

The Message of the Prophets



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:1–17; Leviticus 16; Matt. 24:24–31; Rom. 3:21–28; Heb. 8:1, 2; 9:23.*

Memory Text: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16, NKJV).

The doctrinal framework of the Seventh-day Adventist Church largely was created by a small, dedicated group of Adventist pioneers. Their meetings were characterized by earnest Bible study and prayer. Writing in 1904, more than a half century after the events, Ellen G. White still had vivid memories of these gatherings. “Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 206. At times, when they could go no further, Ellen White would supply answers given to her in vision, though she never initiated doctrinal formulation. The visions were not given to take the place of faith, initiative, hard work, or Bible study. The crucial point to remember is that our church’s doctrines are based solely on the Bible. They are not dependent upon Ellen White’s writings, however helpful she has been in clarifying some of those teachings.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we need to keep the commandments when we are saved by grace? What is the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary? How does the Sabbath commandment differ from the other commandments? What happens at death, and why is knowledge of the state of the dead important? What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ’s second coming?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.

Righteousness by Faith

What is the common lot of all human beings, and why? What is the only solution for the situation in which we find ourselves? *1 Kings 8:46, Rom. 3:21–28, 5:12.*

Sin is the greatest problem we face. The Egyptians thought that death was humanity's biggest problem, hence they developed the art of mummification and built huge pyramids to keep the mummies. The Greek philosophers thought ignorance was the chief enemy of true happiness, so they emphasized education. But the chief problem of humanity is sin. Sin destroys happiness and peace of mind. Sin kills, and no modern medicine can cure it. From the moment we are born, we begin to die. The only cure is Jesus Christ and the Cross. "There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone."—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

According to the Greek poet Homer, ships passing through the Strait of Messina were in danger of running afoul of the rock Scylla on one side or the whirlpool Charybdis on the other. Christians are always in danger of running afoul of either legalism or cheap grace. Those who fear that talk of assurance of salvation in Christ will lead to cheap grace and the tolerance of sinful behavior stress the importance of obedience. Those who fear that talking of obedience and victorious Christian living directs attention away from Christ and leads to legalism emphasize God's part in salvation.

The balanced Christian will have assurance of salvation in Jesus *and* lead a victorious Christian life at the same time. The two go together like the two sides of a coin. Whomever God justifies, He also sanctifies. We cannot have one without the other. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone; good works follow, even though those good works, even done under the unction of the Holy Spirit, never can justify us before God. Our salvation is rooted only in what Jesus has done for us.

Discouraged over your spiritual life? Not getting the victories you wish you had? What great hope can you find in the fact that you are accepted solely through what Jesus has done for you and not through your victories or failures? Why should that hope keep you from never giving up in your struggles with sin and self?

The Sanctuary

What were the services of the Old Testament tabernacle, and how did they illustrate the plan of salvation? *Heb. 9:1–8.*

With the sanctuary service God produced a visual demonstration that enabled the sinner to understand the great plan of salvation. Confession, sacrifice, forgiveness, faith, reconciliation, holiness, all graphically were demonstrated in the daily and yearly services of the earthly sanctuary.

According to Hebrews 8:1, 2, Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. What does His ministry consist of, and why does Hebrews 9:23 say that the heavenly sanctuary needs cleansing?

In the Old Testament the sinner received forgiveness through faith in the atoning blood of the Promised Seed (*Gen. 3:15*), who was foreshadowed in the animal sacrifice of the sanctuary service. And just as in the earthly service at the close of the year there was a Day of Atonement, a day of judgment on which the sanctuary was cleansed, so in the heavenly sanctuary service there is a day of judgment prior to Christ's second coming.

The pre-Advent judgment reveals to the universe those who have professed Christ and are really His followers. God, so to speak, opens the books of heaven for all the universe to see that in each case His decision was just and fair. In that sense, this judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus (*Rom. 3:4*).

In Leviticus 16, the key element that appears again and again is blood. And that makes sense, because this is the Day of Atonement, and only blood atones. And what is atonement, other than the work of God saving us? Hence the judgment is good news; it's the work of God saving us because we can't save ourselves. The crucial point is that just as the high priest never went into the Most Holy Place without blood, neither should we, for to enter into the Most Holy Place without blood means death, not atonement. Dwell on these ideas. What hope and encouragement should they bring to us, who are living in the great antitypical day of atonement?

The Sabbath

The Sabbath and marriage are the only earthly institutions that come to us from the time before sin entered the world. Hence, sometimes they are called the twin sisters of Paradise. When you look at our world today, it's obvious that Satan has worked hard to deface and defile them.

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What is it about the Sabbath commandment that makes it stand out from the others?

The fourth commandment is, in a sense, a test commandment. It tests humanity's spirituality. Because it deals with time, which is invisible, rather than with tangible objects, it is well suited to measure humanity's attitude toward God. How we feel toward the Sabbath is an indicator of how we feel toward God. It is the only commandment an individual can break and yet be fully accepted as a good person in any conservative Christian society.

In a certain sense, the Sabbath is arbitrary. Why the seventh day over any other? It's because God said so, that's why. There's a lot of obvious and apparent logic in not stealing, not killing, not coveting, and so forth. You don't have to be a Christian to follow those precepts; many non-Christians do.

But to obey the seventh-day Sabbath, which isn't rooted in any natural phenomena, is to reveal a willingness to obey simply because God tells us to. Sabbath keeping is an act of faith; we keep the seventh-day Sabbath, not because it's socially acceptable, not because it's popular, not because it fits in with any natural cycle. No, we keep the seventh-day Sabbath because God commands us to, and as New Testament Christians saved by grace, we reveal our faith through obedience to God's commandments (*James 2:10, 11; 1 John 5:2, 3; Rev. 14:12*).

In fact, by resting on the Sabbath, we're revealing to the world that all this talk about *resting in Christ* isn't just talk. As Sabbath keepers, we truly rest in Christ's work of salvation for us, not just daily but also in a special way each week. We reveal the fullness of our assurance in Christ by resting on the Sabbath (*see Heb. 4:1–11*). Sabbath keeping is an outward expression of our rest in Christ.

Though the Sabbath is, in a sense, arbitrary, what are the tangible and practical benefits we get from keeping the Sabbath holy, as God commanded? What can you do to better enjoy the benefits of Sabbath keeping?

State of the Dead

What do the following Bible texts tell us about humanity's condition in death? *Ps. 146:4; Eccles. 9:5, 6; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34.*

Inspiration teaches that only God is immortal (*1 Tim. 6:16*) and that human beings apart from God are subject to death. Jesus taught that death is a sleep that ends in one of two resurrections—a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (*John 5:28, 29*). William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury, recognized this when he wrote, “Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God’s terms.” —*Nature, Man, and God* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1934), p. 472.

How are we to understand texts such as **Matthew 25:46** and **Revelation 14:9–11**? Do they teach eternal torment in hell?

The notion of human immortality is found in all primal, animistic, and polytheistic religions. It was also an important concept in Greek philosophy, which conceived of Hades as a ghostly, shadowy underworld, in which the soul lived a twilight existence. The Greeks viewed human beings as consisting of matter and soul. At death, matter and soul separated, releasing the soul from the prison house of matter into an independent existence.

In Matthew 25 and Revelation 14, the words translated “everlasting” and “for ever” do not mean necessarily never ending. The Greek words *aion* and *aionios* express duration as long as the nature of the subject allows. For example, in Jude 7 we are told that the cities Sodom and Gomorrah are suffering the punishment of eternal (*aionios*) fire. Yet, 2 Peter 2:6 says that they were turned into ashes. When the subject of the words *eternal* or *forever* is the life of the redeemed who have received immortality, the word means a time without end. When it refers to the punishment of the wicked, who do not receive immortality, the word has the meaning of a limited time period.

From popular preachers to popular films, the world is flooded with spiritualism (the idea that the dead live on now in another existence). How does our understanding of the state of the dead give us powerful protection against this terrible deception?

The Second Coming

Since the early 1970s, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* has sold more than fifteen million copies. In recent years, the *Left Behind™* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers) has sold millions, as well. These facts indicate that there is a general awareness among many Christians that we are living in the time of the end.

The word *Adventist* in our church name means that we believe in the second coming of Christ so much that it's part of our identity. Yet, our understanding of the Second Coming is far different from that advocated in the *Left Behind™* series or by Hal Lindsey.

What does the Bible teach about the manner of Christ's coming, and why is it of vital importance to know this? What deceptions did Jesus warn us about regarding the manner of His coming? *Matt. 24:5, 24–31; Rev. 1:7.*

First introduced by John N. Darby in the nineteenth century, the concept that Christ's coming consists of two stages has captured the thinking of many Protestants today. The first supposed stage involves a secret rapture, when all true Christians will be *caught up* with Christ, and the second focuses on Christ's appearing seven years later to rule on earth for 1,000 years.

Seventh-day Adventists can find no scriptural support for splitting the Second Advent into a *rapture* and an *appearing*. According to the New Testament, Jesus' return will be an indivisible, single, literal, audible, and visible event (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 19:11–21*). And, just as important, Jesus warned us against false interpretations about the manner of His coming. Jesus obviously knew that deception would be rampant (*Matt. 24:24*), which is why the Word of God is so clear about how He will return.

Though the passing of every day brings us closer to Christ's return, the passing of each day also makes His return seem more and more delayed. How do we strike the balance between living in the expectation of Christ's return and yet simply getting on in the daily routine of life?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?” pp. 551–562; “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

During the early years, many of our pioneers became imbalanced in their preaching of the law. Hence, Ellen White wrote in 1890: “As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law.” —*Review & Herald*, March 11, 1890. At the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones did just that. The burden of their message was “to affirm the truth that the only way righteousness can be obtained is through a living faith in the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on Calvary’s cross as a propitiation for the sins of the world. No one can enter the kingdom of God without being clad in the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. This robe can neither be purchased with silver or gold nor earned by good works. This message was a clarion call to make Christ and His righteousness the center of all our living and our preaching. It placed special emphasis on righteousness by faith as a real personal experience rather than a mere theory.” —A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory 1888–1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1966), p. 35.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Is there any teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that is based on anything other than the Bible? That is, is there any doctrine that comes from Ellen White rather than the Bible? Though we believe in the gift of prophecy, why must we make sure that we know all our teachings are from the Bible alone? What problems are created if we lean on Ellen White for our doctrines? At the same time, why is she so helpful to us in clarifying and understanding teachings that we have gotten from the Bible?
- 2 Dwell on the idea that Sabbath keeping is an expression of the rest we have in Christ, in that our salvation is based on His works for us, not on our own. How does this help answer the spurious charge that by keeping the Sabbath, we are denying the gospel of God’s grace?
- 3 Even critics of Ellen G. White admit that she played a big role in moving the Adventist Church from legalism toward a more Cross-centered view of salvation, which is a strange thing for a “false prophet” (what many of these same people refer to her as) to do. How is the inconsistency of these critics revealed by their view that, though a “false prophet,” she nevertheless guided the church away from legalism?

The Eavesdropper

by DAVID VIKAS PAN

Chhabi stood in the shadows, straining to hear the visitor talking to her brother-in-law about a God named Jesus.

Several weeks earlier Chhabi had heard her brother-in-law say, “Something good is in this Jesus.” She wondered who this Jesus was and why her brother-in-law was interested in Him. Chhabi wanted to learn more about this Jesus, but her husband forbade her to join the Bible study on the veranda. So when the Global Mission pioneers, David and Swarna, visited their home, Chhabi eavesdropped on the Bible studies being held on the family’s veranda.

Chhabi found Swarna’s telephone number and called her. She told Swarna, “I want to know about Jesus, but my husband won’t allow it. Please pray to your God that He will cause my husband to allow me to search for the true God,” she begged. The two women began meeting secretly to study the Bible while Chhabi’s husband was at work.

One day when the women were studying, Chhabi’s daughter rushed in to tell her that Father was coming! Fearing what he would say, Chhabi asked Swarna to pray before he entered the house. When he arrived, he sat down to listen to their study. Chhabi asked her husband why he was home early, and he said that he was not feeling well. Swarna prayed for him, and soon he said he felt better. After that, Chhabi’s husband allowed her to study the Bible with Swarna.

Chhabi learned to pray and began praying for her husband. He didn’t argue when she wanted to attend church—a bold step for an Indian woman, and in time she was baptized. Men don’t allow their wives to teach them, but Chhabi encouraged him to read certain passages in the Bible and decide for himself whether he was going to worship the idols or the living God. Chhabi’s husband read the passages, and soon he joined her in the faith. Today Chhabi’s family and three of her husband’s brothers and their families have become Adventists.

Then Chhabi turned to her own family. She is encouraging her mother, a widow who lives in another area, to follow Jesus. She is praying that her two brothers will also consider following Jesus. But there are no Adventists in their village, and some villagers are pressuring them to reject Christianity.

Our mission offerings support Global Mission pioneers in India and around the world as they share the gospel and plant churches where the name of Jesus is not known.

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