

Earth's Closing Events



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

Loyalty to God and His Word

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

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

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

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

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

Sealed for Heaven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whom Do We Worship?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Early and Latter Rain

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

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

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

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

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

The Loud Cry

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

The angel announcing the fall of Babylon has “great authority.” Like the angels of Revelation 14, this angel represents human messengers. This angel reveals the glory of God so fully that it illuminates the entire earth. The Greek word for authority or power in the New Testament is *exousia*. It often refers to Christ’s triumph over the principalities and powers of hell. Jesus uses this word in the gospel of Matthew in harmony with the sending out of His disciples. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples authority over the principalities and powers of hell. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28, He once again sends them out with “ ‘all authority . . . in heaven and on earth’ ” to “ ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, 19, NKJV*).

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

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

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

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why is an understanding of last-day events so important in the coming crisis? How are the Scriptures a safeguard from deception?
- ② Democratic societies worldwide have been bastions of religious freedom for centuries. How might that change rather quickly?
- ③ Look at Ellen White's statement above. What choices are you making today that could result in your being with those professed Adventists tomorrow?
- ④ How does the second angel's message change under the loud cry, and what personal preparation can we make for receiving the latter rain to finish God's work on earth?

Reaching Russian Speakers

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

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

What happened?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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