

Last Things: Jesus and the Saved



SABBATH—DECEMBER 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Hebrews 8:1–5; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:24, 25; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:23; Acts 3:19–21.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So turn away from your sins. Turn to God. Then your sins will be wiped away. The time will come when the Lord will make everything new. He will send the Christ. Jesus has been appointed [chosen] as the Christ for you. He must remain in heaven until the time when God makes everything new. He promised this long ago through his holy prophets [special messengers]’ ” (Acts 3:19–21, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: The Bible teaches about Christ's ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary (where Jesus is), His second coming, and the return to life of the dead. Together it stands as a message of hope for those who have put their trust in Him.

THE HISTORY OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY (WAR) between good and evil has had many important moments. But the great end was at the Cross, where Satan's future was decided. He will be destroyed at last. At the same time, Bible prophecy (special messages from God) points to a “time of the end” (Daniel 12:4, 9). This period in salvation history is also very important in the long history of the relationship between the Lord and His people. Events within this “time of the end” period are described as *eschatological*. This means “last things.”

In this week's lesson we will study three special events within this general period of the “last things.” These events have great spiritual lessons for us: Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection (return to life) of those who died in true faith.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 16**THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY:
PART 1 (Hebrews 8:1–5)**

The Bible is clear. There is a sanctuary in heaven (Psalm 11:4). Because of this, Fundamental Belief No. 24 opens with Hebrews 8:2: “There is a sanctuary in heaven. It is the true tabernacle [tent], which the Lord set up and not man” (adapted).

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. What is the main point taught in these verses?

The earthly sanctuary is shown as an example of the heavenly sanctuary. This means that the earthly sanctuary has some connection with the heavenly. The earthly sanctuary, then, teaches us a lot about the heavenly. The real purpose of the earthly sanctuary was found in the heavenly sanctuary and what was to happen there. Through sacrifices and priestly works, the earthly model taught us that the heavenly sanctuary was real. The work of the earthly sanctuary was God’s way of teaching the principles (important rules) of salvation to His people. This was an example of the “real thing”—which is Christ’s ministry (Hebrews 9:9–15). Christ’s ministry involves both His death and work for people in the heavenly sanctuary.

Ministry (work done for God) in the earthly sanctuary taught that blood was necessary (Hebrews 9:22) for forgiveness of sins. But there was still the need for a priest to work between sinners and a Holy God through the earthly

sanctuary and the services done there. The ministry of the priest in the Most Holy Place cleansed the sanctuary of sin. And it required confessions and repentance (turning away from sin) on the part of the people. So judgment was also an important part of the total ministry of salvation.

What is interesting is what Hebrews 8:1 and 2 say. The goal of all the first seven chapters in the book of Hebrews is to tell the reader that the heavenly sanctuary is real. These verses also tell of the position of Christ as our High Priest in that heavenly sanctuary. It is hard to understand how anyone could fail to realize that Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is an important part of the entire plan of salvation. Nothing in the verses shows that the sanctuary in heaven should be considered as a symbol. In fact, verse 5 makes it clear that the earthly sanctuary in Old Testament times (a real structure with real priests and real sacrifices) was only a “shadow” (lesser example) of what Christ really is doing for us in the heavenly sanctuary.



The earthly sanctuary taught us that Christ’s blood was necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 17**THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY:
PART 2 (Isaiah 53:6)**

The earthly sanctuary service showed three parts of salvation: (1) Christ's sacrifice as our Substitute, (2) priestly work between people and God, and (3) judgment. The Bible teaches that all three parts of salvation are included in the ministry of Christ for sinners.

Read Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Christ's death on the cross satisfy the sacrifice-as-a-substitute part of salvation?

What do 1 Timothy 2:5 and Hebrews 7:25 say about both Christ and His priestly work for sinners?

Animal sacrifices pointed to the death of Christ. In the same way, the priestly ministry was an example of the true ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. And the continual, or daily, ministry of priests in the Holy Place symbolized (showed) the opening that the sinner has to God through Christ's ministry. Christ now works as High Priest between sinners and God in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Study Hebrews 9:23. How is the cleansing of things in the heavens

connected to the priestly work in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement?¹

With the earthly sanctuary services in the background, Hebrews 9:23 points clearly to a cleansing (forgiving) ministry of Christ in heaven. This is a verse that has puzzled scholars for centuries. This is because it clearly teaches that something in heaven has been defiled (dirtied) and needs to be purified (made pure; clean). This cleansing is the end result of the yearly cleansing of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of Atonement.

Think about atonement (cleansing and forgiveness). What does it mean? How is it done? Who alone can make atonement (forgiveness) for us? Why should the news that we are living in the "Day of Atonement" be something positive and hopeful?



Jesus now works as High Priest between sinners and God in the heavenly sanctuary.

1. Day of Atonement—a yearly service that points to the death of Christ as our substitute. It shows His forgiveness of sinners through the death of the Lord's goat and the sending away of the scapegoat (Satan's goat) into the wilderness.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 18**THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST (Acts 3:19–21)**

Study Acts 3:19–21. How does the fact that our sins will be “blotted out” (removed) connect to the cleansing of the sanctuary that we studied yesterday?

Peter may not have known the “times or seasons” (Acts 1:7). But he does speak of Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:14–21, which points to the fulfillment of prophecy in his time. It seems clear that “Peter is speaking by inspiration [urging from God to act] beyond his own limited understanding. Peter is speaking of two great events of earth’s last days: (1) the powerful outpouring of God’s Spirit and (2) the final blotting out of the sins of the righteous [holy] people. They both are tied to a third great closing event, the second coming of Christ.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 160.

The early church was certain of both the second coming of Christ and the promise of a new heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:13). Christ’s first coming gave a good reason for the Second Coming. Unless there is a Second Coming, the First Coming would have been useless. Dealing with the sin problem begins with Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and will reach its glorious (wonderful) close at the Second Coming. This will happen after the cleansing of the sanctuary.

Then Jesus will appear the “second time . . . for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28, NKJV). Without the Second Coming, what would the promise of salvation mean to us? (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18.) Nothing!

The second coming of Christ will mark the close of the great controversy (war). Satan knows that the end of the controversy is very close. So he tries to cause many people to sin through his tricks. We are told that “when the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ comes near, Satan and his evil angels will get busier. Satan will appear as a human, and he will do even more than this. He will pretend to be [appear as] Jesus Christ. And the world that has refused the truth will accept Satan as the Lord of lords and King of kings.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, pages 168, 169. We have been warned against this false trick with the message that Christ’s coming will be a real, personal, and visible (one we can all see) event that will surprise the entire world. And the world as we know it—as a place of sin, suffering, misery, disappointment, and death—will end.

Look at our world. How well have we humans done at making it a better place? We must try to improve the situation of people who are not so fortunate as we are, and who are suffering. But why must we first remember Jesus, who is the only answer to the universal problem of sin?



The second coming of Jesus will end the great war between Christ and Satan.

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 19

WAITING FOR THE SECOND COMING (1 Thessalonians 5:1–11)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. What is the message here? Why is it so important to us today? How can we accept these words and use them in our day-to-day living?

So much can be learned from those verses. But one point should be most important. That is the hope that those Christians awaiting the return of Christ should have. Yes, we need to be watchful and serious so that the day does not surprise us “like a thief in the night.” But we should also be full of faith and love and hope. This is because “whether we wake or sleep” (meaning whether we are alive when Jesus returns or we have already died), we have the promise of eternal life with Him.

In this day and age, we are aware of signs of the end times all around us. We must be careful about how we

interpret them and how we understand their importance. Too often we can get caught up in all kinds of excitement, only to have those things fade into nothing. When the excitement dies down, it can leave people feeling very disappointed, discouraged, and even full of doubt. We need to be watchful. But we also need to be very careful, wise, and humble as we try to read and study “the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:1–4).

What is the purpose of the “signs of the times,” according to John 13:19 and John 14:29?

The prophecies about the end times were not given to satisfy the curiosity of believers. Instead, they were to encourage them to stay aware (Matthew 24:32–44). As we wait for the Second Coming, we need to keep our eyes open. We also need to know what the Word of God teaches about last-day events. This is very important because there are so many false ideas and opinions among Christians about the signs of the times.



We must watch so that the Second Coming does not surprise us like a thief in the night.

How do we keep the right balance in our lives and in our thinking while expecting the Second Coming? Also, how do we avoid making the mistake of thinking of every headline as a sign of the end? How do we avoid being too satisfied or going too far?

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 20

DEATH AND RESURRECTION (1 Thessalonians 4:13–16)

In the New Testament, one of the events connected with the second coming of Christ is the resurrection (return to life) of those who died believing in Him. That probably is the most important part of the Second Coming. This is because most of Christ's followers will be dead when He returns.

What do 1 Thessalonians 4:13–16; 1 Corinthians 15:13–25; Romans 8:11; and Philippians 3:20, 21 teach us about the resurrection of the dead at the time of Christ's return?

The Bible teaches that in the resurrection, the "body" returns to life. In other words, biblical resurrection is a *bodily* resurrection. This truth becomes even more clear when we remember that after Christ's resurrection, His tomb was empty. His dead body no longer remained in the grave. If we are sure that Christ rose to life, then we can be sure that we will too.

If resurrection means the breaking of the power of death, how does that explain why one can have it only by being "in Christ"? Read 2 Timothy 1:8–10.

The key to immortality² is not greater scientific research. The power of death has already been broken through Christ's own death and resurrection (Romans 6:9). The fact that Jesus died and rose to life has given proof that He can give immortality to those who have died and risen to life like Him through baptism (Romans 6:23). Also, the Bible makes it clear that the gift of immortality is not given to believers at death but when Jesus comes the second time (1 Corinthians 15:51–54).

"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies'" (John 11:25, NIV). How can you learn to better understand the hope that is held in these words? Where would you be without them?

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 21

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "Christ's work as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary for our sake is as important to the plan of salvation as His death upon the cross was. By His death Jesus began the work that He was to complete after He went to heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, 'where Jesus has gone. He went there to open the way ahead of us' (Hebrews 6:20, NIV). There the light from the cross of

2. immortality—the ability to live forever.

Calvary is shown. There we may gain a better understanding of the mysteries of how we are saved. The salvation of humans cost heaven more than we can ever understand.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 489.

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Savior the life that was lost through sin is restored [made new]. This is because Jesus has life in Himself to save whom He will. He is empowered with the right to give immortality. The life that He surrendered for man, He takes up again, and gives back to man.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 786, 787.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① John Calvin called Christ’s priestly work for humans the “continual reminder of His death for our salvation” (adapted). It is said that “the heavenly sanctuary was standard preaching among Puritan ministers” (adapted). It is not hard to understand why Christ’s priestly work for humans should be seen as a very important teaching. For example, see how much the Old Testament centered around the sanctuary and the temple. See how much

the New Testament does too! What should this tell us about how important this doctrine (teaching) is?

② Think more about Hebrews 9:23, a verse that has puzzled Bible thinkers for many, many years. They cannot understand how something in heaven itself could really need cleansing. As Seventh-day Adventists, we still have a lot to learn about what this verse means. But how does our understanding of Daniel 8:14 help to make this important idea clearer?

③ The resurrection of Christ is very important to the Christian faith. Without it we have nothing. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. Look at how Paul is trying to show his readers the proof for Christ’s resurrection. Notice verse 6. What is Paul saying here? Why is he making the point that many of the people to whom Christ appeared are still alive? It is almost as if Paul is saying, “Do not believe me only. Ask some of these hundreds of people who saw Him themselves.” These are not the words you would expect from someone who was not sure of what he was teaching. What other proof from the Bible can help to make our belief in Christ’s resurrection sure?