

Ablaze With God's Glory



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 5:1–6; John 8:32; Rev. 18:1; Rev. 4:11; Exod. 33:18, 19; Rev. 5:6, 12; Rev. 13:8.*

Memory Text: “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory” (*Revelation 18:1, NKJV*).

Sooner or later, final events will unfold. Exactly when, exactly how—we have not been told. But we have been told enough. Some kind of legislation enforcing Sunday keeping, in contrast to Sabbath keeping, will occur. Revelation has revealed to us the crucial issues at stake, the crucial players involved, and in broad sweeps, it has told us what will happen when, in contrast to the worship of the One “‘who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), people—all “whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Rev. 13:8, NKJV*)—will worship the beast and his image. In other words, all those who have chosen to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and obey His commandments—their names remain in the book of life. How much better to be in the register of God than in the records of man.

God has raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to preach this message to the world. Thus, we need, ourselves, to be converted to the truth as it is in Jesus, and to have been transformed and made new by the “everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14:6, which is centered on Christ’s death for us, the assurance of our salvation in Him.

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

Preparing for the Final Crisis

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6. What admonition does the apostle Paul give us regarding the last days of human history?

The apostle Paul urged the believers at Thessaloniki to “watch” and “be sober” in the context of the second coming of Christ. And if Paul would say that to believers then, what would he say to us today?

He also declared that they were “children of light” (1 Thess. 5:5, NIV) and that they were not in “darkness, so that this day [the return of Christ]” (1 Thess. 5:4, NIV) should overtake them “as a thief” (1 Thess. 5:4, NKJV). Jesus used the expression to “watch” in connection with earnest, heartfelt prayer (Matt. 24:42, Matt. 26:40, 41). To watch is to be spiritually alert. To be sober minded is to be serious about the times that we are living in and focused on the things that really matter.

Ellen G. White adds: “We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 28.

And while it might be a surprise to the world, it should not be a surprise to us. Though we don’t know when it will happen, we can see enough to know that it is coming, and that now, today, is the day to be ready.

Review Daniel 2, and note the sequence of kingdoms that came and went, exactly as predicted. What should this teach us about how we can trust that what God says will happen, will indeed happen?

Christ has given us these last-day messages so that, knowing what is coming, we can prepare for it. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, combined with the modern gift of prophecy, give us divine insight into what is coming upon this world. The prophetic Word of God outlines salvation history in advance, and Daniel 2 provides powerful, rational evidence that we can trust God.

Paul says not “to sleep” as others do. What does that mean, and how can we know if we are, indeed, sleeping and, if we are, what will it take to wake us?

Knowing Truth

Read John 7:17, John 8:32, and John 17:17. What promises does Jesus give regarding knowing truth and where is it found?

God's final appeal to His people is to flee the errors of Babylon and walk in the light of eternal truth found in His Word. The key to everything is the Bible. As long as people stick to the Bible and follow what it teaches, they will not be deceived in the final crisis, particularly regarding the Sabbath.

The message of the second angel appeals to us to accept truth rather than error, Scripture rather than tradition, and the teachings of God's Word rather than the errors of false doctrine.

The third angel's message, which follows the first two angels', presents a warning against the mark of the beast. Throughout the prophecies of the Bible, a beast represents a political or religious power. The sea beast of Revelation 13 and 14 arises out of Rome as a worldwide system of worship. Eventually this Roman power extends its influence over the whole world and will lead out in a movement to unite church and state. The goal will be to achieve world unity at a time of economic upheaval, natural catastrophes, social turmoil, international political crisis, and global conflict.

And the United States will eventually take the lead in this global confederation. "Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

These messages conclude with an urgent appeal for Christ's faithful followers to keep the commandments of God through the living faith of Jesus dwelling in their hearts (*Rev. 14:12*).

How do you understand Jesus' words: "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, NKJV)? What does that mean? How has the truth set you free? What does it mean to be "free" in this context?

The Reformation Continues

God has raised up a last-day people to stand on the shoulders of the great Reformers of the past with the Bible as their only creed, Christ alone as their only Source of salvation, the Holy Spirit as their only Source of strength, and the return of our Lord as the consummation of all their hopes. Truths long obscured by the darkness of error and tradition, including the true Bible Sabbath, will be proclaimed to the world just before the return of our Lord.

The three angels' messages gave birth to this last-day movement to complete the Reformation and to participate with Christ in finishing His work on earth. The great prophecies of the Bible's last book reveal a divine movement of destiny arising out of disappointment to proclaim God's final message to the world. Revelation 14 describes a worldwide church spanning the globe with the good news of the eternal gospel.

The three angels of Revelation 14 are joined by a fourth angel in Revelation 18. This angel gives power to the proclamation of the three angels so that the "earth [is] lightened with [God's] glory" (*Rev. 18:1*). Chapter 18 focuses on the major events leading up to the climax of human history and the final, ultimate triumph of the gospel.

Read Revelation 18:1. What three things does John tell us about this angel? (*See also Hab. 2:14.*)

The angel who comes down from the glorious presence of God in the throne room of the sanctuary is commissioned to proclaim God's last message of mercy and to warn the inhabitants of the earth of what is coming upon planet Earth.

The text says that the angel comes with "great authority." The New Testament Greek word for "authority" is *exousia*. Jesus uses this word in the Gospel of Matthew in harmony with the sending out of His disciples. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples "authority" (*NIV*) over the principalities and powers of evil. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28:18, 19, He once again sends them out, but this time with "all authority" in heaven and on earth to go and "make disciples of all the nations" (*NKJV*).

Ultimately, how do the issues in the last days (as they really do every day) come down to *authority*? Whose authority do we follow: God's, our own, the beast power's, or someone else's? Whose authority are you following now?

God's Glory Fills the Earth

Read Revelation 4:11, Revelation 5:12, Revelation 19:1, and Revelation 21:26. What words are associated with the glory of God that fills the earth as described in Revelation 18:1?

The great controversy between good and evil in the universe also is about God's honor or reputation. Satan, a rebel angel, has declared that God is unjust, that He demands worship but gives little in return. The evil one declares that God's law restricts our freedom and limits our joy.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection exploded that myth. The One who created us plunged into the snake pit of this world to redeem us. On the cross, He answered Satan's charges and demonstrated that God is both loving and just.

Charmed by His love, concerned about His honor, His end-time people reveal His glory—His loving, self-sacrificing character to a self-centered, godless world, and the earth is illuminated by the character of God.

Read Exodus 33:18, 19. How does God reveal His glory to Moses? What is God's glory?

God's glory is His character. The earth will be filled with the glory of God when we are filled with the love of God and our characters are changed by redeeming love.

Revealing His love in our personal lives reveals His glory, His character, to the world. The last message to be proclaimed to a world engulfed in spiritual darkness carried by three angels in the midst of heaven is " 'Fear God and give glory to Him' " (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*).

There is no glory for us in our good works, or our righteousness, or our goodness. "The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other. . . . This is the glory of God which closes the work of the third angel."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 19. Ellen G. White also writes: "What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself."—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

No glory for ourselves but, yes, glory to God instead.

The Lamb, the Slain Lamb

There are many symbols in Revelation, biblical symbols of importance; that is, a dragon in heaven (*Rev. 12:3, 4, 7*), angels flying in the midst of heaven (*Rev. 14:6*), a woman riding a scarlet beast (*Rev. 17:3*), and so forth. They are in the Word of God; the Holy Spirit inspired John to put them there, and they have important roles in revealing truth to those who read the words of this book and do them, for, as it says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (*Rev. 1:3, NKJV*).

There is, however, another image that appears, again and again, all through the book of Revelation. What is the image, and what does it represent?

Read Revelation 5:6, 8, 12; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 14:1; Revelation 15:3; Revelation 19:7; Revelation 21:22, 23; and Revelation 22:1, 3. What is the meaning of the symbolism of the Lamb, and why would it appear so many times in the book of Revelation?

Of course, as the opening words of the book say, this is a revelation “of Jesus Christ.” And not only is He a Lamb but also a Lamb “slain” (*Rev. 5:6, 12; Rev. 13:8*). That is, Jesus Christ crucified. Here is the heart and soul, not only of all the Bible but also of the book of Revelation and of the three angels’ messages. We cannot be faithful to our calling, we cannot do the work that God has raised up this church to do, unless we have the Lamb, the slain Lamb, Jesus crucified, a sacrifice for our sins, as the focal point of our message.

“We must intentionally place the Lamb that was slain at the very center of our doctrines and mission and at the heart of every sermon we preach, every article we write, every prayer we make, every song we sing, every Bible study we give, and in everything we do. Let the love revealed by the Lamb on the cross transform the way we treat each other and move us to also care for the world.”—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, p. 70.

That is, amid the imagery of dangerous beasts, of a dragon making war, of plagues, of persecution, and of the mark of the beast, there remains front and center the Lamb, the Lamb slain. And He alone, and what He has done for us, is doing now, and will do before it’s all over—He is, ultimately, what the three angels’ messages are about.

Why is keeping the slain Lamb at the center of our message crucial not only for leading others to Him but also for your own spiritual life?

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

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Ellen G. White states that “the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message . . . in verity.”—*Evangelism*, p. 190. What does that mean? What relationship does justification by faith have to the three angels’ messages?
- 2 Read Revelation 14:12 again. What is the difference between keeping the commandments of God and legalism? When does obedience become legalism? In what ways can someone who doesn’t keep the commandments of God still be a legalist?
- 3 What answer can you give to those who criticize us when we talk about the ferocious beasts and fearsome warning found in the book of Revelation? Besides the obvious answer, which is that we talk about them because, well, they are there, written in the book, what other answers can you give?
- 4 Discuss in class current world events. What things have you seen happen that could help lead to final events? How do we strike a balance between being aware of the times we are living in and not getting caught up in fruitless speculation about what hasn’t been revealed to us yet?

Training Boys to Read the Bible

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

What is the secret for teaching a child to spend personal time with God?

Christian Müller, an Argentine volunteer at a Seventh-day Adventist school in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan, surprised me with his answer as we spoke in his home. I was in town to collect mission stories for Adventist Mission.

Christian said his six-year-old son, Thomas, had interrupted his personal devotions that morning.

“Normally, I would have asked him to wait,” Christian told me. “But he held up his Bible in his little hands and said, ‘Papa, I don’t understand what I am reading. Can you help me?’ What else could I do but help him?”

I expressed astonishment that a such a small boy was reading his Bible in the morning. My incredulity grew as Christian explained that Thomas and his seven-year-old brother, Lukas, read their Bibles every morning.

“How did you teach them to have morning devotions?” I asked.

Christian thought for a moment. “Actually, I have never taught them to have morning devotions,” he said.

The boys began having personal devotions around the time that they were learning to walk. Christian and his wife, Romina, would sit at opposite sides of the kitchen table to read their Bibles for personal devotions every morning in their home in Argentina. The boys would wake up and, naturally, want to be with their parents. Crawling out of bed, they would find their father and mother in the kitchen. Christian told the boys from the beginning that it was very important for Daddy and Mommy to spend time with God in the morning and that the boys could not interrupt the morning devotions. If the boys wanted to remain in the kitchen, they needed to be quiet and have their own devotions. The boys chose to stay. Initially, they could not read, so they quietly leafed through Bible picture books. As they grew older, they began to read their Bibles. After moving to Kyrgyzstan, the parents and the boys had morning devotions in their own rooms.

This was the secret for teaching a child to spend personal time with God

in the morning. “I never once told the boys that they needed to start having morning devotions,” Christian said. “They just saw that their mother and I had devotions and followed our example.”



Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering in the fourth quarter of 2017 helped enlarge the Seventh-day Adventist school where Christian volunteered in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath that will help spread the gospel around the world. Read more about Thomas and Lukas online: bit.ly/mission-kids.

Years after the exciting start of the Christian church in Ephesus, the members there begin to struggle with their faith.

As Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians from prison, he is worried that they may forget what it means to be Jesus' disciples in their pagan culture. Paul seeks to reignite the fire of their devotion to Christ and to resurrect the excitement of being part of God's church.

Ephesians, our study for this quarter written by John K. McVay, speaks especially to times like our own, in which the allure of the world and the passing of time threaten to dull Christian discipleship. It lifts up Christ and accents the significance of following Him as engaged, active members of His church as we live out the hope of His return. This quarter we have the privilege of prayerfully studying Ephesians and experiencing anew the excitement of following Jesus in challenging times.

Lesson 1—Paul and the Ephesians

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Paul, Evangelist to Ephesus** (*Acts 18:18–21*)

MONDAY: **A Riot in the Amphitheater** (*Acts 19:21–20:1*)

TUESDAY: **Hearing the Letter to the Ephesians** (*Eph. 1:1–6:24*)

WEDNESDAY: **Ephesians in Its Time** (*Eph. 1:1, 2*)

THURSDAY: **Ephesians: A Christ-Saturated Letter** (*Eph. 1:9, 10*)

Memory Text—*Ephesians 1:9, 10, ESV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians at a time when they are tempted to lose heart. His purpose is to awaken them to their full identity and privileges as followers of Christ.

Lesson 2—God's Grand, Christ-Centered Plan

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Chosen and Accepted in Christ** (*Eph. 1:3–6*)

MONDAY: **Costly Redemption; Lavish Forgiveness** (*Eph. 1:7, 8*)

TUESDAY: **God's Grand, Christ-Centered Plan** (*Eph. 1:9, 10, ESV*)

WEDNESDAY: **Living in Praise of His Glory** (*Eph. 1:11, 12*)

THURSDAY: **The Holy Spirit: Seal and Down Payment** (*Eph. 1:13, 14*)

Memory Text—*Ephesians 1:3, ESV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul begins Ephesians by praising God for all the blessings He has poured out and for working through the ages on behalf of believers.

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