, it was

For we are caught in  
time's continuum.

clear to everyone that Satan wasn't going to change his attitude toward God, and he became *persona non grata*. God knew that He couldn't just kill off Satan and his followers because He would look like the monster He'd just got rid of. So it was banishment to planet Earth, unfortunate for the dwellers on earth, which now became the battlefield for this cosmic war.

### The Present

It wasn't that God cast Satan to earth because of His contempt or dislike for the people of earth; it was because they were the ones God knew He could trust the most. They were God's best and foremost creation of the expression of His love for life. They were the best representatives of all the principles that God espoused and that Satan wanted to destroy. By destroying God's principles in His creation, Satan hoped to prove his supremacy over God. He tried persecution, but God kept the little flame going for over a millennium (verse 6). He tried to overwhelm God's people with a myriad of races, religions, and rulers, but God revealed their temporal nature by burying them in time (verses 15, 16).

God gave a little vision of the ultimate goal for His people (Revelation 10; 11): the restoration of peace, power, and authority in heaven and earth. And with it came salvation for the people of earth. For while there was a temporary delineation of territory, God promised the ultimate destruction of Satan and his movement (12:12).

Until that time, there were storms to weather, persecution to endure, fanatics to foil, and faith to engender. People had to show that they were of the same mindset

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as God Himself. These were the principles that Satan tried to undermine: acceptance of God's law of love, and Jesus as the Revealer of that love (verses 11, 17; Phil. 2:6, 7). For there is no love more revealing than the care a pregnant woman takes of the life within her body.

Jesus was the birth Child of the woman, the epitome of the character of God, and the focus of Satan's destruction (Rev. 12:4, 5). Here was, for all time, the beginning and end of faith and trust. God entrusted to His people on earth, risking all heaven, the caring of His Son. Jesus became One who was of their flesh and blood, who identified with them, and who saved them. This act of Jesus was to show all heaven how much He was prepared to sacrifice to save earth (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). It proved to all earth that something was more important than life. Above all, it revealed the nature of God and His goal of salvation.

Satan could not match this and knew that it was only a matter of time before his ultimate defeat. He knew that unless he could get Jesus to sin, his power and time left were limited. If Christ had sinned willingly, it would mean the acknowledgment of Satan's supremacy and his vindication. But Christ did not sin and thus defeated Satan on his own ground. He remained steadfast to God's principles and plan. He carried out to the ultimate degree the predetermined agreement made in heaven. And for that He gave up His omnipresence, but was given the highest honor possible (Phil. 2:6-11).

Such devotion. Such love. Such trust.

## **The Future**

Foiled at every attempt to destroy God's principles, Satan has one more trick up his sleeve—that of the beast of Revelation 13, a scheme so insidious that few, very few, could withstand it.

Revelation 12 holds the key in the explanation of the future, a future of peace and not of war. But steeped in history of the distant past lies our future. For we are caught in time's continuum. Dark and treacherous times are coming, and of these we must be aware.

## **REACT**

1. To what extent, if any, is our salvation a matter of saving God's reputation?
2. Should a Christian be willing to risk his or her place in heaven to save others, as Jesus did? Explain your answer.
3. In your own words, what central lesson does God want us to learn from the book of Revelation?
4. What makes us so special that God chose us as His allies in the great controversy?
5. In what ways might we demonstrate the truth that there are worse things than death; that there is something more important than life?

Tuesday  
May 21

## Where Wise Men Build

### TESTIMONY

Rev. 12:17

"The whole world is to be stirred with enmity against Seventh-day Adventists, because they will not yield homage to the papacy, by honoring Sunday, the institution of this antichristian power. It is the purpose of Satan to cause them to be blotted from the earth, in order that his supremacy of the world may not be disputed.

"Every position of truth taken . . . will bear the criticism of the greatest minds; the highest of the world's great men will be brought in contact with truth, and therefore every position we take should be critically examined and tested by the Scriptures. . . . if our theories of truth can be picked to pieces by historians or the world's greatest men, it will be done. . . .

"Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have with meekness and fear, not in a proud, boasting, self-sufficiency, but with the spirit of Christ. . . .

**"Be prepared to give a  
reason for the hope that  
we have."**

"We do not want to hold our faith simply because it was handed down to us by our fathers. Such a faith will

not stand the terrible test that is before us. We want to know why we are Seventh-day Adventists. . . .

"The powers of darkness will open their batteries upon us and all who are indifferent and careless, who have set their affections on their earthly treasure, and who have not cared to understand God's dealings with His people, will be ready victims."<sup>1</sup>

"Let us . . . take our minds off the perplexities and the difficulties of this life, and fix them on Him, that by beholding we may be changed into His likeness."<sup>2</sup>

Celine Dion sang a hit song during 1998 about an imaginary character that went down with the magnificent ship *Titanic* in 1912. The song mournfully tells of the lost soul living on after death. The fact is there is only one relation-SHIP in the world that can make your heart go on beating forever. And He will do this for His friends when He comes back for us. John 17:3 says: "This is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (NLT).

Revelation 12 advises us to keep our eyes on Jesus and the bigger picture. In our struggle to grow in a relation-SHIP with Jesus, our reading of Revelation and Daniel encourages us that God was there for us in our past. He'll be there for us tomorrow as well. Our compassionate Life Savior will never let us down!

1. *Maranatha*, p. 217.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 241.



# No-Fence- Sitting Zone

## HOW-TO

Rev. 12:17

It was in the first book of the Bible that we came across a curse that God made upon each participant in that original transgression: “I will put enmity between [Satan] and the [church], and between [Satan’s followers] and [Christ’s followers]; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15, NKJV).

In the last book of the Bible, we see this message repeated again. “[Satan] was enraged with the [church], and he went to make war with the [remnant of the church], who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17, NKJV).

It is interesting to note that this message was proclaimed at the beginning and at the end of the Bible. And it is of this same nature that this controversy exists—from beginning to the end of time. We read of a war of which we are, unfortunately, a part. Two sides are represented. And it is our choice which side we are to take. We don’t have the choice of staying neutral.

**There is no fence  
that we can sit on.**

There is no fence that we can sit on. At first glance, the grass may seem greener on one side, but we are not to fall into Satan’s deceptions. He knows he has only a limited time on earth and is wanting to tempt as many to his side as possible.

The Bible is our only weapon during this time of conflict. Though the journey is going to be tough, we are assured of at least two of God’s promises.

First, He is always with us (Matt. 28:20). Just imagine His being your shadow. He’s there with you on every joyous occasion—and when the way seems dark and unbelief fills your heart. All the time, He’s there saying, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (verse 20, NKJV).

Second, He won’t allow a temptation greater than what you can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Jesus endured the greatest temptation when He was left in the desert for 40 days without food. Think of it: if Christ did it, so can you, but by the power of His Word. Just memorize these verses and then go about your daily living. And when you meet a trial or a temptation, recite these verses in your head and it will give you the power you need to overcome or to pick up the pieces and carry on.

## REACT

1. In what ways do you agree/disagree that “the Bible is our only weapon during this time of conflict”?

2. Besides the two verses given to assure us of God’s continuing presence and His promise not to let us be tempted beyond our power to resist, what other verses give you special courage in times of trouble? Be specific.

Thursday  
May 23

## The Day the Devil Died

**OPINION**  
Rev. 12:10, 11

He uses enticements, fear, and even scare tactics to bully people into submission, but people have been warned not to be afraid of him because he is a loser and will be defeated and destroyed. Think of it! He was destined to be successful. He had everything that he needed. No one ever thought that he would be discontented with the home that was provided him. He was very talented and was given duties that only he could perform. His home was expensively furnished and he occupied a most favorable place within the community. That is, of course, until he began, secretly at first, to disobey his Superior.

After conducting what he might have thought to be some covert activities, he began publicly to voice his disaffection with the way his home was being run. His open and unreasonable display of selfishness and disloyalty was eventually impugned when he was called to give account of his activities.

Who among his fellows would have thought that such a life of potential would turn into such a life of failure and disappointment? Surely, only his Master knew exactly what was going on but had to allow things to take their course so that all would understand and agree that he was not treated unjustly. Strange as it may sound, this is basically what took place in heaven with Lucifer and God, and everyone of us has to make a decision as to whose side we are on because the day of accounting is at hand.

The human soul is in the balance and endures a daily fight with the forces of evil, but there is no need to fear for fear is of the devil. Despite the calamities and the atrocities that we see in the world, there is an assurance that God is in control

**The human soul  
is in the balance.**

and that the overcoming life that Jesus lived on this earth assures us victory over sin. Further, Jesus' death paid the price for sin, so we can put our trust in Him and live a life of happiness, knowing that we can be victorious over the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. Praise God for this assurance! We are safe in Him.

### **REACT**

1. Despite the calamities and the atrocities that we see in the world, what assurance do you see that God is in control? Be specific.

2. What words of comfort and encouragement could you offer a friend who was experiencing the effects of sin and evil in real life? What practical advice would you give about how to "put our trust in Him and live a life of happiness"? Be specific.

# Of Dragons and Diadems

## EXPLORATION

Revelation 12

### CONCLUDE

In Revelation 12, we read of a woman, a dragon, and a Child—a crown of stars, heads with ten horns, the wilderness, and a river swallowed by the earth. At first these images may seem bizarre and the message unintelligible. But these symbolic characters and objects—studied in context with the rest of biblical prophecy—reveal the story of Satan’s rebellion in heaven, his banishment to earth, and his war on humankind. They also tell us of God’s love for and commitment to His people—and their final victory over Satan through the blood of the Lamb.

### CONSIDER

- Using scissors and colored construction paper to cut, arrange, and glue shapes either to a background sheet or together as a 3-D paper sculpture, depicting Satan’s assault on earth and the human race.
- Looking through *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* or another songbook, and making a list of all the songs with lyrics about victory over Satan and sin, redemption by the blood of the Lamb, etc. Choose one to sing or hum to yourself for each day of the coming week.
- Designing a table or chart on which to list all the symbols mentioned in Revelation 12, what they represent, their meanings and relationships, etc.
- Inviting a friend or Sabbath School classmate to study Revelation 12 with you—each reading one verse aloud—and then discussing your understandings of the chapter.
- Writing a poem to describe and explain one important symbol, verse, or idea from Revelation 12.
- Working with several other Sabbath School class members, performing a silent interpretive pantomime of the events outlined in Revelation 12.
- Looking up in a thesaurus the synonyms for all the symbolic terms in this chapter. Think about which other words can help us better understand the symbols?

### CONNECT

Daniel 7.

*The Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 57; *The Great Controversy*, chap. 30.

*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, chapter on “Revelation.”

# Fear and Captivity



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“He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Rev. 13:10, NKJV).

# Dare to Die

## INTRODUCTION

Rev. 13:10

The sound of the door clanging shut behind you reminds you with a sharp jolt where you are. You are captive in a prison that feels more like a sewer from the look of its damp, dark, and decaying walls. You are alone in that cell with no contact with the outside world.

“They” are keeping you here. They are the people who would have you deny Christ. They tell you that if you curse God and deny His existence, they will set you free. If you don’t, you will be tortured—even killed. You can hear nothing in your soundproof walls except your movements. The screams and cries of other Christians held captive cannot be heard, but you can sense their sound waves. You don’t know where your family is or whether they’re even alive. You are about to bow your head in prayer, but

**You can hear nothing in your soundproof walls.**

the ultimatum resounds like a headache in your thoughts. Deny Christ and live. Accept Him and die. “The people who are destined for prison will be arrested and taken away. Those who are destined for death will be killed. But do not be dismayed, for here is your opportunity to have endurance and faith” (Rev. 13:10, NLT). An inevitable choice is presented here.

This scenario elicits the emotion called *fear*. However, we shouldn’t forget that we are in possession of a telescope with which, from this plateau of the past and present, we can view the future both near and everlasting. Our telescope is the Bible.

Search its pages and cling to the glittering promises. Search and research: you can begin with this lesson’s focus. Paul was a true enemy of the state, as he suffered multiple prison experiences. Through it all he concluded that for him, “Living is for Christ, and dying is even better” (Phil. 1:21, NLT). Such representation is confirmed as achievement, for Christ tells us plainly, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32, NKJV) and “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (verse 39, NKJV). I dare you to be like Paul who never denied God. I dare you to embrace your power of choice and to become fearless! Dare to stand for righteousness and proclaim the name of God, whatever the consequences.

## LOGOS

Rev. 13:1-10

### Strange Beast Claiming Authority (Revelation 13:1-4)

The beast arising out of the sea suggests that the nation came from an already densely populated area. The nation is then split into ten. The beast is a “composite of beasts found in Daniel,”<sup>1</sup> hence they have features resembling Babylon, Greece, Media-Persia, and Rome. The devil is responsible for the power and authority this beast has. One key feature is that this nation is weakened by a fatal wound, but then regains strength as the wound is healed. The nation has worldwide power and is marveled at. It also has religious power, because it is worshiped.

### Blasphemy and Authority (Revelation 13:7-10)

The beast blasphemes for 42 months against God, His sanctuary, and even against heaven. Although a religious power, it stands in opposition to God. There are several references to this time period (Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6). Note that the Bible was written to a people of Jewish ancestry. In the Jewish calendar there are 30 days to a month. Therefore for 42 months =  $(42 \times 30 \text{ days}) = 1,260$  days. Hence, the beast had authority for 1,260 days. In biblical prophecy, however, one day is equated to one year (Ezek. 4:6; Num. 14:34). We surmise that for 1,260 years this nation had complete authority—a long time! During this time faithfulness and endurance among true Christians is required.

**When the pope speaks,  
the world media listen.**

### The Beast Revealed (Revelation 13:18)

This verse identifies who the beast is, which involves calculating its number as well as applying other identifying marks. For Adventists, such calculations point to the Roman Catholic system, the papacy. Let's examine the identifying marks:

● *Arises out of a region divided into ten parts.* Historical documentation shows that the Roman Empire collapsed in A.D. 476, and ten political powers ruled: the Alemani, Franks, Burgundians, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Lombards, Heruli, Suevi, and Anglo-Saxons.<sup>2</sup> These 10 nations became extinct in 538 A.D. and the pope took possession of the city of Rome. The papacy was established.

● *Has worldwide religious and civil power.* Not only was that true in the past, but even today when the pope speaks, the world media listen, and his popularity when traveling in the world is second to none. His influence in government and wealth is unrivaled. In the past his power was stunted but it is being gradually reinstated.

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● *Speaks against God (or blasphemes)*. Pope Pius IX claimed that he was “Vicar of Christ” and “the way, the truth, and the life.”<sup>3</sup> “All the names attributed to Christ in scripture, implying his supremacy over the church are also attributed to the Pope.”<sup>4</sup> In sum, the pope became the “Christ on earth”<sup>5</sup> and his priests/bishops claim to have the authority to forgive sins.

● *Persecutes Christians for 1,260 years*. The papacy ruled for 1,260 years from A.D. 538 to 1798 when the pope was taken captive by French General Berthier. Documented in historical records are the atrocities that true Christians faced under the dominion of the papacy for that period. Revelation 13:10 captures their situation well. During this period the human conscience was to be controlled by any means necessary and “millions died for their faith throughout Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

● *One final mark—666*. Revelation 13:18 suggests that the beast represents a man who has an identity number of 666. Using Roman numerals to letters of the alphabet of one of the pope’s titles (i.e., VICARIUS FILII DEI) we get this number.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of chapter 13 introduces us to a second beast that emulates the first in actions yet presents itself differently. This beast represents the United States of America, which emerged from people who sought asylum from the oppression faced under the 1,260 years of papal rule. However, we find a warning for the future in verses 15-17. This key political power will reunite with the behavior and thinking of the papacy, and the atrocities of the past will become those of the future (Rev. 13:15). Therefore, Revelation 13 is not an ordinary read, but is and will become a real experience for you. You will inevitably face these choices: you will have a mark in your forehead (intellectually understand what is going on, but still choose to follow papal authority) or in your hand (in action follow the papacy)—or no mark at all (standing for Christ). Today take into consideration the number of lives lost to provide you with an opportunity to read the truth found in the Bible, to believe and be saved. Such a gift is beyond compare—a sacrifice was made and cannot be ignored. It is at this point that Revelation empowers you to make an informed choice because you have insight.

## **REACT**

1. How do you respond to people, especially Roman Catholic friends, who might brand this exegesis of Revelation 13 as intolerant or hateful? Be specific.

2. What religious and political systems in the world today deny full religious freedom?

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1. Morris Venden, *The Last Trolley Out* (Gentry, Ark.: Vintage Publications, 1995), p. 117.

2. A. Jan Marcussen, *National Sunday Law* (Thompsonville, Ill.: Amazing Truth Publications, 1983), p. 11.

3. Ian R. K. Paisley, *Antichrist* (Belfast, Ireland: Martyrs Memorial Productions), p. 61.

4. A. Jan Marcussen, *ibid.*, p. 77.

5. Ian R. K. Paisley, *ibid.*, p. 23.

6. A. Jan Marcussen, *ibid.*, p. 80.

7. Ian R. K. Paisley, *ibid.*, p. 67.

Monday  
May 27

## Vindicated or Intimidated

### TESTIMONY

Rev.13:5-8

Revelation 13:5-8 depicts great suffering and intimidation for the people of God, all because they “believe and obey the Word of God.” Intimidation is an influence induced by fear. “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.”<sup>1</sup> Note that “God never forces the will or the conscience”<sup>2</sup> and that you always have a choice.

Christ died for our sins so that He could write our names in the book of life. The persecuted church of the Dark Ages embraced this sentiment; they acknowledged that the blood of Christ was spilt so they might be vindicated. Therefore it seemed a joy that they

**They viewed  
persecution as a joy.**

should die for this cause also and not submit to the power of papal Rome. They viewed persecution as a joy. As Daniel looked down to “a time of trouble such as never was,” he “declares that God’s people shall be delivered ‘everyone that shall be found written in the book.’”<sup>3</sup>

Hence, neither Satan nor his agencies can intimidate us if we have chosen vindication by the death of Christ. With His incomprehensible love for us, God constructed this plan of salvation before the world was founded. Despite the severity of persecution and intimidation Paul declares, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35, 37-39, NKJV). There is no reason for us to be intimidated by Satan and his agencies because we have been vindicated by the life of Jesus Christ.

### REACT

Describe the process of vindication. How does Satan interfere with this process?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 591.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 481.



# The Hotter the Battle, the Sweeter the Victory

## EVIDENCE

1 John 5:4

What may appear to be a complex passage of Scripture can be understood with relative ease if the literary genre is taken into consideration. John uses Hebrew thought patterns in Revelation 13 to describe 1,260 years of persecution that began with the establishment of the Bishop of Rome as head of all the churches in A.D. 538 and ended with stripping of the pope of his civil and ecclesiastic power in 1798. There is parallelism. The vision of the beast is described in the first section of that narrative (verses 1-4), followed by the explanation of the vision (verses 5-10). This means that this narrative (verses 1-10) cannot be read in a straight, linear sequence; rather, it must be understood as going over the same ground twice.<sup>1</sup> An eschatological zigzag.

There are symbolisms: sea (peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues); leopard beast (ecclesiastical as well as civil authority); the dragon (primarily Satan, secondarily the Roman Empire in its pagan and Christian form). They must be contextualized yet remain futuristic. For the dragon/beast was given "a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies" (Rev. 13:5, NKJV). How? Well, if forgiveness (absolution) can be received from a mere man, such a man has the power of the divine person. "He blasphemes them that dwell in heaven by assuming to exercise the power of forgiving sins, and so turns away the mind of men from the mediatorial work of Christ and His heavenly assistants in the sanctuary above."<sup>2</sup>

Events have the  
remarkable characteristic  
of repeating themselves.

Past events have the remarkable characteristic of repeating themselves. "All that [Rome] has done in her persecution of those who reject her dogmas, she holds to be right; and would she not repeat the same acts, should the opportunity be presented?"<sup>3</sup> The evidence exists. Ask Jesus, enquire of the apostles, interrogate the Waldenses, grill the Reformers, interview the pilgrim fathers, and cross-examine Rigley and Latimer. Their responses re-echo, "it would happen to you. 'But be of good cheer, I [we] have overcome the world' '" (John 16:33 NKJV). In time, we will be asked about our rights to worship. God's people will be delivered, however, every one of them.

1. Frank B. Holbrook, editor, *Symposium on Revelation*, Book 1 (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p. 360.

2. Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 570.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 564.

# The Battle Is Already Won!

## HOW-TO Rev. 13:1-10

**The battle is never  
going to be easy.**

There is great difficulty in accepting that evil powers (as described in Revelation 13) can have such an impact on the world in which we live today. Though it is difficult to accept, it would be even more difficult to deny something so obvious. It comes as no surprise therefore, that the devil has set up his religion with a doctrine of distorted truths adorned with lies and that the world follows eagerly in search of something that will not be given to them. As Christians we are in spiritual warfare with these evil forces. The battle is never going to be easy, but there are a few things that can prepare us for it.

- Remember that we are not fighting alone. Many try to stand up to evil by themselves, and it is only when they begin to fail, or have failed to win, that they call upon the Lord. Ephesians 6:13-17 tells us that God has provided everything needed and that we have to put on the armor He has given us. Without it we are fighting a losing battle.

- Warriors don't go into battle without knowing their assignment, their weapons, and who the enemy is. We must learn to recognize Satan in his various forms and have a clear understanding of what must be done in order for us to win the fight.

- Learn from our forefathers of the Bible. They all fought in the spiritual war, and those who followed after God's will were victorious.

Knowing that there is nothing we can face that Jesus has not already gained the victory over provides great comfort to the troubled soul. It is even more comforting to know that we have a God who will fight all our battles for us (Psalm 27). Indeed, there is nothing that will happen to us today or tomorrow that we cannot face with God.

## REACT

1. How does a perspective of spiritual warfare influence the way you face daily situations and conflicts? Be specific.

2. What kinds of spiritual battles are you most likely to try to fight on your own? What situations send you directly to God for help?

3. Can and should we view other people as enemies in the spiritual battle, or is this a mistaken perspective? Explain your answer.

4. What relevance does a study of Revelation 13:1-10 have in our preparation for deliverance? Be specific.

5. In what ways can fear be overcome? Be specific.

6. How can we use fear as a positive tool to glorify God? Be specific.

# Fear as a Tool

## OPINION

Rev. 13:1-10

As the Second Advent of Christ draws closer, an era of the great controversy is being ushered in. Daily government policies are being implemented and current laws are being revised. Some of these laws have become a deceptive and powerful tool used to drive changes, challenge truth, and impose fear. Even though some of us may not have used or experienced fear as a tool to restrain, manipulate, demean, or coerce, yet each of us at one time or another has exhibited fear.

Fear is real. Whether we express fear or demonstrate a phobia—balance is the most important thing. The prophecy in Revelation 13 describes the opposing forces that will ultimately challenge our allegiance to God and cause some of us to lose our balance. How will you endure the ultimate decision? Will you succumb with fear and let go of Christ? The battle will continue in the mind: Whom will you obey, and whom will you worship?

**Fear is a powerful  
yet creative force.**

Fear is a powerful yet creative force. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "If a man were to lose his capacity to fear, he would be deprived of his capacity to grow, invent, and create." The greater the demand placed on us, however, the more our abilities and resources are challenged. In some instances, fear can stifle vision, thwart progress, consume unnecessary energy, and deplete resources.

Though our mental alarm system may warn us of impending dangers resulting from fear, our problem is not to be rid of fear but to harness it positively to the glory of God. The imagination of our mind may seemingly help us to get out of difficult situations. However, only by claiming "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV) will we be empowered to use fear as a tool to:

- Be totally dependent on God
- Honestly admit our fears to God
- Pray for courage to deal positively with our fears and that of others
- Seek appropriate guidance in overcoming fears
- Be proactive in redressing the phobia of fear or fear itself
- Create positive outcomes as a result of our knowledge of fear
- Accept God's promise that "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18, NKJV)
- Empathize with those who are struggling with and overcoming fear
- Be faithful and patient in hard times
- Fear God and give Him the glory at all times

# Prophecy and the Fear Syndrome

## EXPLORATION

Psalm 56

### CONCLUDE

Most of the prophecies have been fulfilled. Yet there are a few left that we know are coming. Satan will impersonate Christ. The mark of the beast will be enforced and those who reject it are on the hit list of society, doomed to die—unless they retract. Humanly speaking, we have a right to be afraid.

But the Great I AM who forewarned us of the coming fearful times also predicted our deliverance. He did not forget the three worthies in the fiery furnace; He did not forget Daniel in the den of lions. He will not forget us.

I like the way Mark Finley paraphrases Joshua 1:9. "Haven't I commanded you, Be strong and of good courage? Don't fear. Don't be afraid. Don't let worry and anxiety stress you. Don't be perplexed or confused. I, the Lord, will be with you, and we'll walk into the future together."\*

### CONSIDER

- Making a journal of Bible promises that relate to fear and memorizing as many as possible.
- Arranging your favorite Bible promise to music. This makes it much easier to memorize.
- Finding a quiet spot in nature and reflecting on how God has led you in the past.
- Going to the following URL on the Internet: <[www.heartlight.org](http://www.heartlight.org)>. Key in the word "fear" in the search engine and explore the multimedia offered there for the overcoming of fear.
- Writing a story using Bible verses to depict the deliverance of God's people.
- Making a list of what you are afraid of and finding Bible quotations that address that fear.
- Viewing a segment of a current TV program (sitcom or drama) that depicts someone who overcomes fear. Think about how the character(s) overcome(s) their fear and how this compares or contrasts with what God's Word says about overcoming fear.

### CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*, chaps. 39, 40.

Dwight K. Nelson, *Countdown to the Showdown*; Marvin Moore, *The Coming Global Crisis*.

\* *A Promise a Day*, p. 59

# The dragon vs. **The Remnant**



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"I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion,  
and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having  
His Father's name written on their foreheads"

(Rev. 14:1, NKJV).

## INTRODUCTION

Rev. 13:9

The four strange ships on the horizon did not arouse much curiosity among the people standing on the shore. This city was no stranger to ships. As a matter of fact, Calicut, on the west coast of India during the 15th century, was a meeting point of ships from all over Asia and Africa. The apparent oddity of the ship ballooned into broad clamor among the onlookers when the first of the passengers came ashore. In no time the passengers were on their way to the Zamorin, the ruler of the city. The ship was Santa Rafael, and it had just brought Vasco Da Gama and his companions all the way from Portugal to India—the first Europeans to reach India by sea!

The visitors were immediately made welcome, treated with all honor, and given splendid gifts. Little realizing the sweeping intentions behind this visit, the local ruler gave them permission to set up a trading establishment as soon as they asked for it. The Portuguese shrewdly used this opportunity to wipe out all competitors and establish a monopoly. When it seemed as if they had achieved everything they could want, they advanced

**The newcomers had become the rulers of the domain.**

their strategy to a new level. Soldiers came in with their modern weapons of war. Within no time the newcomers had become the rulers of the domain. To drive the last nail into the helpless land, the priests arrived. Zealous in their beliefs, they forcefully converted the people in swarms.

If only the people had known what the plan was beforehand, they could have resisted the servitude and ignominy with all their strength.

But there is a more heinous web being drawn around all inhabitants of earth. This time around we know the plan and its unfolding. Revelation 13 provides us with a blueprint of what the plan is. This week, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are going to familiarize ourselves with it so that we may not be taken unaware.

# No! The States Would Never . . . !

## EVIDENCE

Revelation 13:15–17

It is difficult to evaluate things we will fully understand only after they have occurred. Biblical prophecies have this nature of unfolding while the events are actually being fulfilled. If we understand the principles of biblical prophecy, however, we can be prepared for things as we should.

For example, prophecy suggests that the United States will restrict religious liberty in the future. It is hard to believe that a nation based on human rights, freedom of speech, assembly, and religion could at any time limit any area of freedom—though we have seen in human history several occasions proving the opposite.

**“Democratically elected regimes are now routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power.”**

(I live in one of the former communist countries that tried to make the world—and even themselves—believe how democratic they were.) But how can similar injustice occur in a country considered to be free?

I read an article entitled “Doubts About Democracy” in a 1997 issue of *Newsweek* magazine: “Thomas Jefferson’s declaration ‘that all men are created equal’ is apparently becoming a global reality. There’s just one problem. The democracy we see around the world often has a distinctly ugly face.

“Democratically elected regimes are now routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms.

“The pattern is now familiar. It begins right after the . . . elections. Popular leaders . . . bypass their parliaments and rule by presidential decree . . . they make a mockery of the constitutional procedures of government.

“The tension between elections and individual liberty isn’t new to Americans. What is distinctive about their system is not its democratic nature, but rather how *undemocratic* it is.”\*

In an “undemocratic” democracy anything can happen concerning the area of religious freedom too. The author of this article could not predict the way things would go, but we can foresee a picture with the help of our Best Friend, Jesus.

## REACT

Identify a specific current event in which a government did not act according to its constituted authority.

\*Fareed Zakaria, “Doubts About Democracy,” *Newsweek*, Dec. 29, 1997/Jan. 5, 1998, p. 26.

## Imitating the Holy Spirit

The first beast tries to imitate Christ. The second beast is the unholy spirit of the unholy trinity. Let us notice what he does:

- “Exercises all the authority of the first beast” (Rev. 13:12, NKJV) and causes worship of the first beast.
- “Makes fire come down from heaven” (verse 13, NKJV). With the help of signs, he makes all that dwell on the earth believe false things.
- “Causes all [who worship him] . . . to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads” (verse 16, NKJV).

Compare this with the work of the Holy Spirit:

- Stands in for Jesus on earth until He comes back (John 16:14).
- Seized the servants of God by heavenly fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
- Works in human hearts on Jesus’ behalf (John 16:7-13).
- Seals the servants of the Lord (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

## Describing the Beast

This beast, or power, comes up from the earth (Rev. 13:11). The sea from which the first beast came represented people and nations (17:15). The earth must then be an uninhabited area of *the planet*. We’ve seen something similar in

Revelation 12:15, 16, when the woman was saved by the earth which devoured the “waters” persecuting her.

The second beast comes up when the first receives the deadly wound. So the second beast

appears when the 1,260-year period is about to end—that is, at the end of the eighteenth century. There is only one state corresponding to this description: the United States of America. Its characteristics are that of having two lamblike horns (acting according to religious and political freedom) and speaking as a dragon (denying these freedoms).

In verse 12 we see that “he exercised all the authority of the first beast” (NIV). What was the essence of the power of the first beast? He used political power to compel religious practices. This means the intertwining of church and state. So the image of the beast will be completed when the United States, together with the church, wants to apply force in religious matters. This is the image of the beast.

**This prophecy gives us the details of how the beast will accomplish its aims.**



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## Miracles

This prophecy gives us the details of how the beast will accomplish its aims, by performing “great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men” (verse 13, NIV) and deceiving “the inhabitants of the earth” (verse 14, NIV). This description brings several passages to mind:

**1 Kings 18:21-40.** In this story God had sent Elijah to give evidence on Mount Carmel of His power and defeat idolatry by His servant. The priests of Baal—after a day of endeavoring to bring down fire on their sacrifice proving that their god was the genuine one—failed. At the end of the day God proved—by consuming Elijah’s sacrifice—which company was on His side. The warning of Revelation 13 is definite: At the end of human history no one will be able to distinguish with his own eyes between true and false forms of religion.

**Matthew 24:23, 24.** In His prophetic speech, Jesus mentions the appearance of false prophets and false christs. The deception will be the same way—in signs and wonders. He cautions His followers that the deceptive power will be so great that even the elect will be in danger.

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-11.** In this church Paul fights with false teachers giving strange ideas about the second coming of Christ. He warns the church not to believe if someone told them that Christ had already come. First the man of lawlessness—the antichrist—must appear, who will do miracles as verse 9 says.

## The Mark and 666

To understand the mark and the number of his name—666—first we should see that the mark of the beast is not the name of the beast, and the number of the name of the beast is not identical of either.

The mark can be received on someone’s forehead or hand. There is but one Old Testament passage mentioning something a faithful Israelite should put on his hand and forehead (Deut. 6:6-9). One could not miss the connection between the law of God, the obedience to it, and the mark of God. So the mark of the antichrist cannot be other than the law of the antichrist (the changed law of God) and obedience to it. The mark of the beast can only be the most controversial point of the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath commandment.

Concerning the number of the name of the beast—the 666—we can say that it must be seen in the light of at least one Old Testament story—in Daniel 3. There we can see an image made, worship forced on God’s faithful, the threat of death for those who do not bow down in front of it, and the size of the image is—not surprisingly—60 and 6. It represents a false system of religion. So the number 666 is the number of a name of a person at the head of a false religious system that teaches the changed commandment of God, especially the false Sabbath—Sunday. Generally accepted among Adventists is that the fulfillment of this prophecy appears in one of the official titles of the head of the Roman Church, the pope: Vicarius Filii Dei — “Vicar of the Son of God.”

Tuesday  
June 4

## Fighting the Right Fight

### TESTIMONY

Rev.13:9, 10

In her book, *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White identifies a principle that has always distinguished a faithful movement of God from an apostate one.

"When the early church became corrupted by departing from the simplicity of the gospel and accepting heathen rites and customs, she lost the Spirit and power of God; and in order to control the consciences of the people, she sought the support of the secular power."<sup>1</sup>

One of the signs of a fallen system of worship, then, is a reliance on a secular government to enforce its dogma. "It was apostasy that led the early church to seek the aid of the civil government,"<sup>2</sup> wrote White. And history is full of accounts in which the minority has been persecuted for its "unorthodox" beliefs by the strength of the majority and its alliance with secular powers.

The thing that makes this more than a history lesson is White's statement: "The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord there will exist a state of religious declension similar to that in the first centuries."<sup>3</sup>

In the book, *Christ's Object Lessons*, White reveals the true spirit of those who try to force others to live or worship contrary to their conscience: "To punish those

**This is more than  
a history lesson.**

who were supposed to be evildoers, the church has had recourse to the civil power. Those who differed from the established doctrines have been imprisoned, put to torture and to death, at the instigation of men who claimed to be acting under the sanction of Christ. But it is the spirit

of Satan, not the Spirit of Christ, that inspires such acts. This is Satan's own method of bringing the world under his dominion. God has been misrepresented through the church by this way of dealing with those supposed to be heretics."<sup>4</sup>

Do you see the pattern? A religious movement begins with pure doctrine but allows human traditions and customs to usurp the place that authentic Bible teaching ought to take. Then the church, in an attempt to bolster its position, strikes an unholy alliance with political powers and seeks to eradicate "heresy"—and its proponents—by force.

There will be more than one kind of struggle taking place at the time of the end. One will be the struggle between good and evil; the other will be over how to respond to error and false doctrine in a Christlike, not a satanic, way.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 443.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 74.

# The Sureness of the Prophecies

## HOW-TO

Gen. 32:24; Dan.10:13, 14; Eph. 2:19; Rev. 13:1-18

Daniel 10:13, 14 presents us the three-week fight between Satan (the prince of Persia) and Gabriel. It shows us we are in the midst of a cosmic war between the Lamb and the dragon (see also Revelation 13:1-18), and also points out to us that the Lord knows the future and controls it.

As I was writing this article, Mrs. Ilda, an 85-year-old member in our church, has passed away. She was a very special person for everyone. Her death compelled me to consider the brevity of life. "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12, NIV). This Bible text directs us to reconsider the priorities of our life. It leads me to permit God to fulfill His plan in my life.

The Lord's plan  
is outlined in  
the prophecies.

If the Lord's plan is outlined in the prophecies, we need to study them with renewed interest. Below are some steps that may help us in our study:

**Pray.** Pray to the Lord every day and solicit Him to send His Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind with His influence. The Lord wants to guide and communicate with us in our daily journey.

**Study the Bible.** "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8, NIV). In particular, a deep study of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation will allow us to understand better the final events of this world.

**Trust in the Lord.** The experience of Jacob in Genesis 32:24 is so important. For a long time he had been fighting with his conscience about the sin against his father. He prevailed in his struggle with the angel. Ellen White says: "Had this been a boastful, presumptuous confidence, Jacob would have been instantly destroyed, but his was the assurance of one who confesses his own unworthiness, yet trusts the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God."\*

## REACT

1. Look again at Jacob's experience in Genesis 32:24-30. Does every Christian have a wrestling-with-God experience at some point in life? Explain your answer.
2. If you have had a wrestling-with-God experience in your life, when and where was it?

\*Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 196.

Thursday  
June 6

# The Dragon's Race Against Time

**OPINION**  
Rev. 13:11-18

Satan is not uneducated; indeed, he is a psychological mastermind. Being power hungry and a sore loser, this fallen angel will try everything to lead astray faithful followers of Christ. Even now he has led many Christians from biblical truth in order to embrace his ideas and complete his own agenda, and will continue this way until the great controversy ends.

Revelation 13:11-18 explains this in the apocalyptic prophecy of the beast from the earth (verse 11). Though it is not necessarily important to focus constantly on its symbolism, it is appropriate to observe and be prepared for this event ahead of time.

This second beast's purpose is to persuade the world to turn from worshiping Jesus and instead to worship all that the beast represents, namely Satan, the dragon. His first deception is in performing miracles. Those who are not grounded in biblical truth will be easily swayed. Is this not happening today? Many are taken in by the occult and the so-called miracles of TV evangelists. Such beliefs have already led to death, allegiance with Satan, and given rise to the reign of emotion, not reason.

In playing upon men's emotions, the beast is then able to make them build an idol for worship, in direct conflict to the first and second commandments (Exod. 20:2-4). Today, even without a specific structure, many professed Christians are turning to material possessions over Jesus, loving those more than Him. Cars, money, fame, and powerful titles are human-made idols, serving to distract the weak from Christian living.

Upon winning souls to his cause, Satan's alliance is quick to scare Christ's faithful servants into submission by having them face death, starvation, and poverty for not choosing to worship the beast and bearing his mark (verse 17). We see similar situations today in many countries where pagan faiths outnumber Christian communities. Christians are imprisoned, punished,

**Satan is a  
psychological  
mastermind.**

or even massacred for their upheld faith. Although the mark of the beast serves as a prerequisite for being able to sell or buy goods, at this point in time we can only speculate on what this 666, "the number of a man" (verse 18, KJV) truly means.

However, all would agree that to have the mark shows one's pledge to Satan's control. With not much time to spare in the race to the end of this world, we would be wise to heed Revelation's warning cry.

## **REACT**

Is it more important to be watchful of the times, or being mindful of our sins and asking for forgiveness? Explain your answer.

# Facing the Lion

## EXPLORATION

1 Pet. 5:8

## CONCLUDE

Beasts, dragons, horns, and a beautiful woman. Sounds like a popular computer game with one rather glaring exception: there's *no* pause key. Often, we get so caught up in deciphering prophetic history that we forget one important fact: the whole purpose behind the evil activity that sweeps through the centuries isn't to change the course of nations or topple rulers and kings. That's the easy part. No, prophetic history is happening because the devil wants you and me. It's personal. We're the prizes.

## CONSIDER

- Visiting a library to find a book on the demise of Communism. Pay particular attention to what role religion played in its establishment—and downfall.
- Drawing or painting a picture showing the beasts as described in Daniel and Revelation gathered together, glaring down at *you*.
- Composing a song that highlights how you've chosen to fight against the tide of evil sweeping through history and today.
- Gathering a group of interested individuals to do a little "Lion Hunting." Discuss how the devil is making inroads into your life and how you can use examples from history to stop him, such as finding places of social and spiritual safety, using the power of friends and family to fight back, accepting leadership roles to help make changes in the community, etc.
- Spending a day or two cut off from the outside world, studying the inner workings of nature. The battle between good and evil is just as strong there too. You may also discover fresh insights on how to battle that evil.
- Celebrating your religious freedom as part of your sundown Friday and sundown Sabbath worships by choosing a special song from *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* that focuses on the only King you'll ever worship (e.g., #223, #225, #227, #738, etc.).
- Starting a collection of old H.M.S. Richards (Jr. & Sr.) Voice of Prophecy tapes or records concerning prophetic history. You'll enjoy the spiritual uplift and music as you learn more about the subject.

## CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*

Morris Venden, *Nothing to Fear*; Clifford Goldstein, *The Remnant*

# Knowing the Judge



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

# Fighting the Battle

## INTRODUCTION

Rev. 14:7; 2 Chron. 20:15-17

Whenever the subject of judgment has been dealt with, I have always been left trembling. This is as a result of what I experienced one time when I attended a court session in my last year of high school. I had been involved in an accident when I was learning to drive, and I was placed in police custody to await my case in court the following day. The next day I was taken to court. I was the first to be called, and I was trembling as I entered the box of the accused, avoiding the eyes of the prosecutor and magistrate.

When I glanced at the magistrate, hope awakened in my heart. He was a friend of my brother's, and he smiled at me. As the prosecutor was reading my accusations, I whispered several prayers, hoping that the magistrate would remember our acquaintance. I pleaded guilty, but requested lenience as I was a student. The magistrate granted me lenience and I was released.

So it is with the battle with the devil who has tried to discourage us of his claim of God's fierce judgment. Faced with the same problem, the Israelites received this message: " 'You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord' " (2 Chron. 20:17, NKJV). The battle is not ours, but the Lord's. The judgment against us will be defended by our Elder Brother. He is our Advocate and has already won. He has enough experience as a practicing lawyer. He has never failed a case. Judgment is hope for those who are in Jesus, but it is hopeless for those who are not in Him. The words " 'the hour of His judgment has come' " (Rev. 14:7, NKJV) is a source of joy. The message concerning the judgment is accompanied by an appeal and warning, which reveals that the day of salvation has not passed. We may still turn to God and escape the wrath to come.

**I was placed in  
police custody to  
await my case.**

Sunday  
June 9

# Your Choices Determine Your Destiny

**LOGOS**  
Rev. 14:1-12

## Who Are the 144,000?

Lack of more definite information has led many to emphasize not who the 144,000 are but to what kind of character God expects them to possess. The 144,000 have the following characteristics: Not defiled with women (faithful in their literal and divine relationships); follow the Lamb (always doing God's will whether favorable or not); no guile found in their mouth (faultless and blameless, no falsehood, no pretense, no make-believe, no deceit, and no sin).

## First Telegram (Rev. 14:6, 7)

The first angel's message, announcing God's judgment and the call to fear and worship Him, was designed to separate God's people from worldliness and backsliding. The angel's flight area indicates the worldwide nature of the angel's work and message. It is the everlasting gospel of the grace of God to save humanity. The content of the message is:

- Fear God and give glory to Him. This conveys the thought of absolute loyalty to God, of full surrender to His will. This message is timely, for humanity is worshiping gods of materialism and pleasure. Even church members are becoming devotees of fashion, engaging in ungodly parties of pleasure, in dancing, in festivities, etc.

- The hour of judgment has come. This refers to the general time when the judgment will take place and not as necessarily referring to the precise moment when the judgment begins. SDA expositors understand the judgment here mentioned as that which began in 1844, represented by the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary (Dan. 8:14). Neither is the reference to the executive judgment at the coming of Christ, when all receive their reward (Rev. 22:12) because the messages of the three angels precede Christ's second coming (14:14). Furthermore, the message is accompanied by an appeal and a warning that the day of salvation has not yet passed. Humankind may still turn to God and escape the wrath of God to come.

- Worship Him the Creator. This worship of God contrasts with the worship of the beast and its image. In the crisis to come, inhabitants of earth will be called upon to make their choice between the worship of the true God and that of false gods. The call to worship the God of heaven as Creator of all things implies that due heed be given to the sign of God's creative works—the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11).

## Second Telegram (Rev. 14:8)

"Babylon is fallen" is the message of the second angel. The word "Babylon," derived from "Babel," signifies confusion. It is employed in Scripture to designate the



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various forms of false and apostate religion. The prophet Isaiah identifies Lucifer as the invisible king of Babylon (Isa. 14:4, 12-14). Babylon is further declared to be that great city which reigned over the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:4, 5, 18). The power that for many centuries maintained despotic sway over the monarchs of Christendom is Rome. Rome is the power that can be truly declared drunken with the blood of the saints as the church which has so cruelly persecuted the followers of Christ. Babylon is also symbolic of the sin of unlawful connection with the kings of the earth. This was departure from the Lord and alliance with the heathen. The prophecy of the fall of Babylon finds its last-day fulfillment in the departure of Protestantism at large from the purity and simplicity of the gospel (Rev. 14:4).

**Inhabitants of earth  
will be called upon to  
make their choice.**

### **Third Telegram (Rev. 14:9-12)**

The third angel's message is a warning concerning issues to come, a warning that will enlighten humanity as to the issues involved in the developing struggle and enable them to make an intelligent choice. The beast is the one described in Revelation 13:1-10. It should be noted that this message will have ultimate force only after the healing of the deadly wound (verse 3) and the formation of the image of the beast (verse 14). The beast and the image will unite in their aims and policies—and in their insistence on the mark of the beast. Hence, the one who worships the beast also worships the image and is a bearer of the mark.

The seven last plagues fall upon the worshipers of the beast and his image (16:2). These devotees of the beast rise in the second resurrection to receive their punishment (20:5, 11-15). The torment of the worshipers of the beast and its image would be for a certain period, not unending. It is evident from other scriptural references that the final fate of the wicked will be annihilation (Matt. 10:28; Rev. 20:14). It doesn't envision unending fires; it denotes complete destruction (Mal. 4:1). On the other hand, the duration of the punishment that continues until death ensues, there will be no relaxation of the punishment of death.

### **Hope of the Saints (Rev. 14:12)**

Jesus came to enable humankind to be restored to the divine image. He came to show humanity what the Father is like and, in this sense, amplified the moral law. Through His power humanity is enabled to keep the divine requirements and thus reflect the divine image. Keeping the commandments of God depends on faith in Jesus. It is possible only through Jesus. God's plan includes the final call to the world to return to Him in love and loyalty. Through the three angels' messages, God unmasks the plan of the dragon and announces its final defeat (Rev. 17:14). It's God's purpose to gather His remnant out of Babylon before it is too late.

Monday  
June 10

## Come Out of Her, My People

### TESTIMONY

Rev. 18:4

Revelation 18:1, 2, 4 “points forward to a time when the announcement of the fall of Babylon, as made by the second angel [Rev. 14:8] of Revelation 14, is to be repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the various organizations that constitute Babylon, since that message was first given, in the summer of 1844.”<sup>1</sup>

“Of Babylon, at the time brought to view in this prophecy, it is declared, ‘Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.’ [Rev.

**“The Sabbath will be  
the great test of loyalty.”**

18:5.] She has filled up the measure of her guilt, and destruction is about to fall upon her. But God still has a people in Babylon; and before the visitation of his judgments, these faithful ones must be called out, that

they ‘partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues.’ Hence the movement symbolized by the angel coming down from Heaven, lightening the earth with his glory, and crying mightily with a strong voice, announcing the sins of Babylon. In connection with his message the call is heard, ‘Come out of her, my people.’ These announcements, uniting with the third angel’s message, constitute the final warning to be given to the inhabitants of the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

“The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty; for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve him not. 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. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God.”<sup>3</sup>

“Almost till the very close of time, apparently, some—perhaps many—of God’s people have not heard the call to come out of mystical Babylon. Compare God’s call to His people in ancient times to flee from literal Babylon (see Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6, 45). As God’s people formerly came out of literal Babylon in order that they might return to Jerusalem, so His people today are called out of mystical Babylon in order that they may be accounted worthy to enter the New Jerusalem.”<sup>4</sup>

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 603.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 604.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 605.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 861.

# The Beast, Its Image, and Its Mark

## EVIDENCE

Rev. 14:9-11

You will have to admit that this verse is a solemn warning message. Notice also that you cannot receive any part of the beast without getting all of it. If you become a victim of the beast power, whoever it is, you are going to be a victim of the image and the mark and all their totality.

Who is the beast power? Often in prophecy God depicts nations as beasts. Revelation 12; 13 (first half) gives us a representation of papal Rome. The last half of Revelation 13 is talking about the United States of America.

What is the mark of the beast? Evidently the mark of the beast is an indication or a sign of the beast authority. You can receive it in your forehead or in your hand. The hand represents doing and the forehead represents thinking or understanding. This mark has something to do with the day of worship. A day of worship becomes a symbol of the one who is his own god, and another

**A day of worship  
becomes a symbol of the  
one who is his own god.**

day of worship becomes a symbol of one who has faith in God and trusts in Him and His righteousness. This deals with worshiping on a day commanded by God and another set by humanity.

What is the image? The image to the beast is to enforce a religious duty by human power. Trying to be a Christian by being good enough to be saved and enforcing all religious duties we think necessary by our own human power—that is the image of the beast. It ends in self-worship. This is the clear message in the three angels' messages: warning against self-worship and salvation by works.

The entire basis of a Christian life is in knowing Jesus as a personal friend. It is what makes you a Christian. If you are spending your time trying hard to be good enough to be saved, you are a victim of the beast and its image. The three angels' messages is the big dividing line between real Christians and those who only think they are. The vital issue is whether or not we come into personal daily acceptance of righteousness of Christ instead of trying to develop our own.

## REACT

How do you respond to the statement "The three angels' messages is the big dividing line between real Christians and those who only think they are"? How do you apply this statement to Christians who don't accept a Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of the three angels' messages?

Wednesday  
June 12

## A Seal Versus a Mark

### HOW-TO

Exod. 20:12

If a king makes a proclamation of ten laws, what must he do to make it official? He must place a seal upon it so that the people know it is from the king. Otherwise it will be only a piece of paper without signature, a proclamation with no authority.

The great King of the universe has issued Ten Commandments. In order to make them official, He must have placed His seal on these laws. The seal of any monarchy must include these three elements: (a) his name, (b) his title, (c) the territory over which he is empowered to rule.

**The three elements of a seal are contained in the fourth commandment.**

The fourth commandment is the only one of the Ten Commandments that contains the seal of God. Here we see that the three elements of a seal are contained in the fourth commandment: His name (The Lord); His title (Creator/Maker); and (c) territory (heaven and earth—the universe).

You can see why Satan tries so hard to influence the world to reject the fourth commandment. If this commandment is eliminated, the seal will be removed. So the mark of the beast is in direct opposition to the commandment of God that reveals God as the Creator. The sign of God's creative power is the Sabbath (Ezek. 20:20).

### REACT

1. What do you do on Sabbath that reminds you that God is your Creator? Be specific.
2. If your answer to this question is "nothing in particular," what can you do on Sabbath to honor God as Creator?
3. How do you respond to a Sunday-keeping Christian friend who says, "I don't worship on your Sabbath, but I do honor God as the Creator."
4. How would you define the mark of the beast?
5. In your personal experience is the Sabbath more a symbol of righteousness-by-faith or righteousness-by-works? If you answered righteousness-by-works, what can you do to change that perspective?
6. How can someone be sure whether he or she is among the 144,000 people?
7. Is Babylon a church, a teaching, or a sect? Explain your answer.

# Why the Pre-Advent Judgment Is Good News

## OPINION

Rev. 14:7

When you get to heaven, are you going to be happy there? Most people respond immediately, "Yes! Even if I am the last one through the gate, I will be happy." But do not answer so fast! Some people we thought certain were going to be there will be missing, and others we thought sure would never make it, will be present.

"Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14, NKJV). Few find it—not because it is so hard to find, but because few want it.

Revelation 14 speaks of God's judgment. God is up for judgment. God is on trial. God is being accused before the universe as unjust, unfair, and unreasonable. In order for God to be vindicated, for us (the whole universe) to see that God is indeed a God of love and justice, in order to make the universe forever safe from sin and its results, the judgment must take place. So the investigative judgment is extremely crucial. The purpose of the pre-Advent judgment includes the following:

**How could you  
find a friendlier  
Judge than Jesus?**

1. God is interested not only in justifying sinners, but in being just at the same time, as we notice in Romans 3:26.

2. It justifies God in forgiving the ones who are forgiven. This judgment reveals those who have accepted and continue to accept His justifying grace.

3. The post-Advent judgment justifies God in not forgiving the ones who are *not* forgiven.

The judgment is good news, for it reminds us that God treats His people as intelligent beings. God does not ask for our blind trust. Another reason that judgment is good news is that God has committed all judgment to His Son (John 5:22).

Jesus is our Judge, and how could you find a friendlier Judge than Jesus? Jesus is our Defense Attorney and our Judge as well. He has never lost a case, so we have nothing to fear when our case comes up for judgment. Finally, it is good news because it means our custody is about over. What a cause for rejoicing! The hour of God's judgment is come!

## Do I Have Your Attention?

### EXPLORATION

Rev. 14:1-12

### CONCLUDE

Sometimes you hear a tone in someone's voice that demands attention. "Jimmy! Get away from that snake!" Or "Class! The next student who speaks without permission is going to the principal's office." The angels of Revelation 14 seem to have that same tone of urgency. If you've been goofing around, it's time to straighten up and pay attention. For God's people, this warning is welcome news. It means the power of sin is about to be broken. They are about to be forever justified by the mediation of Christ. For those who have turned from the world and have set their face toward heaven, they are nearly home.

### CONSIDER

- Painting or sketching the three angels of Revelation. Include in the picture the skyline of your town or a landmark from your area.
- Finding the most triumphant song in your music collection. As you play it, read about the song of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5.
- Reflecting on the most loyal friends you have had in your life. Think about what they said or did that marked them as loyal and trustworthy. What marks you as loyal to God?
- Involving a group of friends in a skit. Tell one person that they have prophetic knowledge that the building you are currently in will be destroyed in five minutes by an earthquake. They must try to convince the other actors to leave the building.
- Volunteering to help with a Revelation seminar or other evangelistic outreach in your area.
- Exploring your home to discover as many warning labels as you can find. Which one seems the most frightening? How does it compare with Rev. 14:9-11?
- Write an advertisement for modern Babylon as if you were trying to attract tourists. Describe the amusements that are available and the kind of people who populate the city. Consider who among your friends would find your advertisement enticing.
- Talking to a friend or coworker about what they would do if they thought Jesus were coming this year.

### CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 38.

Marvin Moore, *The Crisis of the End Time*.

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Kim Peckham, *Falling Waters*, West Virginia

# The Blessed hope



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“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” (Rev. 22:20, 21, NIV).

# Overwhelmed by a Sense of Hopelessness?

## INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 2:9

Are you longing for your dreams to come true but are presently frustrated because you have been unable to find gainful employment for the longest while? Does the almost daily news of plane crashes, train wrecks, and automobile accidents make you desire to travel even less and less? Are the continual weather reports of tornadoes, hurricanes, snowstorms, and floods leading you to have even less faith in the predictability of the weather?

What about the latest gory evidences of our inhumanity to one another? On the last day of the much touted Y2K, in an island of the sea, 13 people were attacked and injured by masked men who disrupted their church service and set some of them alight. At the end of the brutal act, one of them was left dead. In another incident, a young woman on her way to work

**It was heartbreaking to see the sense of futility.**

early in the morning suffered the loss of an eye because of the senseless battery of her body by an unknown assailant. These stories abound far and wide. Where is the love and brotherhood promised in so many of today's popular songs?

In the light of this apparent inability to trust anyone, do you long for the closest intimacy that can ever be achieved between two beings?

Well, I have great news for you! Jesus is always there in Spirit, and He is coming back in Person. It won't be long now. All the signs point to His very imminent return, the blessed hope. Truly, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, NIV). Keep trusting Him; His glorious appearing is on the horizon.

A group of us recently visited a senior citizens' home to bring cheer to the inhabitants. It was heartbreaking to see the sense of futility in most of the faces of the residents there. They seemed to be society's outcasts. For some reason or other, family members could no longer care for them. Most seemed to be just waiting to die. It was our greatest joy and privilege to share with them the love of Jesus and to assure them that He was soon coming again to put an end to all their pain and sorrow.

This week we will be studying the appearance of our Lord in the skies to terminate all our problems, to allow us to make our wildest dreams come true, and to start us on a journey that will last throughout eternity.



# The Hope of Male Papaya?

## EVIDENCE

Titus 1:2

A Caribbean saying refers to false hopes as *espoire mal papay* (“the hope of male papaya”). In the natural world, the male papaya tree blooms, appearing that it would bear fruit, but it never does. Could the blessed hope be an example of *espoire mal papay*? Is the blessed hope nothing more than hoping in hope?

Daniel’s heavenly vision of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2 reveals that broken hopes and dreams have afflicted our world for centuries. This vicious cycle will finally be broken, ushering in the blessed hope.

Anthropology and history scholars have shown us that no civilization is independent of the culture that preceded it. In other words, we are products of our environment, past or present.

Thus, no empire can be totally free from its predecessor’s culture. In religious and secular history alike, one can detect remnants of the past and/or surrounding culture. The evidence is everywhere:

social, ecological, and economical. Researchers have come to the conclusion that Israel’s master story—the Exodus—and Christianity have their origins in cultures and religions that went before them.

So, too, the image in Daniel’s vision that represents the kingdoms of the world. He saw one ruler succeeding another bearing marks of the other until the everlasting kingdom was set up without hands (Daniel 2). It is important to note that the kingdoms are represented as a unified body, separate but connected. But the foreseen—everlasting kingdom—was completely and absolutely detached from the other (Rev. 21:1-5). The kingdom of God ushers in a total change. This to me is the blessed hope!

Both Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom are of Divine origin (Dan. 2:11, 19, 28). Thus, the blessed hope is not just faith in something, but faith in a time when faith itself shall become sight. The blessed hope is for a time and place where history as we know it ends and eternity begins, when the former things are passed away and all things (not some) have become new (Rev. 21:5).

For me it is called the blessed hope because it’s the time when humans will overcome all evils. Victory will be won over the enemy of sin and death.

No civilization is  
independent of the  
culture that preceded it.

Monday  
June 17

## The New Order and Immortality

### LOGOS

Isaiah 35; Matt. 24:30; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:10, 11; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 Thess. 4:15-17; Rev. 21:1-7

### The Blessed Hope and the Human Race (Isaiah 35)

Since the fall of Adam, “the whole creation has been groaning” (Rom. 8:22, NIV), awaiting deliverance that is complete and permanent. Though humankind has devised ways of gaining freedom, these devices have served only to frustrate the human spirit. The rich have not been able to secure immortality, education has not been able to liberate people from sin, and fame has left many to perish in the shackles of loneliness.

Sin has affected all facets of human existence; all of Adam’s generation has lived in bondage. Life for Adam’s children has been elusive and it was in response to humanity’s yearning that Christ exclaimed: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).

The essence of the blessed hope, therefore, must be understood in the context of the present human condition, the old order of things—the mourning, the crying and

**Satan’s work has  
caused humanity to  
distrust God’s love.**

the pain, and the death—that is inescapable in this life. Jesus, however, wants us to know that this is not His plan for humanity. In Isaiah He has disclosed His manifesto, which can be encapsulated in two points: (1) humanity will be restored to its original existence; and (2) gladness and joy will be

humankind’s permanent experience, for sorrow and sighing will be no more. This promise is not to be enjoyed by all but instead only the redeemed, “he who overcomes will inherit all this” (Rev. 21:7, NIV).

### The Certainty of Christ’s Return (John 14:1-3)

Satan’s work has caused humanity to distrust God’s love and doubt His words, for he is fully aware that faith in God is all that people need to receive God’s promises. Consequently, Satan leads people to question the certainty of Christ’s return, leading us to think: How do we know that Christ meant what He said? How do we know that His promises are meant to be taken literally?

In the Bible we are told that those who come to God must believe that He is God and that He will reward those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). That is, He is able to do what He says and nothing is beyond Him. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. . . . I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1, 3, NIV). “‘These words are trustworthy and true’” (Rev. 21:5, NIV).

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## **The Manner of Christ's Return (Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:10, 11; 1 Thess. 4:15-17)**

Christ's second advent is not a mystery that is left to human interpretation and understanding. This promise is literal and personal; it has been made clear in the Bible. " 'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' " (Acts 1:11, NIV). That is, Jesus will come back not as a spirit, but in the same manner as He left.

His coming will be accompanied with visible and audible signs, not merely for a few to experience as is taught in some circles, but for the whole world to see (Matt. 24:30). So glorious and grand will this event be that even the dead will rise to witness it. Those who suspect they will experience death before that great day should not be fearful, for the Scripture says that those who went to the grave with the blessed hope will not be left out. The living will not precede the dead in this experience of the blessed hope, but at Christ's coming the dead will be caught up together to meet the Lord where they will be forever (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

## **Receiving of Immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Rev. 21:1-7)**

Christ has promised to make everything new, to change the old order of things. God's people will have a totally different experience to that which they have experienced. He will destroy every pain and sadness. Christ is coming to give life, and in the presence of the Life-Giver there can only be gladness and joy.

Death will be consumed by life. At the last trumpet sound, in a flash of time, all the redeemed, the overcomers, will be changed. The perishable will be clothed with imperishable and the mortal with immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-57). The promise will now be a reality, rendering death powerless. God will once again dwell with us, and we will be His people and God Himself will be with us and He will be our God (Rev. 21: 3).

At this point it will no longer be a hope but an experience in glory. "All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. 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."\*

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\**The Great Controversy*, pp. 667, 678.

Tuesday  
June 18

# The Blessed Hope and the Inheritance

## TESTIMONY

John 14:1-3

"The object of Christ's departure was the opposite of what the disciples feared. It did not mean a final separation. He was going to prepare a place for them, that He might come again, and receive them unto Himself. While He was building mansions for them, they were to build characters after the divine similitude."<sup>1</sup>

"There are not many ways to heaven. Each one may not choose his own way. Christ says, 'I am the way: . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.' Since the first gospel sermon was preached, when in Eden it was declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, Christ had been uplifted as the way, the truth, and the life. He was the way when Adam lived, when Abel presented to God the blood of the slain lamb, representing the blood of the Redeemer. Christ was the way by which patriarchs and prophets were saved. He is the way by which alone we can have access to God."<sup>2</sup>

"The sayings of Christ are to be valued, not merely in accordance with the measure of the understanding of those who hear; they are to be considered in the important bearing which Christ Himself attaches to them. He took the old truths, of which He Himself was the originator, and placed them before His hearers in heaven's own light. How different was their representation. What a flood of meaning

**"There are not many  
ways to heaven."**

and brightness and spirituality was brought in by their explanation.

"After His resurrection, Christ opened the understanding of His followers, that they might understand the Scriptures. Everything had been transformed by the working of the arts of Satan. Truth was covered up by the rubbish of error, and hidden from finite sight. When Christ referred to His humiliation, rejection, and crucifixion, the disciples could not take in His meaning. It had been a part of their education to expect Christ to set up a temporal kingdom, and when He spoke of His sufferings they could not understand His words. He reproved them because of their slowness of apprehension, and promised them that when the Comforter should come, He would bring many things to their remembrance."<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

If Christians are not supposed to be materialistic, why do you think Jesus spoke of such things as mansions when He talked of going to prepare a place for us?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 662.

2. *Ibid.*, p 663.

3. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, p.122.

# Preparing to Meet Jesus

## HOW-TO

Matt. 24:42-44; Phil. 3:14

How many of us will see Jesus when He comes? Christ's second coming will be as real as was His first, and as visible as His ascension, and far more glorious. To spiritualize our Lord's return is to pervert the obvious meaning of His promise, "I will come again," and nullify the whole plan of redemption, for the reward of the faithful of all ages is to be given.

Areas we should not neglect:

● **Prepare conscientiously for His coming.** Not to do so leads to reckless neglect of opportunities and privileges to prepare for His return.

● **Learn to trust and obey.** Now, just now, is our day of opportunity and privilege. When the light of truth is shining upon us, we are to learn the lesson. We must plead with God to give us a true conception of His character and a willingness to obey Him.

● **Fix our eyes on Jesus.** By beholding Jesus Christ, we shall grow up into His likeness. The more closely we are connected with Him, the more clearly we shall see our unrighteousness.

● **Give gifts of loving service.** The desire that Mary had to do service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the spikenard and precious ointment in the world because it expressed her appreciation of the world's Redeemer.

Now is our day  
of opportunity  
and privilege.

## REACT

1. On a weekly basis, how many times does the blessed hope occur to you?
2. In what practical ways can one prepare to meet Jesus?
3. How do we "behold" Jesus? Be specific.
4. How do we prepare conscientiously for His coming?
5. What gifts of loving service are you able to do for Jesus?
6. Why do you think so many religions believe in some form of after-life?
7. What is the best aspect of the blessed hope: (a) living with God, (b) the absence of pain, or (c) the absence of death? Explain your answer.
8. How would you respond to someone who has accepted the view of Christ's second coming (i.e., the rapture) represented in the book or movie, *Left Behind™*?
9. Jesus said that He came so that we "may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10, NIV). What aspects of your relationship with Jesus help you to live your life to the full?

\* Trademark owned by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

Thursday  
June 20

## The Blessed Hope and History

OPINION

Rom. 4:18

The belief among Christians that Jesus Christ will put an end to human history is called the blessed hope. Yet, hoping in the blessed hope is not easy because new technologies and new trends in knowledge production and dissemination are

**A large number of people  
are still underfed.**

opening new possibilities for humans to transcend the previous limitations of food production and medical treatment. Despite the fact that treatment and food seem to be available, a large number of people are still underfed and diseases which have been eradicated in developed countries still present a threat in third world countries.

For people like me who live in the world of limited resources and possibilities, hope takes on political significance: to speak of the blessed hope is to critique the excesses of wealth that are amassed by exploiting those who are most in need.

As a Christian, my understanding of the blessed hope is that there will be a total eruption of human history as we know it. Some of the areas that will be turned upside down are:

● **Economic System:** Our present economic system, which is based on the maximization of profits at the expense of human destruction, indignity, and ill-treatment will no longer exist. Rather, we will be valued for what we are, children of God, and we will be in communion with God and one another.

● **Racism:** The problem of racism that permeates both the church and society will be eradicated. The various colors and features that God blessed us with to celebrate our diversity will not be seen as a curse, a source of shame, or a justification for ill-treatment by others for we all shall be like Christ.

● **Ecological Decay:** The continual destruction of the world will stop. There will be no more nuclear plants to manufacture products and send the waste to third world countries for monetary benefits and promised infra structural development. Nor will poor people and poor countries have to deplete their trees and plants for survival. At the realization of the blessed hope, a new environment will be created. God will create a new heaven and new earth.

● **Imperialism:** The hubris of rich and developed countries who dictate to small, poor countries will vanish. The current new imperialism is as dangerous as the old colonialism. Its attendant evils will end. There will be one world and Jesus will be crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords. Our homage will be to Him.

# I Just Can't Wait!

## EXPLORATION

1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 21:1-7; John 14:1-3

## CONCLUDE

We live in a world where hope fights an uphill battle to survive. The cumulative effect of thousands of years of human effort has only served to increase the amount of misery on our little planet. For struggling humanity, Christ's second coming is the light at the end of the tunnel. He promises victory over sorrow, sin, and death. As Christians, there is much to which we can look forward. Every facet of our day-to-day lives should be influenced by this forward-looking posture.

## CONSIDER

- Planning an advance victory party! Invite several friends and make it a joyous event with games and refreshments centered on the theme of God's triumph. After all, what's worth celebrating any more than this event?
- Imagining yourself a witness to the Second Coming. Write a description of the event, including what is perceived by each of your five senses. Read it aloud, and perhaps even record it on a cassette tape with sound effects.
- Making a collage or composite drawing with illustrations of "hope."
- Developing a mime sketch, showing how Christ brought—or will bring—life and hope to specific individuals. Think about sharing your sketch with a friend, small group, or your Sabbath School class.
- Choosing a historical monarch or head of state, and comparing/contrasting the conditions under his or her rule with those that will exist when Jesus Christ reigns as King.
- Using a concordance to research a list of Bible texts that point to the certainty of Christ's return.
- Supposing that you knew for certain that Jesus was coming at the end of next month. Reflect on how you would spend the next 30 days. What would you do and say? What would you change about your daily routine?

## CONNECT

*The Great Controversy*, chap. 40.

Jonathan Gallagher, *The Ultimate God*, chap. 5.; Jennifer Jill Schwirzer, *Testimony of a Seeker*.

# An **End-times** how-to



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“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. . . . Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household”  
(Eph. 2:17, 19).



# "Go About Your Business, Citizen"

## INTRODUCTION

Matt. 24:42-44

In the campy TV version of Batman, the caped crusader and his trusty sidekick, Robin, would be climbing the outside of a tall building when someone would stick their head out the window and say, "Look, Ethel, it's Batman." Before continuing, Batman would always stop and say, "Go about your business, citizen." As if they are going to go back to reading the evening paper knowing that the city's foremost super hero is battling the forces of evil on top of their apartment building.

"Look, Ethel,  
it's Batman."

The question is, how do we, as Christians, go about our business as we see signs of the end occurring all around us and know what is eventually going to take place?

When Jesus told His disciples of the signs of the end and the hardships that they would endure, He warned them to watch and be ready (Matt. 24:42-44). Obviously, God wants us to pay attention to the events around us, but how should we react when we see the signs of the end beginning to unfold? What effect does this knowledge have on our everyday lives?

How can we "be ready"? Does this mean we should all be taking wilderness-survival classes and have our bags packed, ready to flee to the mountains at a moment's notice? Or was Jesus referring to being spiritually prepared? What did Jesus mean when He said to watch and be ready?

And what is our business that we need to be about? What is our primary function as Christians living in the last days?

As we study this week's lesson, we will look for Jesus' instructions to His disciples on how to prepare our lives for the last days, and we will struggle with the question of how to go about our special business of being a disciple of Christ in the time of the end.

Sunday  
June 23

## The Fear Factor

### LOGOS

Gen. 5:18-24; Isa. 53:5, 6; Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2

Have you ever experienced the feeling of instant pain in your gut when you have just experienced a traumatic or climactic event? Fear can do that to you instantly.

I have felt those feelings. There have been times that I've heard of end-time events that were happening or rumored to be about to happen. I will have to admit I was fearful.

The momentary fearful feelings were a good thing for me. It made me stop and think. Why was I afraid? We know from what the Bible says that these things will happen. For me it was a wake-up call. I realized that there were things not right in

### Why was I afraid?

my life. I also knew there was a way to become one again with God (1 John 1:9). But I must admit that fear is not a long-term motivator for my behavior. Once the trouble is gone or forgotten I would go back to my old routine. It became clear to me. My service to God must come from a loving desire to know and be with Him. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (John 14:23, NASB).

### Taken Home

"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24, NASB).

In light of the common thread throughout the Bible of the promises of God to restore humankind to life as God had intended, Enoch was the first to experience the fulfillment of the promises. We believe Enoch was a symbol of those who will be taken to heaven without seeing death when Jesus returns to take us home.

Enoch's translation came at a time in the history of the world when there was tremendous wickedness—much like today. It appears that God took Enoch as an encouragement to His faithful believers of that day and for us today, showing us that His promises are true.

Enoch is also a representation of how God's people will be conducting their lives just before Jesus returns. We will walk in total dependence upon God. Ellen White tells us, "Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. In the family and in his intercourse with men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the steadfast, unwavering servant of the Lord."\*

### Jesus' Suffering Foretold

Isaiah was shown that Jesus "was pierced through for our transgressions, . . .

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and by His scourging we are healed" (Isa. 53:5, NASB).

All this happened just as the biblical record states. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy that foretold of His birth, life, death, and resurrection. Is there any reason that I should doubt that His return, our life with Him in heaven, and the new earth will not also happen just as He said? I have no doubts!

## Holy Spirit Promised

In Acts 2:38 we find the following: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (NASB).

Before Jesus returned to heaven He promised the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit. The promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost—yet another evidence of God fulfilling His promises.

So will it be for those of us who wait for Jesus to return the second time. If we are earnestly seeking to know God—like Enoch and the apostles of the early church—and are willing to be used as they were, we will also be filled with the Holy Spirit.

## REACT

1. The disciples feared death in a storm at sea (Luke 8:24, 25). How does fear (fright) act as the antithesis to faith? Contrast this with what Jesus said to the woman, "your faith has healed you" (Matt. 9:22, NIV). And the woman was healed from that moment.

2. Do you think John tasted fear in his lifetime? What comforted him?

3. What comfort and assurance do you find in Revelation? Be specific.

4. Do you fear apocalyptic events? Or do you fear what God might ask you to do prior to the apocalyptic events? Explain your answer.

5. Why do we fear the end of time?

6. What cause for rejoicing can we find in suffering?

7. How do you feel each time you hear of war and rumors of war?

8. How can you simplify life so you can stay more closely focused on Jesus? Be specific.

9. Why do you think we always picture the end of this world so ominously?

10. Why do you think we were given so many specific details regarding Christ's return?

11. In what specific terms does it mean to "occupy" until Christ comes?

12. What does "soon" mean in relation to Jesus' second coming?

13. How can I share my knowledge of Jesus' coming with others?

Monday  
June 24

## "Jostling One Against Another"

### TESTIMONY

Ezek. 28:11-19; John 8:42-47

"Everything in the world is in agitation. The signs of the times are ominous. Coming events cast their shadows before. The Spirit of God is withdrawing from the earth, and calamity follows calamity by sea and by land. There are tempests, earthquakes, fires, floods, murders of every grade. Who can read the future? Where is security? There is assurance in nothing that is human or earthly. Rapidly are men ranging themselves under the banner they have chosen. Restlessly are they waiting and watching the movements of their leaders. There are those who are waiting and watching and working for our Lord's appearing. Another class are falling into line under the generalship of the first great apostate. Few believe with heart and soul that we have a hell to shun and a heaven to win.

"The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure

**"The crisis is stealing  
gradually upon us."**

lovers are still crowding to theaters, horse races, gambling hells. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Satan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy be forever shut.

"Solemnly there come to us down through the centuries the warning words of our Lord from the Mount of Olives: 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.' 'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.'"<sup>\*</sup>

### REACT

1. If you focus on the problem, the problem tends to increase. What is the problem?
2. What agents might Satan be using right now to distract you from the plan God has for you?

<sup>\*</sup>*The Desie of Ages*, p. 636.

# Assurance and Hope

## EVIDENCE

Isa. 53:6

As if the plagues described in the book of Revelation were not enough, God will add plagues to some and He will disallow partaking of the tree of life and citizenship in the holy city to others! (Rev. 22:18, 19).

Compare that foreboding caution with the simple and comforting invitation to partake in God's promises (verse 17). The cost: given as a free gift to anyone who hears. After reading Revelation, some may shake their head in confusion, deriving little comfort from vivid descriptions of beasts, plagues, and prostitutes thundering across a backdrop of torment, persecution, and destruction. Do we walk a thin line under the insomniac scrutiny of an implacable God? How do we reconcile these vastly different portrayals and discover assurance and hope in Revelation?

The book is meant  
for enlightenment.

**1. The name "Revelation."** Rather than an agent of perplexity packaged in pandemonium, the book is meant for enlightenment. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "revelation" as: "an act of communicating divine truth; something that is revealed by God to humans, an enlightening or astonishing disclosure."

**2. The message of Revelation.** The message is to show Jesus' servants what must soon take place (1:1), a preview of God's plan. The unfolding of events as described gives hope to those who look forward to the culmination of predictions and assurance to those who will look back on fulfilled prophecy.

**3. The messenger of Revelation.** John delivered Jesus' revelation as instructed. Accompanied by an angel, he fell as though dead (verse 17), he was afraid (verse 17), he wept (5:4), and he fell down to worship in utter awe and reverence (19:10; 22:8). He does not decipher much of the symbolism, and he was evidently emotionally and physically distressed by his inability to understand fully or to relay what was revealed to him. But he is comforted by the same glorious words given to comfort any reader (1:3-6, 17; 21:4, 6).

**4. Social climate of Revelation.** Revelation was written around A.D. 95 on the Greek island of Patmos during a time when the young Christian church faced great persecution. John was most likely exiled to Patmos (1:9), probably the site of a Roman penal colony, "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (verse 9, NIV). The missionary writes to encourage faithfulness, for the faithful will soon be vindicated through Christ when He returns (2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20).

## “Are We Almost There Yet?”

### HOW-TO

Rev. 22:7

Jesus has told us, “Behold, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:7, NIV). *Soon!* This word means different things to different people. For my students in grades 1-4, for instance, “soon” means “within five minutes,” especially if it is referring to lunchtime. For me, “soon” might mean “in a few weeks,” referring to summer vacation or “in a few months,” when I will have my next birthday. How soon something seems depends on how important it is to us.

As a child, I remember taking trips with my family to visit relatives at Christmastime. My parents would load our 1980 Volkswagen Rabbit with suitcases and Christmas presents, and we’d set off from our house in West Virginia to our grandparents’ house in Indiana. The trip was exciting. We enjoyed going through a tunnel, playing the alphabet game with billboards, and opening little toys Mom had wrapped for us. After a 10-hour drive, we arrived at our destination.

The following days sped by, and soon it was time to head home again. Somehow the journey home never seemed quite so interesting. A few miles into Ohio, my

**After a 10-hour drive, we  
arrived at our destination.**

sister or I were sure to ask, “Daddy, are we almost there yet?” Dad would smile, shake his head, and wish he could say Yes. This pattern would continue for several hours, and each time we would get more

restless. Finally, after months (it seemed) of driving, Dad would announce, “We’re almost there now; we’ll be home soon.” Then we would recognize some familiar sights: a sign announcing our exit off the freeway, the bridge that went over Opequon Creek, the sign for our road, the house two doors down from ours, and then at last . . . home!

This experience reminds me of our journey as we wait for Jesus’ coming. Here are a few pointers to help us on our way.

1. Expect to get tired of the journey. Just as a 5-year-old is not designed to sit still for hours in the back of a VW Rabbit, we weren’t created to live in a world full of sin. It may make us feel cramped and irritable at times. But God promises to go with us the whole way.

2. Look for signs that show we’re almost there. Just as the signs showed we were nearing home, God has given us signs to know that His coming is near.

3. Know that you’ll get there. As a child, I never doubted that we’d get home eventually, even though I wished it would be sooner. God has given us many evidences that He will come, and we need to trust His word. He promises that this will truly be the greatest homecoming ever.

# Assorted Heresies

## OPINION

Matt. 24:14

When I was seven years old, there were several eagerly anticipated events that I did not want to miss. One was a mission-boat ride with my parents to conduct camp meetings on Choiseul, Solomon Islands. I distinctly remember praying to the Lord the night before and pleading with Him that He delay His return to earth until after our journey. Before you blame me for the Lord's delay, consider Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14.

What requirements must we meet before Jesus can complete His plan of salvation? The gospel commission in Matthew 28 reminds us that some of the responsibility lies with us.

Assuming that Christ's return depends on our acceptance of His work through us, how successful have we been? There are currently about 11 million Seventh-day Adventists compared to over 5 billion living humans. This means that each Adventist needs to convert about 500 people before picking up the golden crown at the pearly gate. How will we battle this seemingly insurmountable challenge?

**Each Adventist needs to convert about 500 people before picking up the golden crown.**

The good news is that God has a chosen people, and as He explained to Elijah, there are more of us than we think! (1 Kings 19:18). So who exactly is on our side? Well, the Bible makes it clear that we must not judge, or we too will be judged. Disclaimers aside, Paul states, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9, NIV).

Although I firmly believe that we are held accountable for the doctrines we believe, salvation itself is dependent on a personal relationship with Christ alone. Therefore, many genuine fellow believers in other denominations could also be considered part of God's remnant. Does that include Lutherans? Mormons? Muslims? Should we be converting them or only total nonbelievers? I believe those are great questions. What is our mission, then, as Seventh-day Adventists? During the time of trouble, people will be looking for stability and a foundation on which to base their beliefs. They will seek fellow believers to support their trust in God. As we currently stand, many sincere non-SDA believers could see us as a sect or cult. Although we are not called to be people-pleasers, we should "let [our] light shine before men" (Matt. 5:16, NIV) so that in that time of confusion, they will see Christ's foundation in us and "praise [our] Father in heaven" (verse 16, NIV).

Friday  
June 28

# The Great Walk Into Heaven

## EXPLORATION

Eph. 2:17, 19

## CONCLUDE

At first thought, we may envy Enoch's peaceful walk into heaven as we contemplate the noisy, cataclysmic events of earth's last days. However, as Enoch's developing relationship with God made him more and more a misfit for life on earth, he suffered persecution and trouble. And as we come closer and closer in relationship to God as Enoch did, heaven for us begins now, amid the increasing violence and trauma of an earth worn out from sin's horrors.

## CONSIDER

- Illustrating, cartoon style, your growing friendship with God. What factors in your life have the greatest impact on building your faith, your dependence on Him for guidance, the role of the Holy Spirit in your friendship?
- Taking a walk and noting the signs of Christ's coming in nature. What signs do you see of wear and tear on the earth? Of violence? What reminders do you see of God's promises for a new heaven and a new earth? How do these messages from the natural world influence your relationship with God?
- Journaling about your daily relationship issues with God. What do you long for? Where do you find your greatest comfort? How has your relationship improved in the last few months? What would you like to do to come even closer to Him?
- Putting to music Psalm 46:1-3 and Isaiah 25:9, promises that have special meaning as we wait for God's deliverance. Not only are these songs that we will be singing as we see His coming, (see *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 639, 644) but they are the foundation of our hope now.
- Creating a three-dimensional illustration of the foundation of our hope in Christ. What promises in Revelation are particularly important for our faith?
- Rereading chapter 69 in *The Desire of Ages*. Christ is briefing His disciples on last-day events. Take notes about the specific advice Christ has about the importance of relationship during this time. Compare this with chapter 39 in *The Great Controversy*.
- Contacting friends and celebrating with them your great confidence in Christ's power to save and keep us close to Him. Share Romans 8:31-39 or other promises that are especially comforting and inspiring to you.

## CONNECT

*The Desire of Ages*, chap. 69; *The Great Controversy*, chaps. 39; 40.



# Kings and Chronicles: Too Much Idol Curiosity

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 2002, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### Lesson 1: Rough Start

**Scriptures:** 1 Kings 1:11-53; Gal. 6:7

**Key Thought:** The books of Kings and Chronicles are, in many ways, a family history. Much of the Bible, at least the Old Testament, particularly the earliest books, is the same: it's the story of a family. And not any family, of course, but the family that came from faithful (but flawed) Abraham, the one through whom "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 18:18, KJV).

Unfortunately, as with so many families, it hardly presents a model home. Kings and Chronicles continue what has been, and still is, a sad story—one with occasional and brilliant spasms of divine light interspersed between the constant current of human darkness.

In Kings, starting in the first chapter, both light and darkness are presented. Let's learn from both, because each has lessons for us, we who seek to cling to the Light amid the silent rush of darkness that surrounds us in this fallen world as it did those whom we are to read about in their fallen world as well.

### Lesson 2: The Wisdom of Solomon

**Scriptures:** 1 Kings 2:1-3, 13-25; 3:5-16

**Key Thought:** Last week's lesson ended with Solomon ascending to the throne; this week starts out with him firmly securing it. It's not always a pretty picture. Israel, in choosing to have a king of its own kind, would struggle for the rest of its days from that unfortunate decision. Things in the chosen nation were not the way they should have been (What, of course, in life is?). How thankful we should all be that God is still willing to work with us, no matter how much we have messed up along the way.

This week does, however, reveal some of the most tender moments one can find between man and his Maker; thus, there's much here that we can learn.

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### Mongolia

Bold had dropped out of high school to study Buddhism, but when he tried to enter a monastery, none had room for him. Disappointed and frustrated he completed high school and was accepted at the university in Ulan Bataar, Mongolia.

One day Bold's twin sister told him that she had met some Christian missionaries. When he learned that they spoke English, he asked his sister if he could attend the Christian meetings with her—just to improve his English.

Bold enjoyed the informal meeting so much that he forgot that he was there to improve his English. Soon he was visiting the missionaries at other times and asking deep spiritual questions.

Read more about Bold's journey from Buddhism to Christianity in this quarter's *Mission*.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help to provide churches for the rapidly growing church in Mongolia.

### Northern Asia-Pacific Division



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