

# The Sabbath *and the* End




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

## The Judgment, Creation, and Accountability

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Sabbath and Creation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## A Not-So-Subtle Deception

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Creation, the Sabbath, and the End Time

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

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

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## The Sabbath and Eternal Rest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

## Quandary of Two Books

By CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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