

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 Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Timothy 4:16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Key doctrines as revealed through biblical prophets and affirmed by Ellen G. White.

Feel: Desire to understand the Bible's teachings better.

Do: Share this knowledge with others.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Salvation (*Rom. 3:21–28*)

A How can we ensure that righteousness by faith remains at the heart of our church's mission?

B Read Hebrews 9:1–8. What did God reveal about His plan of salvation to Moses? What does Hebrews 8:1, 2 reveal about the ongoing work of salvation? Why can we have assurance about the judgment?

II. Distinctly Adventist (*John 11:11–14*)

A How has our understanding of conditional immortality (the soul sleeps), with an emphasis on the resurrection, brought you hope and comfort?

B Read Revelation 14:9–11. How do you feel about God burning the wicked until they are consumed rather than letting them burn eternally, as some Christians believe?

III. Blessed Hope (*Matt. 24:24–31*)

A How should our expectation regarding Jesus' return influence the way we live?

B How can we keep this hope alive as time goes by? What can you do to share our knowledge with others?

C How do the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White help us live in the *waiting time*?

► **Summary:** While Adventists are characterized by these important doctrines, we always have affirmed that the Bible is our only creed and that we are a people of the Book. Although noncanonical prophets can provide helpful insights, the Bible should be the only foundation on which our doctrine and faith rest.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to take a decisive stand with Him in the great controversy between good and evil.

Absalom, King David's estranged son, was poised to overthrow his father and establish himself as king. The conspiracy had gained momentum, and Absalom had secured supporters throughout the kingdom. His plans were advancing rapidly, and he appeared to be destined for a successful overthrow of David's government. At this crucial juncture an unnamed messenger arrived in Jerusalem to warn David about Absalom's conspiracy. David acted decisively when he heard the message of warning, and his actions eventually led to the defeat of Absalom and his rebellious supporters. (See *2 Sam. 14:25–18:18*.)


Christians are involved in a much greater battle, a cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan. Prophets throughout the ages have been entrusted with a message not only of warning but also of hope. This message unmask the conspiracy of Satan and his rebel followers and calls us to take decisive action. The prophetic message that God has placed in our hands offers salvation, freedom, and deliverance. God offers us the privilege of joining His ranks as He defeats the enemy of life, but He leaves that choice up to us.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

I. Righteousness by Faith (*1 Kings 8:46–51, Romans 3:21–28, 4:1–11, 5:12*)

In Solomon's dedicatory prayer offered at the opening of the temple, he addressed the frailty of humanity and the strength of sin's hold on the human race. As he expresses it, our only hope lies not in the strength of human effort to overcome temptation but in the merciful forgiveness God freely provides to the sinner. The foundation for his appeal lies not in a supposed natural goodness of man but in the fact that God has chosen us as His special possession.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

A thousand years later Paul asserts the same thing: as we trust in God and the sacrifice through Jesus that God offered for sin, our sin is forgiven. Our obedience is nothing but filthy rags compared with the spotless character of Christ. Even Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, was accepted by God *before* he obediently adopted the symbol of obedience, which in his time was circumcision. Likewise, our obedience is rooted in God's acceptance of us as demonstrated by His forgiveness.

Consider This: Which of the following is a stronger motivator for you to obey God: (1) fear that God will punish you or exclude you if you do wrong, or (2) appreciation for the forgiveness that God offers you at His personal expense?


II. The Sanctuary (*Hebrews 9:1–8*)

The sanctuary of the Old Testament was not an end in itself (*Heb. 9:9*) but an illustration that pointed to the ministry of Christ. The blood of sacrificial animals actually could not bring forgiveness; nor could it provide an escape from the judgment which all humans deserve (*see Rom. 6:23*). When Christ entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary in heaven, He secured our salvation, not with the blood of animals but with His own blood. The judgment, the penalty, the sentence that rightfully belonged to us was, instead, pronounced against Him. He died, and we are released! (*See Heb. 9:13–28.*)

Consider This: We are living in the time of the end, the prophetic hour of judgment that immediately precedes the Lord's glorious return. During this time, what should be our primary focus? Personal moral improvement? The incomparable mercy of God in taking on Himself the condemnation that is rightfully ours? Does my spiritual inheritance depend on my efforts to improve my life or on Christ's death in my place? Does the magnitude of God's mercy explain the severity of the warnings given to those who do not appreciate it? (*See Heb. 10:26–29, 37–39.*)

III. The Sabbath (*Exodus 20:1–17, James 2:10, 11; 1 John 5:2–3; Revelation 14:12*)

The importance of keeping the Sabbath holy is rooted in Creation and

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

redemption, God's two supreme actions in human history. The Sabbath is a part of the Creation story (*see Gen. 2:1–3*), and the fourth commandment, as recorded in Exodus, calls us to worship on the seventh day, because God created the world. However, in Deuteronomy 5:12–15, the fourth commandment calls us to worship because God has delivered us from slavery by His amazing power. Worshiping each Sabbath reminds us that we lovingly are created and are not some randomly evolved mass of tissue. It also reminds us that God has released us from our slavery to sin and that we may rest securely in Him.


Consider This: Sabbath keepers sometimes observe the Sabbath in different ways, sparking controversy within the church. How do the themes of rest and the commemoration of Creation and redemption inform our practice of Sabbath keeping? (*Note Exodus 16, Neh. 13:15–22, Isa. 58:13, 14; Luke 4:16; John 5:1–18.*)

IV. The State of the Dead (*Psalms 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; John 5:28, 29; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34; 1 Timothy 6:16*)

Consider This: First, read 1 Corinthians 15:12–23, then discuss the following: According to Paul, there is no resurrection from the dead, no eternal life, apart from Christ. He says that if Jesus were not raised from the dead, we would be responsible for our sins and the penalty for sin, which is death (*Rom. 6:23*). If, however, Paul is wrong and there is another way to get eternal life (for example, the theory of an immortal soul), what does that say about the necessity of Christ for deliverance from death?

V. The Second Coming (*Matthew 24:5, 24–31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Revelation 1:7, 19:11–21*)

“The usual N[ew] T[estament] terms for the 2d coming of Christ are *parousia*, ‘presence,’ ‘out-shining’; *epiphaneia*, ‘appearance,’ ‘appearing’; and *apokalupsis*, ‘revelation.’ *Parousia* appears commonly in the papyri for the visit of an emperor or king. . . . *Epiphaneia* occurs often in classical Greek to describe the glorious appearance of the pagan gods. . . . *Apokalupsis* is used of the ‘appearing’ or ‘revelation’ of Christ at His 2d coming.”—*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 999.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: What preparations would you make if the president of your country promised to visit your home and take you away to a new permanent home in a tropical paradise? How would that promise affect your attitude about your own self-worth or your outlook on the problems you face in life?

► STEP 3—Practice**Role Play**

Assign someone in the class the role of being a skeptical atheist. Someone who is analytical and has some acquaintance with atheistic positions would be an ideal candidate. The role of the other class members is to present the teachings reviewed in this lesson and to make a strong case for faith based on them. Consider the human longing for purpose, meaning, significance, redemption, love, and longevity. How do the teachings about righteousness, the sanctuary, the Sabbath, death, and Christ's coming provide answers for our human needs? Allow the skeptical atheist ample time for rebuttal. Challenge the class to provide valid answers to the objections.

Witnessing

Invite class members to share real-life experiences of sharing the message studied in this lesson. Take time to pray about obstacles that may be standing in the way of someone who is drawn to the message of faith in Christ.

► STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Moses records the story of Balaam in chapters 22 to 24 of the book of Numbers. Balaam really does not want to deliver God's message of hope for Israel because he'd rather collect a reward for cursing Israel. However, God only offers a message of blessing. Later on, Balaam is killed by the Israelites, and his enduring epitaph is that he would do anything for money. God has entrusted us with a prophetic message of hope for our times. Are we so wrapped up in making money and the things of this life that we neglect our calling to share that message? Discuss what you could do this month to faithfully deliver the message.

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?