

# God's Everlasting Gospel



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 14:6–12; Matt. 24:14; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Exod. 20:2–11; Isa. 21:9; Isa. 34:8–10.*

**Memory Text:** “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Revelation 14:12, NKJV*).

Revelation shows that Satan's end-time deception will be so successful that the world will choose to worship the beast and receive its mark. Yet, Revelation 14:1–5 tells us that God will have His remnant, those who will take their stand for the Lord when most of the world doesn't.

In the end, people will have to choose, not whether to worship or not (everyone always worships something), but rather, whom to worship. The worshipers of the beast will receive the mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, symbolic of their choice to serve this apostate system with their deeds and/or minds.

At the same time, the world will witness a great proclamation of the gospel such as has not been seen since the day of Pentecost. Before the judgments of God are poured out upon rebellious humanity, God will send His warning messages “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). God does not want anyone to perish but all to be saved, which is why Christ's death was for all humanity. The question is who will accept that provision and who won't.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 9.

## The Three Angels' Messages

Just before the end, God sends His warning messages, symbolically portrayed in terms of three vocal angels flying in the sky. The Greek word for angel (*angelos*) means “messenger.” Evidence from Revelation suggests that the three angels stand for God’s people who are entrusted with the end-time message to share with the world.

**Read Revelation 14:6 along with Matthew 24:14. The first angel’s message is referred to as the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6). What does describing this proclamation as “the everlasting gospel” tell us about the content and purpose of the first angel’s message? Why is this message central to all that we believe?**

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This first end-time message is the gospel proclamation in the context of the hour of God’s judgment that has come upon the world. The gospel is good news about God, who saves human beings on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and His work for them. The gospel is “everlasting” because God never changes. His plan was put in place even before we existed (*2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 1:2*). The first angel’s message includes both salvation and judgment. It is good news for those who give glory to God and worship Him as their Creator, but it also is a judgment warning for those who reject the Creator and the sign of true worship He has given—the seventh-day Sabbath.

The three angels are described as proclaiming the messages with “a loud voice” (*Rev. 14:7, 9*). These messages are urgent and important; they must be heard by all because it concerns their eternal destiny. As such, they must be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. This proclamation is particularly significant because, at the time of the end, the beast will exercise authority over “every tribe, tongue, and nation” (*Rev. 13:7, NKJV*). Satan’s deceptive activities, worldwide in scope, are met by the end-time proclamation of the gospel worldwide.

The three angels’ messages are proclaimed by God’s people to counter Satan and his end-time allies—the dragon, a symbol of paganism/spiritualism; the sea beast, which signifies Roman Catholicism; and the false prophet, or lamblike beast, representing apostate Protestantism (*Revelation 13*). They will operate up through the time of the sixth plague (*Rev. 16:13, 14*). Thus, the world is presented with two rival messages, each with the goal to win the allegiance of the people on earth.

**As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to reach the world with the end-time truths contained in the three angels’ messages. What are you doing to help do just that? What more could you be doing?**

## The First Angel's Message: Part 1

**Read** Revelation 14:7 along with Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. What does it mean to “fear God”? How does the concept of fearing God relate to the gospel, and what does the gospel have to do with keeping God's commandments? (See also Rom. 7:7–13.) What is the connection between fearing God and glorifying Him?

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The call to “fear God and give glory to Him” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) is proclaimed in the context of the “everlasting gospel.” A realization of what Christ has done for our salvation results in a positive response to Him.

In the Bible, fearing God and giving glory to Him are closely related (*Ps. 22:23, Rev. 15:4*). Together, they designate a right relationship with God (*Job 1:8*) and obedience to Him.

To fear God does not mean to be afraid of Him but to take Him seriously and allow His presence in our lives. God's end-time people are the ones who fear God (see *Rev. 11:18, Rev. 19:5*). God desires His people to love Him (*Deut. 11:13, Matt. 22:37*), obey Him (*Deut. 5:29, Eccl. 12:13*), and reflect His character (*Gen. 22:12*).

It is important for God's people to give Him glory because “the hour of His judgment has come” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). The judgment in view here is the pre-Advent investigative judgment, which takes place prior to the Second Coming. The purpose of this judgment is to reveal whether or not we are truly serving God—a choice made manifest by our works (see *2 Cor. 5:10*). At the conclusion of this judgment, the destiny of every person is decided (*Rev. 22:11*), and Jesus will come to bring His reward to every person according to his or her deeds (*Rev. 22:12*).

Judgment in Revelation 14 is a part of the gospel. To those who are in a right relationship with God, judgment is good news; it means vindication, salvation, freedom, and eternal life. However, it is bad news for the disobedient, unless they repent and turn to God by accepting this end-time, judgment-hour message. God does not want anyone to perish but all to come to repentance (*2 Pet. 3:9*).

**How could you stand, alone, in the judgment? What verdict would your life reveal? What does your answer tell you about the need for the gospel and why it is linked so closely together with judgment in the first angel's message?**

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## The First Angel's Message: Part 2

Revelation shows that the central issues in the last crisis of earth's history will be worship and obedience to God, as revealed in keeping His commandments (*Rev. 14:12*). The people of the world will fall into two groups: those who fear and worship God, and those who fear and worship the beast.

**Review** the first four commandments of the Decalogue (*Exod. 20:2–11*). Then go through Revelation 13. How does the beast's demand for worship (*Rev. 13:7, 8*), the setting up of an image to the beast to be worshiped (*Rev. 13:14, 15*), blasphemy of God and His name (*Rev. 13:5, 6*), and receiving of the mark of the beast (*Rev. 13:16, 17*) point to Satan's attacks on the first four commandments of the Decalogue in the final crisis?

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The central concept of the first four commandments of the Decalogue is worship. Revelation indicates that these commandments will become the standard of loyalty to God in the final crisis. The final conflict between Christ and Satan plainly will revolve around worship and the first four commandments.

The key issue in the final crisis is emphasized in the second exhortation of the first angel's message. The call to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) is almost an exact quotation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (*Exod. 20:11*). This fact shows that the call to worship God the Creator is a call to Sabbath observance.

Rest and worship on the seventh day—Saturday—is a special sign of our relationship with God (*Exod. 31:13, Ezek. 20:12*). The first angel's message is a call to worship the Creator.

“While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

**How is our view of Creation and Salvation related? Why is resting on the Sabbath as God did so important?**

## The Second Angel's Message

The second angel's message announces the fall, or apostasy, of Babylon and identifies it as a false religious system. In Revelation 17:5, "Babylon is said to be 'the mother of harlots.' By her daughters must be symbolized churches that cling to her doctrines and traditions, and follow her example of sacrificing the truth and the approval of God, in order to form an unlawful alliance with the world."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 382, 383.

**Read** Revelation 14:8 along with Revelation 18:2 and Isaiah 21:9. The twofold repetition of the word "fallen" points to Babylon's progressive apostasy and signifies the certainty of her full moral collapse. Babylon is described as already fallen, but her fall is also described as future. Why is that?

The end-time Babylon in Revelation is a union of false religious systems that includes Roman Catholicism and apostate Protestantism. These will put themselves into the service of Satan against God's people (*see Rev. 13:11–18, Rev. 16:13, Rev. 17:5*). This apostate religious union will manifest the arrogance of ancient Babylon in exalting itself above God and will seek to take His place in the world. The message of the second angel warns God's people that this wicked system will depart further and further from the truth in consequence of her refusal of the light of the end-time gospel message. Only when "the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 390.

**Read** again Revelation 14:8 along with Revelation 17:2 and Revelation 18:3. How does Babylon make the world drink the wine of her fornication? What does this wine symbolize?

Revelation 17 pictures end-time Babylon as a harlot making people on earth drunk with her wine of immorality (*see Rev. 17:2*).

The wine of Babylon refers to the false teachings and false gospel offered by this apostate religious system. Today, as many Protestant churches, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy, rapidly erase the differences that once separated them from the Roman Catholic Church and turn away from biblical truth, we witness the corrupting influence of Babylon's wine amongst the professed body of Christ: theistic evolution, which is implicitly contrasted with the reference to Creation in the first angel's message; theological traditions replacing *sola Scriptura*; revised ethics abandoning biblical definitions of gender, marriage, and so forth. Intoxicated people cannot think clearly. As the people become spiritually inebriated by Babylon's wine, Babylon will seduce them into worshipping the sea beast and receiving the mark of the beast.

## The Third Angel's Message

**How** does Revelation 14:12 depict God's faithful people?

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In contrast to God's faithful people, Revelation 14:9, 10 warns about the fate of those who face God's wrath. In the Old Testament, the outpouring of God's wrath is described symbolically as drinking wine from a cup (*Jer. 25:15, 16*). The severity of the judgment upon the worshipers of the beast is expressed as drinking the wine of the wrath of God that is poured out "without mixture" (*Rev. 14:10*) into the cup of His indignation. In ancient times, people often diluted wine with water to reduce its intoxicating strength. But the wine of God's wrath is described as "unmixed" (*akratou*). The unmixed, undiluted wine represents the pouring out of God's wrath in its full strength, without mercy.

**Read** Revelation 14:10, 11 along with Revelation 20:10–15. How do Isaiah 34:8–10 and Jude 7 shed light on the statement: " 'And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever' " (*NKJV*)?

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The statement of the torment with fire and brimstone refers to total destruction. Fire and brimstone is a means of judgment (*Gen. 19:24, Isa. 34:8–10*). The ascending smoke of destruction is a well-known image in the Bible. Isaiah prophesied of the future destruction of Edom by fire and brimstone: it will become a burning pitch; "it shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever" (*Isa. 34:10, NKJV*). Jude describes the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah as suffering the punishment of "eternal fire" (*Jude 7*). These texts do not talk about endless burning, for none of these cities is burning today. The *consequences* are eternal, not the burning itself. The "eternal fire" in Revelation refers to annihilation; the burning will be long enough to make the consumption complete until nothing is left to burn.

**Although we can be thankful for the great truth that the fires of hell don't torture the lost for eternity, the punishment is still terrible enough. What should the permanence and the severity of the punishment tell us about the sacred task that we have been given to warn others about what is coming?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Final Warning,” pp. 603–612, in *The Great Controversy*.

Revelation shows that at the time of the end, God’s people are commissioned with the proclamation of the end-time gospel to the world. The work before us seems daunting, all but impossible. However, we have the promise of God’s power.

“The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612.

The conclusion of the proclamation of God’s final message will result in a great separation that divides people in the world into two camps: those who love and obey God and those who follow and obey the beast. This separation is portrayed in terms of two harvests: the gathering of the wheat into the storehouses (*Rev. 14:14–16*) and the grapes to be trampled in the winepress (*Rev. 14:17–20*). This final separation is the subject of Revelation 17 and 18.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Reflect on this thought: Who is preaching the three angels’ messages other than Seventh-day Adventists? What should this tell us about just how important our work is and how seriously we should take it?
- 2 Why do you think that judgment is an unpopular concept among many Christians? What relevance does the concept of the pre-Advent judgment have for Christians today? How would you help your fellow believers better understand the true meaning of the pre-Advent judgment?
- 3 Think about the question of the Sabbath in the context of final events. The issue is: Whom will we worship—the Creator of “the heaven and the earth” (*Rev. 14:7, NASB*), or the beast power? The Bible teaches that the seventh-day Sabbath is the oldest (*Gen. 2:2, 3*), most foundational sign of God’s creatorship of “the heaven and the earth.” What does that truth teach us about why the Sabbath, as one of God’s commandments (*Rev. 14:12*), plays such a prominent role in the final crisis?

## Power Tools and a Boat

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Church members are finding innovative ways to share the gospel across the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Euro-Asia Division, a territory covering much of the former Soviet Union, in an effort to jump-start membership growth, which is largely flat.

"It's a challenging territory, but God is working through Total Member Involvement," said division president Michael Kaminskiy (pictured).

Eleven Adventist health professionals went on a two-week boat cruise to ancient Russian cities on the Volga River. The trip, which followed a popular tourist route, was organized by a Russian nongovernmental health organization, and the Adventists were invited to share health principles about water, sunshine, exercise, and rest, as well as conduct stop-smoking classes.

The boat's captain, who smoked heavily, attended the classes.

"He smoked so much that there was always a cloud of smoke around him," said Ivan Velgosha, president of the West Russian Union Conference.

By trip's end, he had stopped smoking and made the boat a smoke-free zone. The Adventists presented him with a book about healthful living and told him that Jesus could help him never smoke again.

More than a month after the trip, the captain still hasn't smoked, Velgosha said.

In the city of Nizhny Novgorod, schoolchildren shared their love for God by writing letters about His law. One child wrote, "We need to remember the third commandment so we don't say bad words about God." Another child wrote, "If people stopped stealing, we would be the richest country in the world." The children spent five days passing out the letters on city streets.

In eastern Ukraine, church members have found that free drawings for electric drills are drawing men to evangelistic meetings. Women were coming to the meetings, but the number of men in attendance sharply increased when churches began to advertise the electric drills, said Stanislav Nosov, president of the Ukrainian Union Conference.

"Men need tools to repair homes damaged in the conflict," he said.

Daily drawings were held at two-week evangelistic meetings conducted in several towns in eastern Ukraine. Winners chose between a drill and a set of pots, while anyone who attended seven meetings in a row received a food package with macaroni, sugar, milk, and other basic items. Dozens of people have been baptized.

"God is doing wonderful things through Total Member Involvement," Kaminskiy said.





## *Part I: Overview*

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▶ **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:7*

▶ **Study Focus:** Revelation 14 elaborates on the remnant’s side of the war with the dragon, as announced in Revelation 12:17.

▶ **Introduction:** In Revelation 14, the remnant reappears as the 144,000, who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (*Rev. 14:1–5*). This emergence is followed by the most famous of all Bible passages to Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels’ messages (*Rev. 14:6–13*). The chapter concludes with a symbolic representation of the second coming of Jesus and the respective harvests of the saints and the wicked that accompany it (*Rev. 14:14–20*). The lesson for this week focuses primarily on the three angels’ messages.

▶ **Lesson Themes:** The lesson and the focus passage introduce the following themes:

**I. The Remnant and the 144,000**

These turn out to be two different names for the same group in the end time.

**II. The “Fear” of God**

Far from meaning what it sounds like, the fear of God is a call to true worship, reverence, and respect for the Creator.

**III. The Central Issue of Revelation 13 and 14: Worship**

The word “worship” appears eight times at crucial points in the narrative.

**IV. How Is Judgment Related to the Gospel (*Rev. 14:6, 7*)?**

The language of judgment is used in three different ways in the New Testament.

**V. Revelation 13 and 14 and the First Table of the Ten Commandments**

There are multiple references to the first four of the Ten Commandments in Revelation 13 and 14.

**VI. The First Angel and the Fourth Commandment**

▶ **Life Application:** The “Life Application” section explores (1) the relevance of judgment and (2) the relevance of the seventh-day Sabbath in today’s world.

## ***Part II: Commentary***

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Revelation 14 elaborates on the remnant's side of the final battle introduced in Revelation 12:17. The remnant is described (*Rev. 14:1–5*), its message is presented (*Rev. 14:6–13*), and the outcome of the battle is outlined in symbolic language (*Rev. 14:14–20*).

### **Main Themes of Lesson 10 Elaborated:**

#### **I. The Remnant and the 144,000**

God's faithful ones are called "remnant" in Revelation 12:17 and "144,000" in Revelation 14:1. Are these two different groups or two different ways of describing the same group? Revelation 14:1 contains an allusion to Joel 2:32 indicating an end-time fulfillment besides its "early rain" application (*see Acts 2:21*). In Joel, God's faithful ones are those who call on the name of the Lord, reside in Mount Zion, and are called "remnant." Revelation 14:1 mentions the name of the Lamb, Mount Zion, and calls these faithful ones the 144,000. The allusion to Joel is John's key that he is describing the remnant's side of the final conflict with the dragon in chapter 14.

#### **II. The "Fear" of God**

The word "fear" in English is generally the word we use when we are terrified. As a result, many readers of the Bible think it is appropriate to serve God because we are afraid of Him. But when the word "fear" is associated with God in the Bible, it has a much softer meaning. In the Old Testament, for example, the fear of God means to have reverence or awe for Him: it includes such things as knowing God personally (*Prov. 9:10*), doing His commandments (*Ps. 111:10, Eccles. 12:13*), and avoiding evil (*Prov. 3:7, Prov. 16:6*). In the New Testament, it can mean awe and respectful excitement (*Luke 7:16, Acts 2:43*). It provides motivation for godly behavior (*2 Cor. 7:1*). It is parallel to the honor one would give to a king (*1 Pet. 2:17*) and the respect one would show toward a superior (*1 Pet. 2:18*).

In modern terms, the fear of God means to take God seriously enough to enter into a relationship with Him, to follow His warnings to avoid evil, and to do His commandments, even the ones that may be inconvenient—or worse. It is a call to live and act as those who know that they will give account to God one day. According to this verse, such a serious calling will be a part of the experience of God's end-time people.

### III. The Central Issue of Revelation 13 and 14: Worship

The issue that arises again and again in Revelation 13 and 14 is worship. Seven times in these two chapters there are references to worship of the dragon, the beast, or the image to the beast (*Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15; Rev. 14:9, 11*). The overall story is about a satanic triad, which invites the worship of the entire world in the place of God. The focus is on a universal contest regarding the character of God and whether He is truly worthy of worship. It is the central theme of this part of the book.

Ironically, while there are seven references to worship of the dragon and his allies in Revelation 13 and 14, only one time in the same narrative is there a reference to worship of God, and that is in the call to worship the Creator in Revelation 14:7. That makes this verse the central focus of the section. And because Revelation 13 and 14 are at the center of the book, the call to worship the Creator states the central point of the entire book. Given that this call to worship is in the context of the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue (*Rev. 14:7, compare Exod. 20:11*), the Sabbath is a crucial issue in the final crisis of earth's history.

### IV. How Is Judgment Related to the Gospel (*Rev. 14:6, 7*)?

In the New Testament, judgment is closely related to the gospel. First of all, judgment occurred at the Cross when Satan was defeated (*John 12:31, Rev. 5:5–10*). Second, judgment language is closely associated with the preaching of the gospel in John 3:18–21 and 5:22–25. Whenever the gospel is preached, people are called into judgment, based on their response to what Christ did on the cross. This call to judgment is the background to the four horsemen (*Rev. 6:1–8*), as we saw in lesson 5. Third, the judgment at the end of time examines our response to the hearing of the gospel (*John 12:48*). The book of Revelation reserves the language of judgment for the end-time phase (*Rev. 11:18, Rev. 14:7, Rev. 17:1, Rev. 20:4*).

### V. Revelation 13 and 14 and the First Table of the Ten Commandments

References to worship of the beast (*Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15*) come in the context of a counterfeit of the first table of the law. The first commandment forbids worship of any other God. The second commandment forbids idolatry. The land beast tells inhabitants of the earth to set up an image to be worshiped (*Rev. 13:15*). The third commandment forbids taking the Lord's name in vain. The beast excels in blasphemy (*Rev. 13:6*). The fourth commandment is the seal of the covenant, containing the name, the territory, and the basis for God's rule (*Exod. 20:8–11*).

In contrast, the world is offered the mark of the beast (*Rev. 13:16, 17*).

This section of Revelation is centered in the commandments of God (*Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*). In chapter 13, there is a particular focus on the first table of the Ten Commandments, which contains the four commandments that deal specifically with our relationship to God. The beast and his allies counterfeit each of the first four commandments. This counterfeit sets the stage for the decisive allusion to the fourth commandment in the first angel's message (*Rev. 14:7, compare Exod. 20:11*).

## VI. The First Angel and the Fourth Commandment

The message of the first angel contains a direct allusion to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. This is evident for three major reasons. (1) There is a strong verbal parallel between Revelation 14:7 and Exodus 20:11. Both passages contain the words “made,” “heaven,” “earth,” and “sea.” They also contain a reference to the One who created. (2) Revelation 14:6, 7 contains references to salvation (*Rev. 14:6*), judgment, and Creation (*Rev. 14:7*). All three themes echo the first table of the Ten Commandments (*Exod. 20:2, 5, 6, 11*). (3) There are multiple references to the Ten Commandments throughout this section of Revelation (*Rev. 12:17, 14:12, the counterfeits of the first four commandments in Revelation 13, the verbal parallels in Revelation 14:7*). These references make up a strong structural parallel. The final call of God to the world is in the context of the fourth commandment.

## Part III: Life Application

1. *Why do you think judgment is an unpopular concept among many Christians today?* Judgment today is often seen as cold and harshly legal. Courts are places you want to avoid, if possible. But in the biblical sense, judgment is something for God's people to look forward to. It is a time that all the wrongs of earth will be made right. If there is no judgment at the end, there will never be any justice in this world.

Biblical justice is as much positive as it is negative. It is the basis of reward, as well as negative consequences. Jesus said that even something as small as giving a cup of cold water to a child will be remembered in the judgment (*Matt. 10:42*). It provides great meaning in this life to know that every good deed, every kindness shown, matters in the ultimate scheme of things.

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2. *Why does the Sabbath play such a central role in the final events of earth's history? What difference could a day of the week possibly make in the ultimate scheme of things? God placed the Sabbath at the center of all His mighty acts as a remembrance of Him. When we keep the seventh-day Sabbath, we are reminded of Creation (Exod. 20:8–11). God created us free, at great cost to Himself (we were free to rebel), so we could truly love Him back and also love one another. Not only the Sabbath but the whole of the Decalogue was designed to promote freedom (James 1:25, James 2:12). So the Creation side of Sabbath reminds us of the loving, freedom-giving character of God.*

*The Sabbath also reminds us of the Exodus (Deut. 5:15), God's great act of salvation for His people. He is a gracious God who acts mightily in behalf of His people. The Sabbath also reminds us of the Cross. Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath between His death and His resurrection. The Cross is the greatest revelation of God's character, and the Sabbath is a reminder of that.*

*The Sabbath also looks forward to the future salvation at the end of time (Heb. 4:9–11). Those who truly trust God find in the Sabbath a down payment on the rest from sin that the whole universe will experience in eternity.*

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