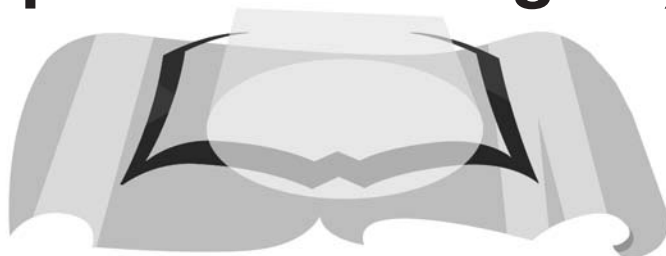


The Message of the Prophets (Special Messengers)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 20:1–17; Leviticus 16; Matthew 24:24–31; Romans 3:21–28; Hebrews 8:1, 2; Hebrews 9:23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Be careful of how you live and what you believe. Never give up. Then you will save yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16, NIV).

THE FIRST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS were a small group of hard workers. They met together to discuss the set of beliefs the church should be founded on. Their meetings were filled with serious Bible study and prayer. Writing in 1904, more than fifty years after the events, Ellen G. White still remembered these meetings very well. “Often we remained together until late at night. Sometimes through the entire night, we prayed for light and studied the Word.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 206. At times, when they could go no further, Ellen G. White would give answers from her visions.¹ The visions did not take the place of faith, hard work, or Bible study. The important point to remember is that our church’s doctrines depend on the Bible alone. They are not dependent upon Ellen G. White’s writings. But she has been helpful in making some of those teachings clear to us.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: Why do we need to keep the commandments when we are saved by grace (the free gift of God’s love and mercy)? What is the cleansing (to make pure and clean) of the heavenly sanctuary? How is the Sabbath commandment different from the other commandments? What happens at death? Why is knowledge of the state of the dead important? What does the Bible teach about how Jesus comes the second time?

¹ visions—special messages from God that are seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God’s will (plan).

SUNDAY—MARCH 1

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH²
(Romans 3:21–28)

What do 1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:21–28; and Romans 5:12 tell us about the common situation of all humans (men, women, and children)? Why? What is the only answer to the situation in which we find ourselves?

Sin is the greatest problem we face. The Greek thinkers thought a lack of education was the chief enemy of true happiness. So they encouraged education. But the chief problem of humans is sin. Sin destroys happiness and peace of mind. Sin kills, and no modern medicine can cure it. From the minute we are born, we begin to die. The only cure is Jesus Christ and the Cross. “There is a most important point humans need to be taught to remember. It is impossible for people to earn anything by their own good works. Being saved comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, page 19.

Christians are always in danger of being shipwrecked by legalism³ or cheap grace. There are those who fear that a wrong understanding of our salvation⁴ in Christ will lead to cheap grace. So they point to the importance of obeying the law. On the other hand, there are those who fear that a wrong understanding



Sin kills, and no modern medicine can cure it.

of obeying the law pulls attention away from Christ and leads to legalism. They point to God’s part in salvation.

The balanced Christian will have assurance⁵ of salvation in Jesus. He or she will lead a victorious Christian life at the same time. Assurance of salvation and victorious Christian living go together like the two sides of a coin. Whomever God forgives and makes right, He also makes holy. We cannot have one without the other. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone. Good works follow, but they never can make us righteous (holy) before God, even with the Holy Spirit’s blessing. Our salvation is rooted only in what Jesus has done for us.

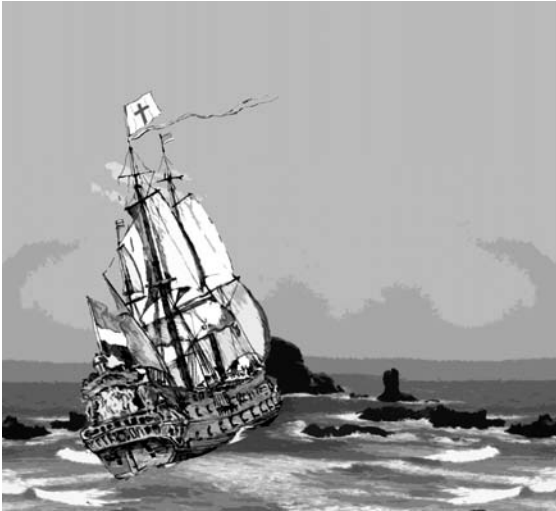
2. righteousness by faith—the truth that we are saved through faith in Jesus.

3. legalism—trying to obey the law to earn salvation.

4. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

5. assurance—the promise and hope of having eternal life.

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Christians are always in danger of being shipwrecked by the rocks of legalism or the whirlpool of cheap grace.

Are you discouraged about your spiritual life? Are you not getting the victories you wish you had? What great hope can you find in knowing that you are accepted only through what Jesus has done for you? Why should that hope keep you from never giving up in your struggles with sin and self?

MONDAY—MARCH 2

THE SANCTUARY (Hebrews 9:1–8)

What does Hebrews 9:1–8 tell about the services of the Old Testament tabernacle (tent)? How did the services show the plan of salvation?⁶

6. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

7. sanctuary service—the offering of animal blood as a payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner's blood. This service represented Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died, this law was not needed.

8. sacrifice—something or someone of value, such as a life, that is given up to save or to help save someone or something else.

With the sanctuary service,⁷ God made an example that helped the sinner to understand the great plan of salvation. Sorrow for sin, giving up sin, forgiveness, faith, being made right with God, holiness, all were shown by example in the daily and yearly services of the earthly sanctuary.

Hebrews 8:1, 2 tells about Jesus' work as the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. What does His ministry (work) include? Why does Hebrews 9:23 say that the heavenly sanctuary needs cleansing?



God used the sanctuary service to help the sinner understand the plan of salvation.

In the Old Testament the sinner received forgiveness through faith in the cleansing blood of the Promised Seed (Jesus) (Genesis 3:15). The animal sacrifice⁸ of the sanctuary service was an example of the sacrifice of the Promised Savior. And just as in the earthly service there was a Day of

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Atonement,⁹ or a day of judgment, at the close of the year. On this day the sanctuary was cleansed. In the same way, in the heavenly sanctuary service there is a day of judgment before Christ's second coming.

The pre-Advent judgment¹⁰ shows to the universe that those who claim to have accepted Christ are really His followers. God opens the books of heaven for all the universe to see that in each case His decision (choice) was just and fair. In that sense, this judgment clears the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus (Romans 3:4).



The judgment is good news. It is the work of God saving us because we cannot save ourselves.

In Leviticus 16, the key (important) part that appears over and over is blood. And that makes sense, because this is the Day of Atonement. And only blood makes atonement.¹¹ And what is atonement, other than the work of God saving us? So the judgment is good news. It is the work of God saving us because we cannot save ourselves.

TUESDAY—MARCH 3

THE SABBATH (Exodus 20:1–17)

The Sabbath and marriage are the only customs¹² created by God that come to us from the time before sin entered the world. So, sometimes they are called the twin sisters of Paradise. When you look at our world today, it is clear that Satan has worked hard to destroy them.

What does Exodus 20:1–17 tell about the Sabbath commandment that helps us to understand its importance?

The fourth commandment is a test commandment. It tests our spiritual life. The Sabbath deals with time, which is unseen, rather than with things we can see. For this reason the Sabbath is the best tool for measuring our attitude (feeling) toward God. How we feel toward the Sabbath shows how

9. Day of Atonement—an event that took place once a year when the earthly sanctuary (the home of God on earth) was cleansed by the high priest. Day of Atonement services symbolized (stood for) cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

10. pre-Advent judgment—the judgment that takes place before Jesus' second coming.

11. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice (death) on the cross.

12. customs—things that have been done for a long time and so have become the accepted or common thing to do.

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we feel toward God. It is the only commandment a person can break and still be fully accepted as a good person in any strong Christian group.

In a way, the Sabbath depends on choice. Why the seventh day over any other? It is because God said so. That is why. There is a lot of sense in not stealing, not killing, not being jealous, and so forth. You do not have to be a Christian to follow those principles (rules). Many non-Christians do.

By resting on the Sabbath, we are showing the world that all this talk about *resting in Christ* is not just talk. As Sabbath keepers, we truly rest in Christ's work of salvation for us daily. And in a special way each week, we show our full assurance (belief) in Christ by resting on the Sabbath (read Hebrews 4:1–11). Sabbath keeping is an outward example of our rest in Christ.

The Sabbath depends on a person's choice. But what are the outward and useful benefits (profits) we get from keeping the Sabbath holy, as God commanded? What can you do to better enjoy the benefits of Sabbath keeping?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 4

STATE OF THE DEAD (Psalm 146:4)

What do Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; John 11:11–14; Acts 2:34 tell us about man's condition in death?

The Bible teaches that only God

lives forever (1 Timothy 6:16). Humans without God are subject to death. Jesus taught that death is a sleep that ends in one of two resurrections (a return to life from the dead)—a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (choosing to die for your own sins; John 5:28, 29). William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury, recognized this when he wrote, "Man does not live forever by nature or of right. But he can have eternal life. God has offered him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive [accept] it from God and on God's conditions."—Adapted from *Nature, Man, and God* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1934), page 472.

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

In Matthew 25 and Revelation 14, the words translated "everlasting" and "forever" do not mean never ending. The Greek words *aion* and *aionios* mean lasting as long as the nature of the subject allows. For example, in Jude 7 we are told that the cities Sodom and Gomorrah are suffering the punishment of eternal (*aionios*) fire. But 2 Peter 2:6 says that they were turned into ashes. When we talk about the subject of the words *eternal* or *forever* as we do of the saved who have received eternal life, the words mean a time without end. When we talk about the punishment of the wicked, who do not receive eternal life, the words have the meaning of a limited time period.

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

THURSDAY—MARCH 5

THE SECOND COMING (Matthew 24:5, 24–31)

The word *Adventist* in our church name means that we believe in Christ's second coming so much that it is part of our Christian lifestyle. But our understanding of the Second Coming is far different from Tim LaHaye's or Hal Lindsey's.

What do Matthew 24:5, 24–31 teach about Christ's coming? Why is it very important to know this? What lies about His coming did Jesus warn us about?

John N. Darby in the nineteenth century first introduced the idea that Christ's coming has two parts. This theory has captured the thinking of many Protestants¹³ today. The first part involves a secret rapture when all true Christians will be *caught up* to heaven with Christ. And the second part focuses on Christ's coming seven years later to rule on earth for 1,000 years.

Seventh-day Adventists can find no support from the Bible for splitting the Second Advent into a *rap-*

ture and an *appearing* (*coming*). The New Testament teaches that Jesus' return will be a real, loud, and very seeable event (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Revelation 19:11–21). And, just as important, Jesus warned us against false ideas about how He would come. Jesus clearly knew that false stories would spread wildly about His coming (Matthew 24:24). This is why the Word of God is so clear about how He will return.

The passing of every day brings us one day closer to Christ's return. But the passing of each day also makes His return seem more and more delayed. How do we strike a balance between living with the hope of Christ's return and living in our daily routines?

FRIDAY—MARCH 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "Can Our Dead Speak to Us?" pages 551–562; "God's People Delivered [Freed]," pages 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

During the early years, many of our pioneers (first Adventist believers) became imbalanced in their preaching of the law. So, Ellen G. White wrote in 1890: "As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa which did not have dew nor rain. We must preach Christ in the law."—Adapted from *Review and Herald*, March 11, 1890. At the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference meeting, E. J. Waggoner

13. Protestants—Christians who are not members of the Catholic Church.

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and A. T. Jones did just that. The important part of their message was “to support the truth that the only way righteousness [holiness] can be received is through a living faith in the Lamb of God. His blood bled on Calvary’s cross as payment for the sins of the world. No one can enter the kingdom of God without wearing the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. This robe cannot be bought with silver or gold nor earned by good works. This message was a clear call to make Christ and His righteousness the center of all our living and our preaching. It put special focus on righteousness by faith as a real personal experience rather than just a theory.”—A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory 1888–1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1996), page 35. Waggoner also taught that our obedience never can satisfy God’s law. He preached that Christ’s righteousness alone is the basis of our acceptance by God. He pointed out that we always need the covering of Christ’s righteousness, not just for our past sins. Ellen G. White strongly supported Waggoner. She called his sermons “a most precious [important] message.”—Adapted from *Testimonies*¹⁴ to Ministers, page 91.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Is there any teaching of the Seventh-

day Adventist Church that is based on anything other than our understanding of the Bible? In other words, is there any doctrine that comes from Ellen G. White rather than the Bible? We believe in the gift of prophecy. But why must we as a people make sure that we know all our teachings are from the Bible and the Bible alone? What problems are created if we depend on Ellen G. White to create our doctrines? At the same time, why is she so helpful to us in clearing up and understanding the Bible?

❷ Think about the idea that Sabbath keeping teaches about the rest we have in Christ. It also teaches that our salvation is based on Christ’s works for us, not on our own. How does this help answer the false charge that by keeping the Sabbath, we are denying the gospel¹⁵ of God’s grace?

❸ Even critics (attackers) of Ellen G. White admit that she played a big part in moving the Adventist Church away from legalism toward a more Cross-centered view of salvation. This would be a strange thing for a *false prophet* (what many of these same people blame her for) to do, would it not? How could these critics attack Ellen G. White for being a false prophet, but admit that she did lead the church away from legalism?

14. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

15. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.