

## How Shall We Wait?



### SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 17

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 24:35–25:46; 2 Peter 3; James 2:14–26; John 4:35–38.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Never let the fire in your heart go out. Keep it alive. Serve the Lord. When you hope, be joyful. When you suffer, be patient. When you pray, be faithful. Share with God’s people who are in need. Welcome others into your homes” (Romans 12:11–13, NIV).

**FOR SEVERAL YEARS** before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in San Francisco and Oakland, California, were busy. Members were involved in visiting the sick and poor. They found homes for orphans and work for the unemployed. They nursed the sick and taught the Bible from house to house. Members handed out Christian tracts (religious pamphlets) and gave classes on healthful living. The churches also supported a school for children in the basement of the Laguna Street meetinghouse. A home for workingmen and medical mission were operated by the churches too. They had a health-food store along with a vegetarian café. The members had started ship mission work at the local port. And their ministers held meetings in large halls in the city from time to time.

Ellen G. White called these churches the two “beehives.” And she was thrilled by their work (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 5, 1900). They are powerful examples of what we should and could be doing now as we wait for the Second Coming. So, what are we doing while we wait?

On that answer hangs the future of souls.

**WHILE WE WAIT FOR JESUS (Matthew 24:36–25:46)**

The disciples have just been admiring the glorious scene as the sun’s rays shine off the temple. Jesus wants to call their attention to what would happen to the Christian church in the near future and at the end of time. So, He gives them a dose<sup>1</sup> of truth by saying: “ ‘Do you see all these things? . . . What I’m [I am] about to tell you is true. Not one stone here will be left on top of another. Every stone will be thrown down’ ” (Matthew 24:2, NIV). Surprised by His announcement, the disciples ask, “ ‘When will this happen? And what will be the sign of your coming? What will be the sign of the end?’ ” (Matthew 24:3, NIV). In Matthew 24:4–31, Jesus then tells them the things they can expect to happen in the world before He returns.

In telling His disciples about the signs, Jesus warns, “ ‘But the end still isn’t [is not] here’ ” (Matthew 24:6, NIV). He also adds, “ ‘All these are the beginning of birth pains’ ” (Matthew 24:8, NIV). The direct answer to the disciples’ question comes in verse 14. “ ‘The good news of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world. It will be a witness to all nations. Then the end will come’ ” (Matthew 24:14, NIV).

The first 35 verses in Matthew 24 tell us to take the signs seriously. But Jesus also tells us how we are to wait for “the end of the world” (Matthew 24:3, NIV). In other words, we just do not sit there and wait for Him to come in the same way that we would sit at a bus stop and wait for the bus. No, we are given a lot to do as we wait for the Lord’s second coming.

**Read Matthew 24:36–25:46. These parables<sup>2</sup> talk about what God’s people should be doing as they wait for Jesus’ second coming. What is the Lord telling us here? We need to ask ourselves, both as persons and as a church: How well are we following the Lord’s instructions for us that are in each of these parables?**

Jesus here begins to advise His disciples about the way His true followers will wait for Him to come again. During this period, Jesus’ disciples always will be ready. They will show love, care, and respect to one another while waiting. They will stay alert, prepare ahead, and be responsible for their own spiritual conditions. They will add to what God already has put in their hands. They will invest talents and money in God’s cause. They will respect the true character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of their loving God. And they will care for the poor and the ill.



**We are not to sit and wait for Jesus to come in the same way that we would sit at a bus stop and wait for the bus.**

**DEFINITIONS**

1. dose—an amount of something that a person experiences.
2. parables—short stories that teach moral (having to do with right and wrong) or spiritual lessons.

## REVIVAL<sup>3</sup> AND REFORMATION<sup>4</sup> WHILE WE WAIT (2 Peter 3)

**Read 2 Peter 3. What does this chapter teach about revival and reformation? How do these verses fit in with the topic we have been studying all quarter?**



**All ten virgins needed to be awakened out of sleep.**

### DEFINITIONS

3. revival—growth in spiritual activity after a long time of no growth. Becoming spiritually awake.

4. reformation—the act or process of improving something or someone by removing or correcting faults, problems, sins, and so on.

5. repentance—to feel or show that you are sorry for something bad or wrong that you did and that you want to do what is right.

6. restored—to make something new, fresh, or strong again.

God wants “everyone” to “come to repentance”<sup>5</sup> (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). We cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to repentance. But we are asked by God to reach them with the message of salvation. If it is accepted, people will come to repentance.

We, too, as church members, need to be in the spirit of repentance. Repentance is an important part of revival and reformation. Revival means to come back to life, to be renewed, and restored.<sup>6</sup> Reformation means to be changed into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). “A revival of true godliness [holiness] among us is the greatest and most important of all our needs. To get this should be our first work.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 121.

The “how should we wait” verses in yesterday’s study show conditions and results of revival and reformation. For example, all ten virgins needed to be awakened out of sleep (Matthew 25:1–13). The foolish virgins needed to have more of the Holy Spirit in their lives. How? We humble ourselves, die to self, unselfishly pray, study God’s Word (the Bible), and lovingly share it with others in word and loving deeds. By doing these things, we have more of the Holy Spirit in our lives for latter-rain power. But it is possible to study the Bible for hours and still be a selfish person. We could pray for revival and the latter rain but selfishly want it only for ourselves. Revival always leads to unselfish care for others. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be reformed (changed) into disciples (followers) of Christ who are centered around mission and service.

We need revival and reformation in our prayers and in Bible study. We need to ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon us in latter-rain power. But as a church we also need revival and reformation in our attitudes (thoughts and feelings) and methods. We need revival and reformation in our attitude and actions toward “the poor, the needy, and the suffering.”

**How can we guard against being lazy and uncaring about the Second Coming? As time goes by, how can we remember that the Lord’s return is soon to come?**

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH WHILE WE WAIT (James 2:14–26)

**Read James 2:14–26. In what ways do these verses show who we are and why we are here?**

In Sunday’s study, the disciples start out pointing to the beauty of the temple buildings. But Jesus points their attention to the condition of the church within and its mission to an ending world.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as shown in the General Conference *Working Policy* (A 05) is “to make disciples of all people. We are to communicate to the world about the everlasting gospel (Matthew 24:14). We are to preach it in the form of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12. We are to lead others to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite [join] with His end-time church. We are to prepare them for His soon return” (adapted). Preaching, teaching, and healing are the suggested methods to push this mission forward. Under “Healing” the *Working Policy* says: “Supporting the Bible principles [important rules] of the well-being of the whole person, we make safeguarding the health and the healing of the sick a very important part of our work. Through our ministry [work done for God] to the poor and needy, we cooperate with the Creator in His merciful work of restoration.”<sup>7</sup>

This quarter began with the idea that Jesus wants to restore His image in people. He wants to empower us as His followers to be servants for wholistic<sup>8</sup> restoration in our communities. “The world needs today what it needed 1900 years ago—an example of Christ. A great work of reform [change] is needed. And it is only through the grace [mercy and forgiveness] of Christ that the work of restoring people physically, mentally, and spiritually, can be done.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.

After hearing a seminar that presented the ministry of Jesus as a model and mission for His end-time church, a church member said, “In our part of the world, we are not very open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. What we have heard this week about following the ministry method of Jesus actually is not new. It is an old idea. We just forgot it.”

**“Faith without works is dead.” How true have you found the idea to be that faith and works are closely connected? How do works make your faith grow?**



**Healing the sick is a very important part of our work for God.**

### DEFINITIONS

7. restoration—the act or process of returning something to its original condition by repairing it, cleansing it, and so on.

8. wholistic—relating to or concerned with complete systems rather than with individual parts.

**PREPARING FOR THE FINAL HARVEST  
WHILE WE WAIT (John 4:35–38)**

Jesus used farming language in His teaching about the kingdom, as lesson 5 shows. As we have learned, farming is not just an event. It is a patient method! It repeats the same work each season with different jobs for different people at different times. We need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and God in how we can be used by the Lord to prepare the ground, plant seeds, and reap<sup>9</sup> the harvest.

**Read John 4:35–38. What kind of word-picture is being used there? And what is the message to us about how we should work for others?**

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We do not know people's hearts. We do not know how the Holy Spirit has been working in their lives. We might look at different people and think that they have a long way to go before being ready to be harvested. But maybe all they need is someone to encourage them to make a decision to come to Jesus. There is a battle for the heart and mind of every person. And God is calling us to help people to choose Him.

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:6–8. What message is there for us in these verses about outreach?**

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In his own way, Paul is repeating here what Jesus said in the example before this. The work of outreach is like the work of a farmer. We might not all be doing the same jobs. But whatever we do is still an important part of the method of reaching out and winning souls. We are to be used by God in different ways. But in the end it is God alone who can lead a person to be converted.<sup>10</sup>

**How can we learn to be thankful and humble in whatever we do for God as we minister to (serve) others? Why is it truly an honor?**

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### DEFINITIONS

9. reap—to cut and collect a crop from a field.

10. converted—to change one's way of life as a result of having changed one's beliefs.

## THE WAIT IS OVER (Revelation 21:1–4)

It could be said that the Bible is a tale of two cities. The two cities are Babylon and Jerusalem.

In Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 18, the apostle (preacher and teacher) John describes Babylon. It has been the home of devils and the place of evil spirits. It has caused every nation to be guilty of spiritual adultery.<sup>11</sup> Its end has been announced. And it is said to have “fallen.” This city, a symbol of evil and backsliding (falling away from God) and rebellion (war) against God, will one day be defeated and destroyed.

**Read Revelation 21:1–4. How is the New Jerusalem different from Babylon?**

The second city is the Holy City. It is the New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21 and 22. This city houses those who have chosen the Bridegroom (Jesus). They have refused to accept the selfishness and spiritual adulteries of Satan and his followers. By God’s grace (kindness and help; forgiveness and mercy), the saved have obeyed His commandments and shown the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12). Their patient faithfulness and their eagerness to accept the ministry of Jesus gave them a taste beforehand of the kingdom of heaven while on earth. They have been saved through faith in Jesus. His righteousness (holy life) alone made them worthy of heaven. Their care for “the least important of these brothers of mine” (Matthew 25:40, NIV) has been shown in their lives as an example of that saving faith.

By the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 5), the church’s part in merciful restoration has changed to joyful celebration (read Revelation 5:13, 14). In that happy and Holy City, “ ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former [past] things have passed away’ ” (Revelation 21:4, NKJV). True peace has been restored. The full restoration of God’s image, mentally, spiritually, and physically, has taken place. The great controversy (war) is over, and from “the tiniest atom to the greatest world, all things, living and non-living, in their full beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 678.

**Read Revelation 22:21. In what way does this verse capture the important message of all that we believe?**



**All things living will declare that God is love.**

### DEFINITIONS

11. adultery—sex outside of marriage. Spiritual adultery is a word picture for unfaithfulness to God.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Matthew 5:16; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 13:15, 16; read Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pages 627–636, and reread “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’” pages 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Jesus told us what the signs of the end would be before He returned. And they are not pretty. Wars, rumors of wars, and disease. If people often use the excuse of evil to refuse to believe in God, they certainly have plenty of excuses now. And they will have more excuses as we get nearer to the end. So, it becomes even more important for God’s people, those who claim to be His followers, to show His character (thoughts; feelings; actions) to the world and to help people get a better understanding of what God is like. “Suppose we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and merciful. Then there would be 100 conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 189. What a simple but powerful statement about outreach and ministry to others. While we wait for Jesus’ second coming, He expects members of His church to preach and live the whole gospel. He also expects us to invest ourselves and our all in His work. We are to love, respect, and care for people. We are to open our lives for the Holy Spirit in His fullness too. That is a witness that all the arguments in the world cannot defeat.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

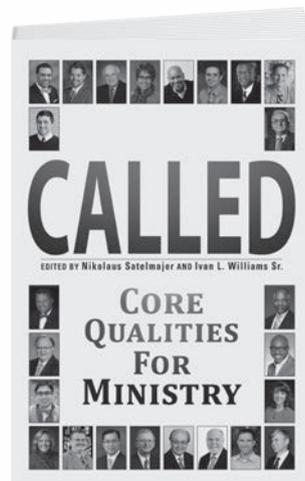
- ① In class, talk about the difference between what it would be like living in “Babylon” as opposed to living in “Jerusalem.” What would be the big differences between the two cities? That is, where is the important difference to be found—in what the places look like, or in who lives in them?
- ② The great question for Christians is not: “Do works have a part in the Christian faith?” Of course they do. Instead, the question is, “If works cannot save us, what is their part in the Christian faith?” How do we answer that question, especially when we reach out and minister to others in need?
- ③ How are we waiting for Jesus to return? That is, what are we doing in our lives that makes real our belief in His return? Why should we be living differently from those who do not believe in the Second Coming?



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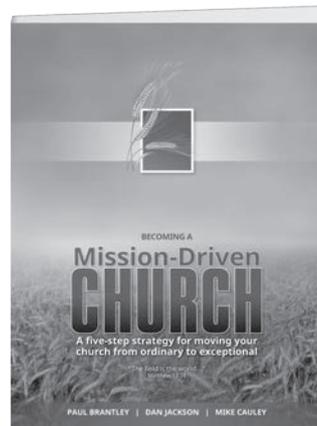
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