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Week of Prayer Special Issue

Living *in* Anticipation

*Revival and the
Second Coming*





Greetings From the President



Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring: Jesus is coming again!" The words of this well-loved hymn echo in the hearts of Seventh-day Adventists as we eagerly look forward to that great day!

"Revival and the Second Coming of Jesus" is the very timely theme for this year's Week of Prayer readings.

This theme is packed with meaning as we consider the blessed hope, the urgency of proclaiming the three angels' messages, the assurance of prophecy, and the reality of the first and second resurrections.

What role do the three angels' messages play in the revival of the church, and in each of us? How are the sanctuary and these important messages connected? What is the link between the signs of the second coming of Christ, revival, and involvement with mission? How can we be certain of the Second Coming and the hope of the resurrection? What is the function of the millennium and the second resurrection in the context of the great controversy? These questions and more will be addressed in these power-packed, Spirit-filled Week of Prayer readings.

I invite you to join me as we prayerfully consider these important topics and together anticipate the ultimate outcome of revival and reformation: eternal life with God.

If you have younger ones in the home (of if you simply enjoy great stories), you won't want to miss the accompanying children's readings written by Charles Mills, owner of Christian Communications, a media production service based in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia.

May the Lord bless us as we come together as a world church family to study and pray during this special Week of Prayer.

Ted N. C. Wilson

President, Seventh-day Adventist Church



MEET THE AUTHORS

Gerald and Chantal Klingbeil enjoy team teaching, and are passionate about young people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Gerald, originally from Germany, serves as an associate editor of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines, and is also a research professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He earned a Doctor of Letters in Ancient Near Eastern Studies from Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and during the past two decades has served as a professor in several Adventist universities in South America and Asia. Chantal, born and raised in South Africa, is an associate director of the Ellen G. White Estate, focusing her work upon children, youth, and young adults. Chantal holds a Master of Philosophy in Linguistics from Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She has served as a high school teacher, university professor, homeschool mom, author, and editor. Gerald and Chantal enjoy three teenage daughters, Hannah, Sarah, and Jemima, who keep them on their toes.

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First Sabbath

Power to Finish the Work

PROCLAIMING THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

BY TED N. C. WILSON

We are living in amazing times. Those who are in tune with Bible prophecy and events both inside and outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church realize that God is doing something unusual. I believe with all my heart that Jesus is coming soon! While no one should ever predict any specific date, we have been given signs in the Bible that point to the time just before the Lord's return, and that time is now!

As you know, the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy call for revival and reformation, which means fulfilling God's instructions for preparation to receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit as predicted in Joel 2, Hosea 6, and Acts 2. His instructions are nicely outlined in 2 Chronicles 7:14. He speaks to us today when He says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

When we humble ourselves before God through the power of the Holy

Spirit, earnestly praying for His guidance, seeking His Word and giving up our own personal agendas, allowing God to lead us to truth, then He will hear, forgive, and heal us. He will bring us into a much closer relationship with Him so we can help finish His work here on earth.

Pray as you have never prayed before. God is calling us to a revived and reformed relationship with Him, so that we will be prepared to proclaim the prophetic messages He has entrusted to us as His remnant church. The Seventh-day Adventist prophetic understanding of the books of Daniel and Revelation help hold together our theological framework, giving us purpose, identity, and a clear vision of our worldwide mission.

God is calling us to share the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 at this time. If there was ever a time for that uniquely understood prophetic Seventh-day Adventist message in a secular age, it is now.

Receive. Believe. Revive.


In order to proclaim them, however, we must first internalize these messages for ourselves by receiving them,

believing them, and being revived by them. How do these special messages revive us?

They change us as we internalize them. The messages are full of light, and as they become a part of us, they shine *through* us as a light to others. We then understand how vitally true these messages are, and because we love God we want to share this life-changing truth with others.

This is our commission from Jesus Himself, as given in Revelation 14. It's a commission to His remnant people, and is a work given to no one else.

We are told in *Testimonies for the Church* that "in a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."¹



“The messages are full of light,
and as they become a part of
us, they shine through us as a
light to others.”

The Three Angels' Messages

Early Advent believers preached the message of Jesus' return in 1844 and faced the Great Disappointment as prophesied in Revelation 10. Their work, however, was not yet complete. There was an additional message that God wanted them to give to the whole world. This message is divided into three parts and is outlined in Revelation 14:6-12.

First Message: The first angel's message (verses 6, 7) proclaims the everlasting gospel, salvation through Christ's righteousness and grace—His justifying and sanctifying power. The angel announces that the time of judgment has come and calls people back to the true worship of God and to recognize Him as Creator.

The call to worship God as Creator automatically places upon people the responsibility to observe the day that honors His creative act. Created beings cannot honor their Creator while defying the command to keep holy the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—which God Himself set aside as a memorial of His creation.

During the time of trouble immediately preceding Jesus' return, the seventh-day Sabbath will be the central issue of conflict. Ellen White writes, “The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not.”²

To worship God as the Creator means

there must be a willingness to reject false theories about the origin of life, including evolution. It is impossible to believe in theistic or general evolution while saying that God is Creator of heaven and earth and all the life they contain. Stand firm for God's creation of this world by His Word in six literal, consecutive days of recent origin, capping that week with the same wonderful Sabbath we enjoy every seven days.

Second Message: The second angel's message, found in verse 8, announcing the fall of Babylon, was first presented in the summer of 1844. Because this announcement follows chronologically in the prophecy with the preaching of the judgment, and because the churches to which this message applies were once pure, Babylon here refers to churches that rejected the warning of the judgment.

The second message, “Babylon is fallen,” is repeated in Revelation 18:1-4. God's people who are still in Babylon are called out so that they will not be guilty of participating in her sins and will not receive the plagues that are to be poured out upon her. Therefore, Babylon is constituted by churches that teach many of the theological errors passed down through the church of the Middle Ages.

Third Message: The third angel's message, found in verses 9-11, contains a clear warning: don't worship the beast and its image, or receive its mark. To do so will result in annihilation. The content of the third message is based on the prophecy of the preceding chapter, Revelation 13. The beast represents the

apostate church. The second animal in this chapter, which represents the United States, creates the image of this beast. A definition of the image is given on page 443 of *The Great Controversy*.

We are so grateful for the religious freedom guaranteed by so many countries, including the United States. According to Bible prophecy, however, the time is coming when our religious freedom will be reduced and churches will so control the government that the government will pass laws that will fulfill the wishes of the apostate churches.³

The mark of the beast—observance of a day other than theseventh-day Sabbath—is an institution that clearly sets forth the authority of the beast. One world church boldly boasts that it has changed the seventh-day Sabbath instituted at Creation from Saturday to Sunday. Other churches indicate that they worship on Sunday as a memorial of Christ’s resurrection. Neither assertion is found in Scripture. As a result, the recognition due the Creator is removed.

A Powerful Effect

Apostate religious leaders will not be able to refute scriptural evidence for the sacredness of Saturday as the Sabbath, and this fills them with anger. As a result, Sabbathkeepers will be persecuted and imprisoned. Amid all these events, the proclamation of the third message will have an effect that has not been seen before. People will see that prophecies in Daniel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Revelation, and elsewhere in Scripture are being fulfilled exactly as commandment keepers said they would. The formation of the image of the beast and the enactment of the Sunday law will lead to national and international ruin.

Those who hold fast to their Savior and refuse to abandon the truths found in the three angels’ messages realize that they must perform their duty in presenting these messages and leave the results with God. We read that they will have “faces lighted up” and will “hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. . . . Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and

signs and wonders will follow the believers. . . . Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.”⁴

An Exciting Future

Biblical students of Daniel and Revelation, this is the exciting future to which you and I have been called in helping to finish God’s great work by proclaiming these mighty messages! Only by relying completely on Jesus and His righteousness and the power of the Holy Spirit will we be able to accomplish anything! God is preparing you and me for something unusual that will soon happen—the outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit—so that we will be revived and ready to boldly proclaim these amazing messages!

God is changing the hearts of those who hear this marvelous prophetic message, those who need to make a decision for Christ. What a privilege to share this prophetic message and humbly ask God for revival and reformation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are We Willing?

As believers of prophecy, of Christ’s righteousness, and of His soon coming, are we willing to renew our commitment to Christ by following His example of warning the world and sharing His love? Are we willing to share the distinctive, prophetic three angels’ messages? Are we willing to be used by God in these last days of earth’s history to lovingly and powerfully share His final message of redemption, love, and judgment?

Then let’s first receive and believe these messages for ourselves, allowing them to revive, reform, and transform us, so that the light of truth will shine through us to a world in darkness.

One day very soon we will look up and see a small, dark cloud about half the size of a man’s hand. It will grow larger and larger, brighter and brighter. Millions of angels will make up that marvelous cloud with a brilliant rainbow above and lightning beneath. Right in the middle of that incredible cloud will be the One we have waited for: our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, coming as

the King of kings and Lord of lords. What a day that will be!

If you wish to humbly submit to the Lord, the One who inspired the writing of the books of Daniel and Revelation, the One who gave and invites us to be revived and proclaim the three angels’ messages, and the One who can save you through His robe of righteousness and His sanctifying power to become more and more like Him—if you want to ask Him to use you in sharing His prophetic messages in this momentous end-time hour of earth’s history, I invite you right now, as you read this, wherever you may be, to bow your head and make a commitment to Christ, asking Him to revive you through an understanding and acceptance of His powerful three angels’ messages. Then may He give you the courage and strength to share these astounding messages with the world.

Jesus is coming soon! ■

¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 19.

²Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 605.

³*Ibid.*, p. 445.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 612.



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QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. What does it mean to live in patient expectation of Jesus’ coming?
2. Why would Sabbath be “the great test of loyalty” in the end-times? Is the fourth commandment the most important one?
3. What should be our focus as we anticipate the soon return of Jesus? Developing our personal relationship with Him? Helping others? Studying Bible doctrine? Explain.



Sunday

“I Knew You Were Coming”

THE CERTAINTY OF THE SECOND COMING

It was one of the most devastating earthquakes ever to hit Armenia. On December 7, 1988, at 11:41 a.m. local time, the northern region of Armenia around Spitak was rocked by a major 6.8-Richter-scale-magnitude quake that destroyed towns, flattened houses, and cost the lives of more than 30,000 people. The story of a nameless father searching for his son in a destroyed school building has since inspired thousands.

Immediately following the initial quake, the father had rushed to the school, which had been totally flattened. Remembering a promise he had made long ago, he started digging, using his bare hands. “No matter what, I will always be there for you,” he had told his young son when his son felt afraid.

Determining the approximate location of his son’s schoolroom, he began moving rubble and concrete. Others arrived and, taking in the devastating destruction, attempted to pull him away. However, he could not be distracted. He had made a promise. Firefighters and emergency personnel tried

to restrain the father. Because of gas leaks, fires and explosions were a real danger. “We will take care of it,” they told him. “There is no way that your son could have survived this.”

The father kept on digging—one stone at a time. Finally, after 38 hours of digging, he suddenly heard his son’s voice. “Dad, is that you? I knew you were coming, Dad. I told the other kids not to worry, because you promised to come for me.” The man saved 14 children that day, including his son. He kept his promise.*

Another Wait

We have been waiting a long time since the angels asked the disciples: “Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Paul waited (Rom. 12:11-13; 1 Thess. 1:10); Peter waited (1 Peter 1:7-9; 4:7; 2 Peter 3:9-14); John waited (Rev. 22:12, 20); and millions of other followers of Jesus have since waited. Often those

waiting for the Master’s glorious return found themselves imprisoned, persecuted, or ridiculed. At other times lukewarmness threatened to slowly transform passionate disciples into popcorn-eating observers, more interested in the latest gadgets and fads than in the coming of their Lord. Waiting is not always easy.

Learning From Acts

The early Christian church, as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles, provides a great example of *how* we can wait. Once they stopped looking into the sky, they began to wait. As they waited, they began to pray (Acts 1:14). As they prayed, they moved closer together (Acts 2:1). Then it happened: prayerful expectation became Spirit-filled audacity. Revival led to a focus on mission that could not be contained. Peter’s testimony, translated by the Spirit to reach hearts, led to a multitude of conversions. Three thousand were baptized on that day, and that was just the beginning (verse 41).

Prayerful fellowship, taking care of

the needs of the new community, and God-centered praise led to a growing church, because “the Lord added to their number daily” (verse 47). Timid, weary, worried people were transformed into mission-minded, bold, and compelling preachers of the Word. Persecution drove them to Samaria, Asia Minor, Rome: to the ends of the world. They waited and were passionate about preaching the risen Savior in a world in which the cross meant foolishness to most (1 Cor. 1:18).

Two key factors compelled them forward: First, they had been with Jesus. They spoke about a Savior they knew intimately. They had experienced God-with-us in person, and that experience transformed them.

Second, they were deeply rooted in Scripture and paid attention to prophecy. Peter’s sermon on Pentecost is full of quotes from the Old Testament. They had seen God’s timing in the arrival of the Messiah (Gal. 4:4), and they trusted His timing for the Son’s return.

Here is something we can learn from the early church: Like the disciples of old, we need to know our Savior personally and intimately. Grace cannot be communicated by hearsay. Salvation is not gained by blood bonds or membership forms. A personal encounter with the risen Lord is the foundation for trusting expectation. We trust people whom we truly know; and to truly know Jesus, we need to spend time with Him in prayerful conversation and study of His Word.

Another important facet of our waiting for Jesus involves understanding God’s prophetic message for our time.

Since the ending of the prophetic time lines in 1844, we are living in the time of the end. Daniel 9:24-27 helps us anchor the beginning of the long time period of 2,300 evenings and mornings (or days), given in Daniel 8:14, that had Daniel clearly worried. The 70 weeks that were “cut off” from the larger prophetic period began in 457 B.C., when the Medo-Persian king Artaxerxes I gave Ezra wide authority to “do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold” (Ezra 7:18). This enabled Ezra

to finally rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem, providing a clear link to Daniel 9:25 and the issuing of the decree to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem.”

Biblical prophecy is trustworthy. When the exact moment, foretold by prophets and seers, came, Jesus stepped into earth’s history and changed it forever. If God’s broad strokes of a prophetic time line make sense and are reliable, how much more may we trust Him who said: “Look, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:12)?

How Soon Is Soon?

Early Adventists understood that God’s soon was truly *soon*. Their lives, their priorities, their hopes, focused on this most glorious moment in history. Soon Jesus would come to take home His redeemed. However, more than 170 years have passed since then.

“How soon is soon?” we ask ourselves as we wait. Yes, the signs of His coming are clearly visible and accumulative (Matt. 24): we can see this every time we turn on our TV, visit our favorite Facebook pages, or read the news about wars, natural catastrophes, hunger, disease, cruelty, lack of moral fiber and values, and social inequalities. When we look into the mirror, we may even see Laodicean complacency. Clearly this world is in crisis—morally, economically, socially, and ecologically.

Life cannot just go on forever. Our resources are limited; our problems seem unsolvable; our selfishness is limitless. Yet we have this hope that Christ alone imparts. Like the disciples, we live a life of active service as we wait. Like the disciples, we grab hold of the Master’s hand as we wait. Like the disciples, we are assured by the “prophetic message” that is “completely reliable” and will guide us like a light shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19).

Prayerful expectation became Spirit-filled audacity.

Similar to Pentecost, we can see God’s Spirit at work all around us. The message of His soon return is transforming lives and making inroads in towns, inner cities, jungles, and on mountaintops. We wait and serve because that has been the *modus operandi* for God’s children since that day the disciples saw Jesus disappear into the clouds of heaven.

One prayer at a time God’s kingdom is enlarged. In the midst of this world’s pain and aches, even in the midst of our own pain, we wait patiently and trustingly. And on that great day that will outshine all other days, we will run into the arms of our kingly Savior and tell him, “Jesus, we knew You were coming for us, because You told us so.” ■

*This is based on Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, eds., *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: HCI Books, 1993), pp. 273, 274.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. How can we actively wait for Jesus’ return in a world that has no place for God?
2. What is the relationship between revival and the hope of the Second Coming?
3. Why do we get distracted, even discouraged, in our waiting for Jesus? What is the remedy for this discouragement and distraction?
4. How can we wait faithfully as part of God’s community and be a blessing to those who surround us?



Monday

“You Alone Are Worthy”

WORSHIP AND THE SECOND COMING

The family had saved long for their dream vacation. As they finally entered the plane and sat down, they breathed a collective sigh of relief that said, “Vacation, here we come”— and fell asleep. Six hours later they woke up as the plane taxied to the gate. Just imagine their surprise and shock, however, when they saw men huddling in down jackets against the cold wind. They had bought a trip to the tropics—but had landed in Alaska.

Can you imagine their complete disbelief? Somehow they had gotten on the wrong plane, and nobody had noticed. Instead of balmy breezes and gently swaying palm trees, they faced icy wind and the prospect of early snow.

While we may not get on the wrong plane and end up in a completely different destination, we too can miss history’s most anticipated event. Tired from the long wait, distracted by an overdose of media and entertainment, confused by contemporary approaches to God, Seventh-day Adventists find themselves in the midst of a worship war that

threatens to shatter communities and churches. This worship war is not about music styles or instruments. This war goes much deeper, right to the heart of the matter.

Whom Do You Worship?

Faithful worship characterizes God’s people living in the last days. In fact, the first angel of Revelation 14, flying in midair and proclaiming the eternal gospel, challenges us to “fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7).

Worship is a major theme in Revelation. God’s people worship the Lamb of God on the throne (Rev. 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16). Yet it is Satan, the dragon, who demands and commands worship from those living on the earth (Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 14). He knows that we are committed to what or whom we worship.

So the battle continues every day, all around the globe. Some people worship things. (In the past this was called idolatry, but today we call it materialism.)

Others worship people. In 2010 Baylor University professors Paul Froese and Christopher Bader published *America’s Four Gods: What We Say About God—and What That Says About Us*. They suggested that, based on a survey of religious views, Americans have four distinct views of God: the authoritative God, the benevolent God, the critical God, and the distant God. Needless to say, our perception of God clearly shapes our worship of God. If God is distant and judgmental (or critical), people tend to worship carefully and liturgically correct. If God is benevolent (which He clearly is) at the expense of authoritative, we may consider God our “buddy.”

It seems, at times, that we have made God in our own image, instead of recognizing that we were created in His “image” and likeness (Gen. 1:27).

Worship and Revival

A quick review of Israel’s history confirms the close connection between worship and revival. Hezekiah’s Temple reform and restoration are followed by the celebration of the Passover (2 Chron.

29; 30). Nearly a century later young King Josiah begins a major revival in Israel, purging Judah and Jerusalem of its high places, Asherah poles, and other forms of idol worship (2 Chron. 34). Later Josiah reestablishes the appropriate celebration of the Passover (cf. 2 Chron. 35, esp. verse 18).

When we focus upon God, we are refreshed; our priorities get rearranged; we remember who we really are (created beings); we recognize our hapless attempts at shaping our own destiny as self-centered. A straight line leads from revival to renewed worship.

Worship and Waiting

Worship is not only a theological topic on God's end-time agenda; true worship, as opposed to false worship, points away from us toward our Maker and our Redeemer. Others will be able to see this practically. James describes this concrete element of worship: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

People waiting for the glorious return of their Master and Lord do not sit idle in monasteries, churches, or campuses, debating the intricacies and timelines of His return. They are engaged in their communities. They serve the homeless; they share material and spiritual blessings with the down-trodden and discouraged; they care for the sick and embrace the dying.

Selfless service challenges us. It often means leaving our comfort zones—those places that feel like home. It emulates the attitude of Jesus, who "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). We can see it in Jesus washing the feet of His disciples—including the one who would ultimately betray Him—and we hear Him remind us that we are to follow His example (John 13:15).

Worship and Sabbath

Ask any Adventist about worship, and Sabbath is bound to enter the conversation. Adventists love the Sabbath. It

It seems, at times, that we have made God in our own image, instead of recognizing that we were created in His "image" and likeness.

reminds us of our origins—a powerful Creator made us in His image and likeness (Ex. 20:8-11). It also tells us something about Paradise lost and God's way to bring us home—we are sinners in need of a Savior and need to be liberated "out of Egypt" (see Deut. 5:12-15). Creation and redemption are important topics in our worship, and every Sabbath is an opportunity "to remember."

Sabbath, however, also plays a significant role as we anticipate the Master's return. Satan's ability to replace Sabbath with Sunday culminates in Revelation's end-time scenario, which centers on the true day of worship (Rev. 13:11-17; 14:9; cf. the ability of the little-horn power of Daniel 7:25 to "change times and law" [NKJV]).¹ Ellen White predicted: "Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth."²

Ellen White's insightful comments remind us that the day of worship is not a matter of preference, but a life-and-death issue. Our commitment to worship God's way needs to be based solidly on the prophetic word and the personal knowledge of a Savior who is truly worthy of worship.

No Need to Fear

The book of Revelation can be a disturbing read. When we focus upon crises, persecution, and God's opposition, we may feel overwhelmed or afraid. However, "the revelation from Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1) does not focus only upon the final crisis; again and again it highlights the ultimate joy of worship-

ping the Lamb who sits upon the throne.

Chapter 7 provides a good example: John looks and sees a great multitude that no one can count standing around the throne. They can't keep quiet; they can't stand still. "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (verse 10), they shout; then they worship Him who paid the ultimate price for their salvation. Their joy reminds us of heavenly peace and eternal bliss. Their worship encourages us to stay faithful and ready to serve. Their songs tell us about a future we cannot even imagine. No scorching heat, no hunger pangs, no tears and fears, no loneliness, because "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (verse 17).

Let's join in their worship today! ■

¹ Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 592.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. How can worship become the driving force of our Christian walk?
2. What is the relationship between worship and the Sabbath?
3. What is the link between true worship and the Second Coming? Why are we warned not to "worship the beast"?



Tuesday

“How Then Shall We Wait?”

PATIENT ENDURANCE AND THE SECOND COMING

It had been a stirring Week of Prayer at one of our Adventist colleges. The pastor had preached on end-time events: Jesus was coming soon! In fact, so soon that some parents had to field phone calls from their college offspring along the following lines:

Daughter: “Dad, Jesus is coming back soon. The signs of His coming are fulfilled. It’s just around the corner. I think I should drop out of my degree program and start knocking on doors.”

Father: “Well, I am so glad that you are enjoying this Week of Prayer. Why would you want to drop everything right now?”

Daughter: “But Dad, this is urgent. We cannot just go on like before. Jesus is coming back.”

Father: “I am so thrilled to hear you talk like this. However, would you not be able to serve Jesus better when you finish your education degree? Can you think of creative ways of sharing Jesus—even while you are studying?”

We often struggle when we have to wait. “When will I earn my first real

paycheck?” ask college students as they enter their senior year. “When will Christmas come at last?” children inquire impatiently. “When will I get better?” wonder those suffering from a chronic disease. “Patience is a virtue” goes a saying, and virtues, it seems, are out of fashion. We live in a world of instant gratification.

Abraham and Sarah had to wait—25 years, to be precise (Gen. 12:4; 21:5). Waiting did not always come easy. In fact, Ishmael’s birth, 11 years after God’s initial promise, seems to have been a detour that caused much pain for all involved. Yet Abraham and Sarah waited and waited, and continued to settle in the land that God had promised to give them. Like many others following them, they lived by faith (Heb. 11:8-12) and trusted God to come through.

He did. And He will do it again on that great day when He finally appears in the clouds of heaven. Revelation 14:12 tells us about the characteristics of God’s end-time people. We know about the faith of Jesus and keeping the

commandments. We do struggle, however, with the “patient endurance” (verse 12; cf. Rev. 13:10) that is part of the core essentials of this group. They are faithful; they understand about God’s end-time timetable; they believe in God’s prophetic gift; yet their most urgently needed trait, coloring everything else, is patient endurance.

Patience and endurance are intimately linked to faith in Revelation 13:10. Those who discern evil and resist the charms of the beast and its standards are patient and will endure. They will not compromise; yet they will also not hide in monasteries and remote wilderness regions. Planted solidly in the cities and byways of this world, they represent Jesus’ hands and feet and are committed to serving “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40).

End-time Waiting

Jesus includes a thought-provoking story in His end-time sermons. Describing a royal judgment scene, He locates a group of sheep on the right and a group of goats on the left of a

royal throne room (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). Clearly Jesus did not want to speak about animal husbandry or the characteristics of sheep or goats. In Jesus' story the King, speaking to the righteous on His right, commends them for feeding Him when He was hungry; for providing cool water when He was thirsty; for visiting Him; for clothing Him; for inviting Him. Jesus sketches the picture so masterfully that as readers we can nearly see the sheepish look on the face of the righteous. "Lord, *when* did we see you hungry?" (verse 37), they reply. Then the King will answer: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (verse 40).

End-time waiting is active waiting. It involves serving those who are needy and associating with outcasts. It calls us to step out of our comfort zones and embrace people we normally would not embrace. Whether in a center of influence in a secular and poor inner city, or in a small and ill-equipped medical clinic in rural Africa; whether in the boardroom of a highly sophisticated educational institution offering Ph.D.s and master's degrees or in the backwoods of the countryside, God wants His people to show the world what it means to really wait for His coming.

"We are waiting and watching for the grand and awful scene which will close up this earth's history," writes Ellen White. "But we are not simply to be waiting; we are to be vigilantly working with reference to this solemn event. The living church of God will be waiting, watching, and working. None are to stand in a neutral position. All are to represent Christ in active, earnest effort to save perishing souls."^{*}

Here is another element of patient end-time endurance: Waiting for the Master to come and take us home is not relying on ringing alarm bells. People around us don't need fever-pitch excitement and rumors of eye-popping conspiracies. Scripture confirms the existence of satanic powers bent on deceiving—even the elect (Matt. 24:24). Persecution, misinformation, distortion, fanaticism, and manipulation

are—and have always been—handy tools in the toolbox of God's archenemy.

Yet, Jesus' focus in His end-time sermons is upon service and mission. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (verse 14). How encouraging to know that Jesus cannot be surprised.

Planting a Garden

Every day a bus driver had to wait seven minutes at the end of his route in the ugly part of town. Waiting to start his tour again, he noticed an empty lot full of garbage. Plastic bags and junk lay scattered all around. Day in and day out the bus driver looked at the run-down place. Then one day he made a decision. Something had to be done about this ugly sight. He got out of his bus and started filling a big garbage bag with debris. Seven minutes later he was on his way again. This became his daily routine. He would stop, get out of the bus, and start cleaning.

People in the area noticed the change. Once all the garbage and dirt had been removed, the bus driver brought flower seeds and bags of earth to the lot. He began to plant a garden. People who read about this in the newspaper started to take the bus to the final stop. Some would help the bus driver as he planted and cared for his garden. Others would just enjoy the beautiful sight. Seven minutes every day were enough to change and inspire an entire community.

Planted solidly in the cities
and byways of this world, they
represent Jesus' hands and feet
and are committed to serving
"the least of these."

Waiting can be disconcerting and demoralizing; it challenges us to the core.

Yet in the midst of our waiting, God wants to give us the patient endurance of His end-time saints. As we wait, we are called to quietly search our hearts, then get to work. Yes, Jesus is coming back soon. Yes, He is looking for a people whose hearts and minds are totally committed. But while we wait, let's serve Him where we are—with all our heart, our soul, and our strength (Deut. 6:5). ■

^{*} Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), p. 163.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. We have been preaching about Jesus' return for more than 170 years. What can we learn from the many Bible characters who also had to wait?
2. Which element of the biblical concept of patient endurance challenges you most? Why?
3. Wherever you live, how could you be the hands and feet of Jesus in practical ways?



Wednesday

“Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophecy”

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND THE SECOND COMING

On a Wednesday evening, January 25, 1837, startled residents of the New England states saw the evening sky light up in a glowing deep-red color. Eyewitnesses said that the red color seemed to dance in waves across the snow-covered ground. Many people were terrified at this unusual display of the northern lights, or aurora borealis, but not 9-year-old Ellen. Ellen was recovering from a severe accident and was bedridden. She couldn't get up, but she could watch the strange lights reflecting through her bedroom window. And while others may have been terror-struck, Ellen felt sheer joy because she thought it was the second coming of Christ. Longing and working toward that great event is something that she would do all her life. So who was this young girl who so eagerly awaited the coming of Jesus?

Meet Ellen White

Ellen Gould White was a remarkable woman who lived most of her life during the nineteenth century (1827-1915).

Yet, through her writings she is still making an impact on people all around the world. Ellen White was a prolific writer. She wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books. Today, including compilations from her 50,000 manuscript pages, more than 100 books are available in English. Her writings cover a wide range of subjects. She wrote about religion, education, relationships, evangelism, prophecy, publishing, nutrition, and even management. One of her best-known books focusing upon the Christian journey, *Steps to Christ*, has been published in more than 160 languages.

The Gift of Prophecy and the Second Coming

But Ellen White was more than just a gifted writer. The Bible tells of a renewal of the gift of prophecy within the Christian church prior to the second coming of Jesus. Joel 2:28, 29 speaks of God's promise to pour out His Holy Spirit and give the gift of prophecy. The prophet says, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and

daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

The dynamic growth and the spiritual gifts visible in the early Christian church give us a foretaste of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the Second Coming. Peter actually quotes Joel in his powerful Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16-21), but this is not the only time that the gift is given.

The rest of the chapter of Joel provides the context for this gift of prophecy and shows that this extraordinary display of God's empowering Spirit takes place before the Second Coming. In Revelation 12:17 John describes the two main characteristics of God's end-time people. Those living at that time obey God's commandments and have the “testimony of Jesus Christ” (NKJV).¹ We are not left to wonder what the “testimony of Jesus Christ” is. Revelation 19:10 clearly tells us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10, NKJV; cf. Rev. 22:9).

Help to Prepare for the Second Coming

Ellen White's life and ministry represent at least a partial fulfillment of these biblical predictions. During her 70 years of ministry she received hundreds of visions and prophetic dreams. The visions varied in length from less than a minute to nearly four hours. She was called by God as a special messenger to draw the world's attention to the Bible and to help prepare people for Christ's second advent. In her own words she says: "The burden of my message to you is: Get ready, get ready to meet the Lord. Trim your lamps, and let the light of truth shine forth into the byways and the hedges. There is a world to be warned of the near approach of the end of all things."²

Of course this prophetic gift was never meant to be an addition to, or a substitute for, the Bible. The Bible remains the unique standard by which Ellen White's writings and all other writings must be judged.³ The Bible contains the tests that can be applied to see if her ministry was in fact the prophetic gift predicted in the books of Joel and Revelation.⁴ Ellen White meets all the biblical tests of a true prophet. Ellen White's ministry called attention to and stimulated careful study of the Bible.

One cannot read Ellen White's writings without getting a sense of urgency. Her personal relationship with Jesus began during the expectation of Jesus' soon coming before 1844. And even though she came to understand that other events would take place before the Second Coming, she lived her life fired by that enthusiasm.

Changed Lives

Predictions about God's coming in judgment and deliverance seem to be a main theme for many of the Old Testament prophets. Again and again Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zephaniah, and other Old Testament prophets predicted the coming of the "day of the Lord."⁵ Joel's announcement is clear and imminent: "Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand" (Joel 2:1).

New Testament writers took up the same theme in their writings.⁶ Peter, Paul, James, and the other New Testament authors all believed and taught that Jesus was coming soon. Listen to what Peter says in 2 Peter 3:9, 10: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient



Ellen White demonstrated in her writings and life the delicate art of living between now and eternity.

with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

This belief in the soon coming of Jesus seems to have been the precursor for change and was the driving force for the rapid spread of the gospel throughout most of the Roman Empire within a generation.

This belief had a way of changing lives, even for a farmer who set about to study his Bible personally.

After studying the prophecy of Daniel 8, referring to 2,300 evenings and mornings, William Miller concluded that Jesus was coming again—soon. He was thrilled at the thought “that in about twenty-five years . . . all the affairs for our present state would be wound up.”⁷ This good news was too good to keep to himself. Although he felt totally inadequate for the job, and knew that he had no training and experience as a public speaker, he felt convicted to tell others. His greatest desire was to see people accept Jesus as their Savior and look forward with joy to His soon return. A belief in Jesus’ soon coming has a way of motivating and inspiring the weakest believer.

This biblically based hope of Jesus’ coming was a sure anchor to the confused Adventist believers when Jesus didn’t return in 1844, as they had expected. It drove them back to their Bibles; back to studying the prophecies, where they discovered that they had the correct date but the wrong event! Rather than coming back to earth, Jesus had entered the final phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. They

were still on track prophetically, and Jesus was coming again—soon.

It was this belief in the coming of Jesus that has fueled the growth and spread of Adventism from a few hundred believers to a worldwide movement numbering more than 18 million. For Ellen White this expectancy of the second coming of Jesus provided the orientation for her life and work in the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church. Jesus’ coming was not simply a hypothetical future event. For her Jesus’ second coming had a sense of immediacy that demanded urgency in preaching the good news of His coming to all the world in as short a time as possible. She wrote: “The Lord is coming. We hear the footsteps of an approaching God. . . . We are to prepare the way for Him by acting our part in getting a people ready for that great day.”⁸

A Guard Against Fanaticism

For some Adventists, a belief in the soon coming of Jesus seemed to lead to fanaticism,⁹ but Ellen White insisted on a belief firmly anchored in Scripture, not based on emotional hype. She demonstrated in her writings and life the delicate art of living between now and eternity. Ellen White’s letters and articles are full of case studies in making practical plans for the building up of God’s kingdom while all the time focusing on the Second Coming. They show us that rather than unfitting true believers for a useful life, it is precisely this belief that motivates us to live our lives conscious of our individual and collective need to prepare a world for the coming of Jesus.

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets,” wrote Amos

more than 2,750 years ago (Amos 3:7). In keeping with His word, God has always given special guidance through His prophets.

Now, as we stand at the climax of earth’s history, let God work again. Be encouraged and counseled by reading and applying God’s counsels through Ellen White’s writings. We need to catch the vision of our future home in God’s neighborhood. He is ready to effect a second Pentecost and guide us through His prophetic word. The question is: Are we? ■

¹Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 106.

³*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 227.

⁴Five biblical tests of a prophet have been recognized. They include (1) divine communication through visions and dreams (Num. 12:6); (2) agreement with Scripture, God’s prior revelation (Isa. 8:20); (3) pointing to Jesus (1 John 4:1, 2); (4) fulfilled prophecy (Jer. 28:9); and (5) the fruits of the prophetic ministry (Matt. 7:20).

⁵See, for example, Isa. 13:6; Eze. 30:2-4; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:6-8; and Obadiah 15.

⁶Compare, for example, 2 Peter 3; 1 Thess. 4:15; 5:3; and James 5:7, 8.

⁷R. W. Schwarz and F. Greenleaf, *Light Bearers* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1995), p. 33.

⁸Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 219.

⁹For a very readable introduction to the fanatical landscape of post-1844 Millerism, see George Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2010), pp. 209-227.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. How can the knowledge that we are part of a prophetic movement inspire greater involvement in outreach?
2. What is the relationship between a belief in Jesus’ soon coming and revival and reformation?
3. In what ways do Ellen White’s writings help us avoid fanaticism?

AD



Thursday

“Christ in You, the Hope of Glory”

ASSURANCE AND THE SECOND COMING

Rescuers in Los Angeles County, California, had a difficult time trying to get an injured man up a steep slope to an access road.

While the rescue itself was dangerous and risky, the injured man was making things even more difficult and dangerous for everyone. As the rescue helicopter hovered overhead, ready to evacuate the seriously injured man, he became hysterical and started thrashing about. The man was afraid of being charged for the rescue. Only after the rescue crew managed to convince the man that the rescue would be absolutely free did he let himself be rescued.

Working Our Way

How do you feel about your rescue? Are you ready to be rescued by Jesus? Would you be ready to meet Him today? While we would all say that we believe that Jesus saves us, most of us would probably hesitate a moment with the today part of the question. If Jesus came today, would I be ready? The

standard for heaven is high. When we examine our lives earnestly, we can come to only one conclusion—we are all sinners (Rom. 3:9). We do not qualify for heaven. Something needs to be done.

Most major world religions share something in common. You have to do something to get something; salvation must be earned. Even in Christianity this mind-set can subtly slip in. We can begin to depend on prayers, Bible reading, or even doing good things to somehow give us the assurance that we are going to be all right. Deep down there is the vague notion that it really is Christ *plus* the things that I do that save me.

Good News

Perhaps we are a little like the injured man, afraid of the rescue because we know that we cannot pay for it. There is, however, good news, in fact, *really good news*. It is true that we are all sinners, unable to pay the penalty. But Jesus died for our sins so that we do not have to die for them (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus took

our place on the cross so that we can go free. We do not have to pay for *this* rescue—it was paid in full on Calvary. When we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we can have the full assurance that if Jesus came right now we would be ready to meet Him.

Free—Not Cheap

God wants to give us the assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:31, 32). But we will get this assurance only when we stop looking at our own efforts and ourselves and focus on what Jesus has done for us.

At this point many Christians get nervous. Accepting God's assurance seems too easy, and they are afraid of salvation becoming “cheap grace,” with people continuing to live in sin, simply claiming forgiveness without making any changes in their lives. Salvation is free, but it is not cheap. The gift of eternal life comes at the highest cost we can imagine. This rescue cost Jesus His life; and although it is free, we do have a part to play. A closer look at a biblical rescue may be helpful.

Hanging On No Matter What

Jacob knew that he needed to be rescued. He had received word that his brother, Esau, was on his way with armed men to meet him. The peace offerings he had sent ahead did not seem to make any difference. Esau was coming, intent on revenge. Jacob sent his family ahead across the river, and all alone he pleaded with God for help.

He needed rescue from Esau, but he also knew that he—the lying deceiver—had no right to ask God for help. When help came, Jacob did not recognize it. He fought God off, thinking that he was being attacked. Only at dawn, as he realized with whom he was fighting, did Jacob get the assurance that he needed. Why? Jacob stopped fighting God and instead clung to Him (Gen. 32:22-29).

Jesus supplies the salvation and assurance we need as we cling to Him. Ellen White puts it this way: “Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God’s will, and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.” Ellen White continues to point out that there is more to salvation than just belief or mental acceptance. Knowing that Jesus is our Savior is more than just a nice, comforting thought or a tantalizing intellectual idea. It is “exercising faith” and “advancing from strength to strength.”

James clearly states that belief is pointless unless it is backed by action (James 2:19). The book of James explains with practical examples that because we know that God has forgiven us, and we have faith that He will save us, we obey Him. Living life with God has a practical effect on our everyday lives. We can have the assurance that we are ready to meet Jesus if He came today.

The Ultimate Rescue Mission

The second coming of Jesus will be the greatest rescue event in earth’s history. The Bible describes the sky being peeled back like a scroll (Isa. 34:4), the

earth reeling like a drunkard (Isa. 24:20).

Would meeting Jesus require a special kind of holiness? Some Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that the character of God will be vindicated through the perfect lives of the last generation of believers. This claim is based on certain Ellen White quotes read in isolation without the context of the rest of her writings. This claim often leads to fear and is inclined to direct a Christian’s focus inward instead of on Jesus. God has always wanted every generation of Christians to find victory over the power of sin in their lives (Rom. 6:11-14). However, on this side of heaven perfection is always a growth process, not a stagnant state; and no amount of our doing anything can get us there. Rather, we have to keep clinging to Jesus. The daily struggle is to let go of all that separates us and, like Jacob, focus on clinging to Jesus rather than fighting off His Spirit or interfering with His work by trying to give the rescuer a hand. Having the assurance that we are ready to meet Jesus does not depend on reaching a certain standard. The assurance is found with Paul in “dying daily” to all that separates us from God, and clinging to His promises.

On this side of heaven
perfection is always a
growth process, not a stagnant
state; and no amount of our
doing anything can get us
there. Rather, we have to keep
clinging to Jesus.

As the sky rolls back and the earth reels we can say with confidence, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us” (Isa. 25:9). ■

¹ See www.coloradoSARboard.org.

² Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), p. 74.

³ See Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “Theology of the Last Generation,” *Adventist Review*, Oct. 10, 2013, p. 42.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. How can we be sure that we are ready to meet Jesus if He should come today?
2. What does God expect of every generation of believers? How is this different from a belief that the last generation must be perfect?
3. If I have the assurance that I am saved should Jesus come today, does that mean I will still have that assurance next month? Why, or why not?
4. How can we help our children and youth discover the joy of the assurance of salvation?



Friday

Greatest Terror— Greatest Hope

THE CERTAINTY AND JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

Following the publication of Charles Darwin's world-shattering book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, scientists tried to find the fossil evidence of our extinct ancestors. In 1910 archaeologist Charles Dawson found what he thought was the missing link in the fossil record. In reality, what he found was one of the most far-reaching frauds in history.

The find soon became known as Piltdown Man. It consisted of some pieces of a skull and a jaw with molars. Dawson brought his discovery to a prominent paleontologist, who confirmed its authenticity.

The discovery was quickly reported all over the world. But the lie behind Piltdown Man slowly began to unravel. Circumstances and evidence just didn't match. In the 1950s more advanced testing showed that the skull was only about 600 years old, and that the jaw had come from an orangutan. Apparently some knowledgeable person had filed down and stained the teeth and "planted" the find.¹

You Shall Not Die—Really?

There is something horrible about being lied to; no one likes being lied to. Yet lies often seem believable, or else we wouldn't fall for them. One of the very first lies was told to Eve in the garden by the serpent. Eve believed the serpent's statement "You will not certainly die" (Gen. 3:4) and ate the fruit. Ever since then, we have hung on to the lie. Even in the face of death before us, we still somehow hang on to the vague hope that something somehow goes on living afterward. This lie has become one of the most widely believed frauds. The burning question for all of us is: What happens when we die?

The Sleep of Death

Scripture tells us that death is an unconscious state. In fact, the Bible compares death to sleep. "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing. . . . Their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevertheless will they have a share in anything done under the sun" (Eccl. 9:5, 6, NKJV).²

Peter reaffirmed this on the day of Pentecost as he spoke of King David: "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day" (Acts 2:29). And he continued: "David did not ascend to heaven" (verse 34).

So even if it may not be biblical, what would be so bad with believing that my loved one is in a happy peaceful place? ask some as they struggle with the reality of death.

Believing that someone is somewhere and conscious after death does two things. First, it opens the door for direct manipulation by evil forces, which can masquerade as a dead loved one and communicate with us. Second, it takes away the necessity for the greatest event in history: the second coming of Jesus.

The Climax of History

The Bible points toward the second coming of Jesus as the great climax in earth's history. It will not be a low-key event that most people will miss. Jesus promised that it will be unmistakable,

similar to spectacular lightning crossing from east to west (Matt. 24:27). John adds that “every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7).

It will be an overwhelming, amazing spectacle. The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church. The Savior’s coming will be a literal, personal, visible, and worldwide event. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected. This will be an occasion that will be loud enough to quite literally “raise the dead.”

The apostle Paul gives us a quick preview in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (NKJV).

At the Second Coming those who sleep in Jesus will be raised to eternal life. Because we know that the dead are asleep in the grave, the promise of the Second Coming and the resurrection to eternal life is especially important to us.

One Event—Two Distinct Reactions

During World War II, prisoners of war were surprised by the sound of airplanes flying low over their camp. As they ran out of their barracks, every eye was straining to recognize the insignia on the planes. Then the prisoners began to shout for joy, wave, and hug each other. These were not enemy planes, but their own planes. Liberation was only hours away. For the prisoners it was the greatest day of their lives; but for another group the roar of the engines brought terror, not joy. The prison guards stared in horrified disbelief. For them judgment day had arrived. Soon they would have to account for their cruel deeds. Terrified, the guards abandoned their posts and fled into the jungle.

Terror and Joy

While it brings great joy to think of the resurrection as a moment of celebration and reunion, it is also a day of

Whether asleep in death or alive at the time of the Second Coming, we can be witnesses to the greatest showdown in history.

terror for those who are unprepared to meet Jesus. What for some will be the most joyful event in earth’s history will be the most terrible moment for others. Those unprepared to meet Jesus will be so desperate to get away from this glorious event that they will call on mountains and rocks to “fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16).

But none of us needs to be among this group. Jesus has made every provision to have us joyfully await His return. Whether asleep in death or alive at the time of the Second Coming, we can witness the greatest showdown in history. We can watch when that great enemy, death, will be swallowed up in victory.

Ellen White vividly describes the scene: “Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ . . . And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”³

We do not need to believe a lie. In the face of death we do not have to cling to some desperate hope that somehow, somewhere, life may go on. We can have the blessed hope that robs death of its sting. We can look forward to the great reunion when Jesus returns in the clouds of glory to wake the dead. We can look forward to the great hello with no goodbye. ■

¹Jane McGrath, “10 of the Biggest Lies in History,” <http://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/10-biggest-lies-in-history.htm#page=6>.

²Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 644.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. How does the biblical concept of the state of the dead give hope to someone who is grieving?
2. What is the danger of believing in an immortal soul?
3. Why is it important to know what the Bible says about the way in which Jesus will come?
4. How can we be sure that we will rejoice and not be terrified at the Second Coming?



Second Sabbath

The Controversy Ended



At the close of the thousand years, Christ again returns to the earth. He is accompanied by the host of the redeemed and attended by a retinue of angels. As He descends in terrific majesty He bids the wicked dead arise to receive their doom. They come forth, a mighty host, numberless as the sands of the sea. . . .

Christ descends upon the Mount of Olives. . . . As the New Jerusalem, in its dazzling splendor, comes down out of heaven, it rests upon the place purified and made ready to receive it, and Christ, with His people and the angels, enters the Holy City.

Now Satan prepares for a last mighty struggle for the supremacy. While deprived of his power and cut off from his work of deception, the prince of evil was miserable and dejected; but as the wicked dead are raised and he sees the vast multitudes upon his side, his hopes revive, and he determines not to yield the great controversy. He will marshal all the armies of the lost under his banner and through them endeavor to execute his plans. . . .

In that vast throng are multitudes of the long-lived race that existed before the Flood; men of lofty stature and giant intellect. . . . There are kings and generals who conquered nations, valiant men who never lost a battle, proud, ambitious warriors whose approach made kingdoms tremble. . . .

Satan consults with his angels, and then with these kings and conquerors and mighty men. . . . At last the order to advance is given, and the countless host moves on. . . . With military precision the serried ranks advance over the earth's broken and uneven surface to the City of God. By command of Jesus, the gates of the New Jerusalem are closed, and the armies of Satan surround the city and make ready for the onset.

Christ Crowned, Judges

Now Christ again appears to the view of His enemies. Far above the city, upon a foundation of burnished gold, is a throne, high and lifted up. Upon this

throne sits the Son of God, and around Him are the subjects of His kingdom. . . . In the presence of the assembled inhabitants of earth and heaven the final coronation of the Son of God takes place. And now, invested with supreme majesty and power, the King of kings pronounces sentence upon the rebels against His government and executes justice upon those who have transgressed His law and oppressed His people. Says the prophet of God: "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Revelation 20:11, 12.*

As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. . . .

The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse; and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them. . . .

Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence.

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." Revelation 15:4. Every ques-

tion of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. . . . Satan's own works have condemned him. God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. . . .

Evil Eradicated

Fire comes down from God out of heaven. The earth is broken up. . . . The very rocks are on fire. . . . The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They "shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1. . . . Satan's work of ruin is forever ended. For six thousand years he has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe and causing grief throughout the universe. . . . Now God's creatures are forever delivered from his presence and temptations. . . .

While the earth was wrapped in the fire of destruction, the righteous abode safely in the Holy City. Upon those that had part in the first resurrection, the second death has no power. While God is to the wicked a consuming fire, He is to His people both a sun and a shield. Revelation 20:6; Psalm 84:11.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." Revelation 21:1. The fire that consumes the wicked purifies the earth. Every trace of the curse is swept away. No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin.

Only One Reminder

One reminder alone remains: Our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion. Upon His wounded head, upon His side, His hands and feet, are the only traces of the cruel work that sin has wrought. . . . And the tokens of His humiliation are His highest honor; through the eternal ages the wounds of Calvary will show forth His praise and declare His power.

"O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion." Micah 4:8. The time has come to which holy men have looked with longing

All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed.

since the flaming sword barred the first pair from Eden, the time for “the redemption of the purchased possession.” Ephesians 1:14. The earth originally given to man as his kingdom, betrayed by him into the hands of Satan, and so long held by the mighty foe, has been brought back by the great plan of redemption. All that was lost by sin has been restored. . . .

“My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” “Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” “They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: . . . mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” Isaiah 32:18; 60:18; Isaiah 65:21, 22. . . .

Pain cannot exist in the atmosphere of heaven. There will be no more tears, no funeral trains, no badges of mourning. “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying . . . for the former things are passed away.” . . . Revelation 21:4. . . .

Glories of Eternity

There is the New Jerusalem, the metropolis of the glorified new earth. . . . In the City of God “there shall be no night.” None will need or desire repose. There will be no weariness in doing the will of God and offering praise to His name. We shall ever feel the freshness of the morning and shall ever be far from its close. “And they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light.” Revelation 22:5. The light of the sun will be superseded by a radiance which is not painfully dazzling, yet which immeasurably surpasses the brightness of our noontide.

The glory of God and the Lamb floods the Holy City with unfading light. The redeemed walk in the sunless glory of perpetual day.

“I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” Revelation 21:22. The people of God are privileged to hold open communion with the Father and the Son. . . . We shall stand in His presence and behold the glory of His countenance.

There the redeemed shall know, even as also they are known. The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find trust and sweetest exercise. . . .

There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.

All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar—worlds that thrilled with sorrow at the spectacle of human woe and rang with songs of gladness at the tidings of a ransomed soul. With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. . . .

And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achieve-

ments in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.

“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” Revelation 5:13.

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love. ■

* Bible texts are from the King James Version.



THIS ARTICLE IS EXCERPTED FROM *THE GREAT CONTROVERSY*, PAGES 662-678. SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS BELIEVE THAT **ELLEN G. WHITE** (1827-1915) EXERCISED THE BIBLICAL GIFT OF PROPHECY DURING MORE THAN 70 YEARS OF PUBLIC MINISTRY.

QUESTIONS FOR

Reflection and Sharing

1. As you look forward to the end of sin, is there anything that frightens you? What is it?
2. What is the significance of Jesus bearing the marks of His crucifixion throughout eternity?
3. For you, what will be the best part of living in God's presence?

FIRST SABBATH

Words of Love
"God's holy people must be patient. They must obey God's commands and keep their faith in Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, ICB).*

The Loud Voice

I was very tired, and the airport waiting room was so cool and comforting. For weeks I'd been traveling around the Caribbean taking pictures and making a movie about the many activities of fellow church members there.

I'd filmed pastors and laypeople sharing God's love with everyone they met. I'd seen doctors healing sick people, and students studying to become doctors and preachers and teachers. I'd met real heroes who'd sacrificed so much to worship the God they loved. I'd photographed young people sharing information about overcoming illness and disease. I'd heard music and powerful preaching, and watched people get baptized. Now it was time to go home.

I closed my eyes as I felt the pressure of my busy schedule slip away. Soon I'd be home in my own bed.

Suddenly I became aware that I couldn't hear anyone talking near me. The waiting room, moments before filled with passengers, children, ticket agents, was empty. All that remained was silence and the sound of jet engines spooling up.

I panicked. My flight home! The journey that would return me to my home had left without me. I'd missed it! I'd fallen asleep, and while I dozed, I was left behind.

That's when I heard a loud voice echoed from the speakers of my lonely airport waiting room.

"Your attention, please. Your attention, please. This is the final boarding call of Flight 982 to Miami. All passengers should be on board the aircraft at this time. If you have a ticket for Flight 982, you must proceed immediately to the boarding gate. This is your final call."

I probably created a record for the fastest sprint to the boarding gate. The door to the airplane was about to close when I raced up to the counter and shouted, "Wait! I'm on that flight. I have a ticket! See? Here's my boarding pass, too. Please let me on! I want to go home!"

Did you know there is a "loud voice" calling out to you right now? This "loud voice" is calling out to everyone in the whole world. It's God's voice echoing from the lips of three high-flying angels who've been sent from heaven to do two things: (1) to warn of coming dangers, and (2) to share what we need to do in order to go home with Jesus.

One time a loud voice woke me and told me to get on an airplane *right now*. God's loud voice has a similar message. Only this time we won't be going to Miami; we will be headed for heaven! So let's all be sure to stay awake and listen for it.

* Scriptures credited to ICB are quoted from the *International Children's Bible, New Century Version*, copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Tommy Nelson, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee 37214. Used by permission.

Share

If you were God, what would you say to this world to invite everyone to go to heaven with you? Write that message down and e-mail it to everyone you know.

SUNDAY

Words of Love
“The angel had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people” (Rev. 14:6, ICB).

Good News School

I don't want to go to church.” Justin sat with his arms crossed over his chest, pouting.

“Why?” his father asked, watching the road ahead. “I thought you liked church!”

“I'd rather do other things today, like play baseball or watch one of my favorite movies on the Internet. Sometimes church is boring.”

Justin's dad nodded slowly. “Well, you're right. Compared to an exciting baseball game or a movie about battling dinosaurs, church can be kinda boring.”

The boy blinked. “You agree with me?”

“Sure,” his father said with a smile. “That's why we're not going to church today.”

“We're not?”

“Nope.”

“Wow,” Justin gasped, squirming excitedly against the seat belt.

“And,” his father continued, “we're going to a place where you learn how to be an angel. As a matter of fact, you're going to learn how to stop wars, make your friends healthier, and bring love into people's homes.”

The two sat in silence for a long moment. “Who's going to teach me all this?” the boy asked.

“God,” Dad said.

Justin frowned. “How do you know God's going to do all that?”

His father shrugged. “Because He said He would. ‘Go everywhere in the world. Tell the Good News to everyone’ [Mark 16:15, ICB].

“Do you think God wants us to just head out into the world without learning how to do that? That, my friend, takes practice and knowledge. Learning, too. It requires that you do something very special once or twice a week—something that teaches you how to be a loving angel to the whole world. That takes—”

Dad steered his minivan into a parking lot filled with cars and smiling faces.

“That takes *church*,” Justin said with a shy smile when he recognized where they were.

“People in Bible times had their sanctuaries and temples. Today we have churches. But the goal of these places is all the same: to learn how to spread the good news of God's love. Do you understand?”

Justin nodded. “Yes. And you know what, Dad?”

“What?”

“I'm glad we have this little church to come to. I'm sorry I complained about it. I do want to be an angel for God. I do want to spread His love to everyone.”

Father and son walked from the car and headed for their church.

Share

If you were the pastor of a church, what would you do to make sure everyone had a fun learning experience there? Make a list and share it with your pastor. Then get ready to help him or her in any way you can.

Words of Love
“What will happen to show us that it is time for you to come again and for the world to end?” (Matt. 24:3, ICB).

Getting Ready

Lisa was as excited as a 10-year-old could be. “Do you see her yet?” her mother called from the doorway, holding a sizzling raspberry pie fresh from the oven. “Raspberry pie is her favorite, you know.”

“I know!” Lisa said beaming. “And she likes baked apples and watermelon and Spanish rice.”

Mother placed the hot pie on a cooling shelf by the window and sat down wearily on the porch swing. “You’ve missed your big sister, haven’t you?” she said.

Lisa nodded. “Sarah’s ship has been to so many interesting places,” she said excitedly. “Each time she is depl—deplo—.”

“Deployed,” Mother interjected.

“Yes. That’s it,” said Lisa. “Each time she’s deployed, the Navy sends her someplace really *exotic*. That means ‘strange, mysterious, and out of the ordinary.’ I looked it up.” The girl paused.

“I’ve never been to anyplace exotic, unless you count Daryl’s bedroom.”

Mother laughed. “I think even he has cleaned up his act for Sarah’s arrival. The whole house is as neat as a pin.”

Lisa smiled. “Nothing’s too good for Sarah. I want her to feel right at home.”

Mother sighed. “I wish people worked this hard for someone *else* who’s coming back soon.”

The girl frowned. “Who’s coming back?”

“Jesus,” Mother stated. “He’s coming back to this earth.”

Lisa gasped. “When?”

“Soon,” her mother responded. “Jesus told His disciples that before He returned, the world would be a dangerous place. That’s why Sarah joined the Navy. She’s trying to keep the world peaceful.”

“Oh, yeah,” Lisa said. “Those were the *signs* Jesus talked about, the signs that He would be coming soon.”

More Signs

“You knew Sarah was coming back, so you’ve been busy cleaning your rooms, scrubbing the floors, picking beautiful flowers from the fields, washing your clothes—you want everything to be special for Sarah. I do, too. I’ve been making all of her favorite foods, like this pie. Why are we doing all those things?”

Lisa grinned broadly. “Because we love Sarah and want her to feel welcome when she gets here.”

“You know what? I like to think it’s the job of every Christian to show signs of loving service to the world, so everyone will know that something special and wonderful is about to happen. Our best friend Jesus is coming back, and we need to be the signs to show everyone that He’s coming soon.”

Just then a car appeared at the curve in the road, and Lisa started jumping up and down. “Here she comes! Here she comes,” she called out. Mom and Lisa waved and smiled at the approaching vehicle. They knew that everything was ready to welcome someone they’d missed greatly and was now coming home again.

Share

List five ways you can be a joyful sign to your friends and neighbors that Jesus is coming soon. Then write a song about your joy.

TUESDAY

Words of Love
“It is important
for you to under-
stand what will
happen in the
last days”
(2 Peter 3:3,
ICB).

Evidence

You don't look so good,” Kim's dad said as his son stumbled into the kitchen. The teenager stood in his pajamas holding a half-empty glass of orange juice in one hand and a bottle of vitamin C pills in the other.

“Oh, I'm fine,” Kim answered, “except for this cough, runny nose, scratchy throat, high fever, and bothersome ringing in my ears.”

Dad laughed. “Poor baby.”

Kim frowned. “You called me *baby*.” I'm 13 years old and prefer to be called ‘young person’ or ‘adult in training.’”

Dad shook his head slowly from side to side. “I know exactly what's wrong with you.”

Kim blinked. “Well, Dr. Dad, what's your diagnosis?”

The man pointed a finger at him. “It's obvious you've got a bad case of twisted ankle.”

Kim studied his father for a long moment. “Twisted ankle?”

Dad's eyebrows rose. “What do *you* think you have?”

“Dad,” the teenager said, “I have a cold.”

“So,” the man pressed, “you have a cold based on the evidence, right?”

Kim nodded. “Right.”

“And,” Dad continued, “we should make decisions based on evidence, right?”

The boy hesitated. “Right.”

“Then why is it so hard for you to believe that Jesus is coming soon?”

Kim gasped. “What does Jesus' coming have to do with my cold?”

Old-fashioned

Dad's eyes softened. “Last night you said that you didn't think Jesus was coming soon. You said that we should just love others and be kind and enjoy God's forgiveness, and that talking about the Second Coming was totally old-fashioned.”

“Yes,” Kim responded.

“So, what about the evidence?” the man pressed.

“Evidence?” Kim asked. “What evidence?”

“Jesus told His disciples that near the end of time there would be famines and pestilence and that people would be so afraid that their hearts would stop beating! And what about all these sudden illnesses like plagues that keep popping up? We've got people mistreating poor persons and making themselves rich off the suffering of others. That's all evidence, Kim. That's evidence that Jesus is coming soon and we have to tell people about it.”

“If that's true, why hasn't He come yet?” Kim asked.

“I don't know,” Dad responded with a shrug. “I'm sure He has His reasons. But if you believe the evidence, you have to believe and trust the promise. I think we need to be telling people about the evidence and about the promise.”

Kim nodded slowly. “OK, OK. You're right,” he said between coughs. “I guess I should take the Second Coming more seriously. I guess I should tell others about it too.” He turned to leave, then paused. “And I will start doing that right after I get over this twisted ankle.”

Dad smiled proudly. “That's my ... young person.”

Share

Draw a picture of three activities you can do in your home, your community, or your church to remind people that Jesus is coming back. Include this text with your drawings: “Listen! I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:12, ICB).

Words of Love
"Those who have
died and were in
Christ will rise
first" (1 Thess.
4:16, ICB).

Waiting for the Harvest

Terry stood and stared at the freshly turned soil. Overhead, spring birds sang their sweet songs and clouds drifted in the bright blue of the sky. It had been three hours since he'd watched his father carefully plant seeds in the dirt, and yet nothing was happening. To his 5-year-old mind, that was simply not acceptable.

Dad had worked hard preparing the ground, adding just the right amount of fertilizer and dropping each group of corn seeds into perfectly spaced piles along perfectly straight furrows. Now the sun shone overhead and a cool wind blew through the branches of the tall oaks behind the house. It was time. But nothing was happening!

Dad walked up beside his young son and smiled down at him. "Are you talking to my garden?" he asked.

Terry pointed. "I'm talking to the seeds. You put them in the garden this morning, and I want

corn on the cob for supper. What are they waiting for? The seeds are just lying there."

"Oh, but they're doing something important," Dad urged.

"What?" Terry wanted to know.

"They're waiting. They're waiting for the days to become longer, the sun to become brighter, the air to become warmer, and summer rains to bring moisture down into the soil so they can drink of the life-giving water. Then something amazing will happen."

"What?" Terry asked, bending low for a closer look.

"They'll send shoots up through the soil to the surface while pushing roots down, down, down into the earth," Dad stated. "Then they'll take energy from the sun and grow up, up, up, forming stalks and leaves and finally ears of corn ready for hungry 5-year-old boys to enjoy with mashed potatoes and string beans. All that takes time, but it will be worth the wait."

Terry frowned. "Why does it take so long?"

"Well," Dad said, looking out over his garden, "everything has to be just right. Everything has to happen in a special order for things to grow. But as long as there's a sun overhead, rain coming down, and rich soil below, the seeds in my garden will grow just as they have since God created this world."

The man paused. "It's the same with people who die—like Grandma and Uncle Jarrod. Remember? We placed their coffins in the ground. But someday soon Jesus will come and call them from the earth. They'll be alive once more, and we'll be so happy to see them. Then we'll all go to heaven with Jesus, where nothing will ever die and my gardens will grow delicious food forever. Would you like that?"

Terry thought for a long moment. "OK. Then I'll wait too. I'll wait for my corn on the cob, and I'll wait for Jesus to make Grandma and Uncle Jarrod alive again."

"Good plan," Dad said, taking his son by the hand and walking toward the house. "Waiting isn't always fun, but it will be worth it. You'll see."

Share

Has someone in your family died? If so, draw a picture of some beautiful tombstones with their names on them. Include the sun overhead to help you remember what Jesus will do someday soon.

THURSDAY

Words of Love
"Blessed and holy
are those who
share in the first
raising of the
dead. The second
death has no
power over them"
(Rev. 20:6, ICB).

A Safe Place

Elsa looked at the falling leaves and dying grasses. She noticed great lines of geese flying high overhead as a chilly wind blew up the valley, making her shiver and move closer to her mother for warmth. "I don't like autumn," she said, jamming her hands into her pockets. "It makes me worried."

"Worried?" Mother repeated. "Why?"

"Because of the animals," the girl stated, pointing at the trees and meadows surrounding them. "See those squirrels and chipmunks and birds? And what about the foxes and bears and groundhogs and the whitetail deer? What's going to happen to them when the snows come? It gets so cold that Miller Pond freezes solid, and all their food goes away. They don't have a nice, warm fire like we have in our house. All they have are the woods and the snow. That can't be good."

Mother thought for a moment. "Well, you're right," she said. "They don't have a big home like

ours, but they have God. When He created this world, He made sure that everyone had a home. As a matter of fact, the earth was one great big happy home for everyone. People and animals lived in the meadows or under the shade of beautiful trees—just like our animal friends out there.

"But after sin came along, Adam and Eve built their own home. Soon people were building houses and cities and living a life very different from what God had in mind. The animals continued to do many things as God intended. Sin created cold winters and brought many dangers into their lives—especially dangers from humans. But the animals dug into the ground or burrowed into trees, or flew south to faraway, warmer places. Many learned to sleep during the cold winter months in cozy dens while others figured out how to find food under piles of fallen snow. Animals are living in the arms of nature, doing what God taught them to do—survive."

The woman paused. "The same God who made us promised to protect us if we'd let Him. Someday heaven will be our home, and even though sin is destroying everything, we'll be safe and sound there. We'll learn more about God and worship Him. The birds, bears, foxes, squirrels, and deer will join us there too. One big happy family again."

Elsa thought for a moment, then nodded.

Mother smiled. "Hey, would you like to help God care for the animals?"

"Really?" the girl gasped. "We can do that?"

"Sure. Let's go to the hardware store. We can buy some birdseed and dried corn. Then, when it snows, we'll put out plenty of food for the squirrels and rabbits and deer and birds to eat. They can carry some of that food back to their dens and tree cavities for later. It won't be the Garden of Eden, but we can love and care for them just the same."

And that's exactly what they did.



Share

Put up some bird and animal feeders in your backyard this coming winter. You'll make a lot of critters—and the God who made them—very happy. Invite your friends to do the same.



Words of Love
“Worship God. He
made the heav-
ens, the earth,
the sea, and the
springs of water”
(Rev. 14:7, ICB).

Worship the Creator

One day I was taking a Sabbath afternoon walk with my wife. We were enjoying the colorful summer leaves and listening to the birds chirping in the branches.

I stopped to take a picture of a flower as my wife continued walking, admiring the butterflies and blossoms. Soon she was some distance from me.

Suddenly a large shaggy dog burst from the yard of a nearby house and headed straight for my wife at full speed. By the look of his bared teeth and the sound of his deep snarl, I knew he didn't want to play fetch with her.

I had three choices. One, I could call out to the dog in a friendly manner. “Excuse me, Mr. Dog,” I could say. “I would really appreciate it if you didn't try to eat my wife. Please return to your yard, and we'll just continue our walk in peace and tranquillity.”

Or, two, I could have tried to reason with him. “Mr. Dog, your actions don't seem friendly.

Being friendly is much more pleasant and rewarding than being all snarly and gruff. Besides, you might get into trouble. Why don't you simply bark a few times, and then head back home again?”

Or, three, I could do what I did. *I shouted*, “HEY! HEY! STOP! BAD DOG! BAD DOG! GET OUT OF HERE! GO HOME! GO HOME!”

That third solution worked like a charm. The dog hurried back toward his own yard. *Whew!* That was too close for comfort.

Snarling Dog Satan

In the fascinating book of Revelation the Bible reports that God sent three angels to warn everyone in the world that sin is destroying them. That old snarling dog Satan is on the attack. The Bible says they used a “loud voice.” And one of those angels, the very first one, while using a very definite outdoor voice, said something strange. He shouted: “Worship God. He made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water.” In other words, he told everyone: “GOD CREATED YOU, SO YOU SHOULD WORSHIP HIM!”

Why would an angel have to remind everyone that they were created by God?

So many people have forgotten that fact. They think we came from monkeys, or just evolved from pond scum. These people worship science or technology; they bow to human leaders, or use worldly ways of thinking and reasoning. That first shouting angel had news for them. Science, technology, humans, monkeys, or pond scum can't save a single person. Not one. Only God the Creator can do that.

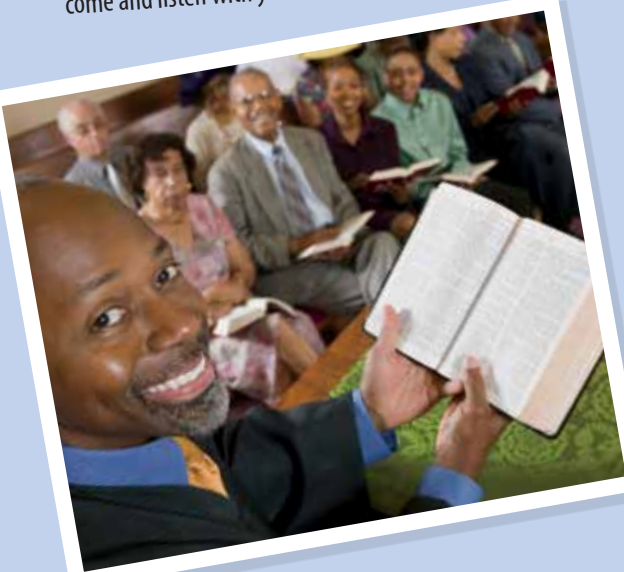
I'm not suggesting that you go to your friend's house, knock on the door, and, when they come to answer, say in a loud voice, “HEY! GOD LOVES YOU. HE WANTS TO SAVE YOU FROM SIN. WANT TO PLAY SOCCER?”

Instead, you can say with an indoor voice, “Hey, how about some soccer?” And then you enjoy an honest, fair game, showing your friends exactly how Jesus would play and treat others.

And our kind testimony should work like the angels'.

Share

Ask your pastor to preach a sermon about how God created this world and everything in it. Then invite a few of your friends to come and listen with you.



SECOND SABBATH

Words of Love
"The Lord will give them light. And they will rule like kings forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5, ICB).

Living Forever

Forever" is a hard word to understand. Why? Because no one has ever done *anything* forever. No one has walked forever, eaten pizza forever, played football forever, or watched television forever. Everything we do has a beginning and an end. Even this day boasted a sunrise and a sunset. Beginnings. Endings. Starts. Stops. Life as we know it.

Then along comes a Bible text that describes what we will be doing in heaven. Here's what it says: "The Lord will give them light. And they will rule like kings forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5, ICB).

OK. That's cool! The Bible says we won't need a bright sun in heaven, because God's glory will provide all the light we need. And as for me, I won't mind being like a king. Here on this earth I've lived my whole life under the heavy hand of Satan, being tempted and many times feeling afraid and uncertain. In heaven there will be no temptations and sins to mess up a good thing.

Being like a king is just fine with me!

But what is this "forever and ever" that the text talks about? Once heaven begins, it won't end?

Yes. That's exactly what it's saying.

We're going to have to use our imaginations, because, as I said, no one has ever done "forever" before. Forever just *is*. It always has been and always will be. Our sin-filled minds and bodies simply can't understand that type of existence.

Instead of trying to figure out what forever is, maybe we can have fun planning what our forever *will be*!

When I was young, I'd be out playing a really exciting game with my friends, and the sun would start falling toward the western horizon. Then I'd hear my mother call: "Charlie, come in now. It's getting dark."

I didn't want to stop playing my exciting game. I didn't want to come in. I didn't want it to get dark. I wanted to stay outside and play with my friends . . . forever.

A few years ago I looked down at the smiling face of my father. He was very old and very sick. We talked about old times, and he told me how much he loved me. I started to cry. "Daddy," I said, "I don't want you to be old and sick. I want to visit with you and talk to you and love you . . . forever." Not long after that, he died.

Do you see what forever means? It means that our fun doesn't have to end. It means that you don't have to stop playing. Best of all, it means that you never have to say goodbye to your dad, or mom, or friends. For those who love Jesus so much that they're willing to start a new life with Him, forever has a beginning. But it doesn't have an end!

That's just fine with me. How about you?

Share

Draw some pictures of how you plan to spend your time in heaven. Under each picture, print the word "FOREVER." Then post your pictures where you'll see them every day.

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