

Redemption



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 20:1–3, Jer. 4:23–26, 1 Cor. 4:5, Rev. 20:7–15, Phil. 2:9–11, 2 Pet. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (*Revelation 21:4, NKJV*).

People often ask, why did evil arise in the first place? Central to the answer is freedom. True freedom, true *moral* freedom, involves risk, because if persons (or beings) are truly free, then they must have the option to do wrong.

Fair enough, but the next question arises: Why then didn't God just blot them out when they did wrong and spare the rest of us the horrible results of rebellion?

The answer gets to the heart of the great controversy. As we will see this week, the Lord runs a kind of “open” government, and though much about Him and His ways are mysterious, He will resolve the great controversy in a way that will forever end all questions about His self-denial, goodness, justice, love, and law.

Indeed, we will be given a thousand years to get answers, at least answers regarding the fate of the lost (we'll have an eternity for the rest). After the Second Coming, the redeemed will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. And, even more incredible, they will have an active role in judgment. Let's look at the final steps in the long-playing drama of the great controversy.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 26.

Binding Satan

Read Revelation 20:1–3. What is being described here, and what hope does it offer us?

Binding or being bound is used in a number of ways in the Bible. On the simplest level it applies to a prisoner. Jesus loosed many who had been bound by Satan. Furthermore, the act of binding is used to describe the power that God gives the church over evil, making it a symbol of judgment.

When dangerous criminals are captured, it is necessary to bind them. However, many times in the Bible when people are bound, they are hardly criminals. John the Baptist was put in chains because he denounced the moral evils of the king (*Matt. 14:3, 4*). Jesus was bound in the Garden (*John 18:12*), at His trial (*John 18:24*), and in death (*John 19:40*). Paul (*Acts 21:33*) and Peter (*Acts 12:6*) were both bound.

Jesus also spent a lot of face-to-face time with people whom Satan had bound. There was a demoniac bound with broken chains on his wrists and ankles (*Mark 5:3, 4*). Before Jesus released him from demons, nobody could restrain the evil. He met a woman whose back had been bent over, and He released her (*Luke 13:11, 12, 16*). He also released Lazarus from the tomb and from his grave clothes (*John 11:43, 44*). Then there was Barabbas, who, although chained, was released so that Jesus, not he, would be crucified (*Mark 15:7–15*). In all of these instances, we see Satan either trying to keep people imprisoned with affliction or binding the innocent in order to allow evil to flourish. But we also see Jesus breaking the bonds of death in order to bring release and freedom to a world hopelessly imprisoned by Satan. In the end, Satan is bound and cast into outer darkness (*Rev. 20:1–3*).

Also, part of Jesus' mission to free those whom Satan bound was to empower His followers. He assured them that Satan ("the strong man") could be bound and his house plundered (*Matt. 12:26–29, NKJV*). In other words, Satan has no power against Christ and Christ's followers because Christ has released His people from the bonds of Satan.

As Paul observed, "the word of God is not chained" (*2 Tim. 2:9, NKJV*). It is the means whereby Jesus silenced Satan (*Matt. 4:4, 7, 10*), and we can use the same power to resist him, as well.

What promises can you claim that will free you from whatever chains the evil one seeks to bind you with?

The “Why” Questions

Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as being “without form, and void.” This same phrase is repeated by Jeremiah to describe the earth after its destruction by the seven last plagues and the Second Coming, with every city on earth “broken down at the presence of the LORD” (*Jer. 4:26, NKJV*). In Jeremiah’s account, there is no man (*Jer. 4:25*); in John’s account, Satan is unable to deceive anyone (*Rev. 20:3*).

The dramatic and universal effects of the Second Coming explain what is happening here in Revelation. First, Jesus promises to take His followers to a place He left earth to prepare (*John 14:1–3*). Paul adds the detail that those followers include the living and those who have been resurrected from their graves (*1 Thess. 4:16, 17*). John adds another detail: after the first resurrection at the Second Coming, the remainder of the dead will stay dead until the thousand years end (*Rev. 20:5*).

Read Revelation 20:4. What is being described in this text?

“Judgment was committed to them” (*NKJV*). How could they judge without getting more information than they have now? Before the final destruction of the wicked, the saved are given the opportunity to get many of their “why” questions answered. Even more amazing, the redeemed even play a role in judging the lost.

“In union with Christ they judge the wicked, comparing their acts with the statute book, the Bible, and deciding every case according to the deeds done in the body. Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 661.

During this time of opening the records, we will see the countless times that God’s still small voice beckoned the lost with words of kindness and love. How patiently He persisted, only to be repeatedly drowned out by the clatter of the things that this world flaunts as desirable. Silently He waited, longing for an opportunity to be recognized as the One who paid an infinite price so they could have life, but instead they chose death. Is there anything in your life that is keeping you from hearing His voice? He is still patiently waiting for you. Choose life.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What is promised to us here in regard to the Second Coming? How can you lean on this promise now, when, no doubt, you have a lot of unanswered questions?

Final Judgment

In Bible times, there were two places for judgment: the city gate and before the king's throne. The elders at the gate decided all the small cases, but the king decided all the large issues. His was the final word in ensuring justice. Similarly, the Bible pictures God enthroned as King of the universe, guaranteeing that justice is finally done (*Rev. 20:11–15*).

Read Revelation 20:7–15. How do we understand these momentous events?

Revelation 20 is all about the thousand years; so, this particular judgment occurs in that time frame. It is not the same scene that is described in verse 4, where there are many thrones, because in verse 11 there is only one. Rather than being at the beginning of the thousand years, it is at the end, after the second resurrection (*Rev. 20:5*), and after Satan convinces the hosts of the unsaved to surround the Holy City (*Rev. 20:7–9*). God's great white throne is seen above the city at that point. Present is every person ever born; some inside the city, some outside. This is the time that Jesus spoke about when He said that there would be some people who ask God why they did not make it into God's kingdom (*Matt. 7:22, 23*). It is also the time that Paul spoke of when he said that one day every knee shall bow down before Jesus, "of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and . . . every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (*Phil. 2:9–11, NKJV*).

The purpose of judgment is not to teach God anything that He doesn't already know, for He already knows everything. The purpose is to ensure that everybody knows exactly why God has judged the way that He has. Every person, every angel, will be able to say, "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were" (*Rev. 16:5, NIV*). The saved and lost, both among humans and angels, will see the justice and righteousness of God.

The final act in this drama is the destruction of "Death and Hades," plus those not "written in the Book of Life" (*Rev. 20:14, 15, NKJV*). Jesus holds the keys to Death and Hades (*Rev. 1:18*). Neither of these has any reason to exist any longer. Rather than facing eternal torment, as is so commonly taught, the lost are destroyed. They cease to exist forever, the opposite of eternal life.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Sin and rebellion have been unwelcome intruders. They were never meant to be here. They inflicted incredible damage, but now that the cause of that damage no longer exists, it is time to restore everything to perfection. Not until that happens will the great controversy be completed.

Read Revelation 21:1, 2, 9, 10; 22:1–3. What are the main features of John’s description? What do they mean?

When John describes a new heaven as well as a new earth, he is repeating what Peter said: “The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” (2 *Pet.* 3:10, *NKJV*). As we know so well, the earth is in desperate need of more than just a makeover. Everything here is going to be completely destroyed in order to make way for a whole new existence.

John also talks about no more sea (*Rev.* 21:1). He wrote this from a prison island (Patmos), where the sea prevented his escape. Even in a modern boat, it takes hours to reach the island where John wrote these words. In the earth made new there will no longer be any form of barrier that prevents the redeemed from moving freely or seeing their loved ones.

The New Jerusalem sounds incredibly spectacular. It is described in terms of a city from Bible times because that is all John knew about. However, artists’ impressions that depict it with first-century Roman architecture do it a major disservice because this is a city “whose builder and maker is God” (*Heb.* 11:10).

Our minds can barely grasp these descriptions. How fun it is to let our imagination dwell on what is in store for us though. We can barely begin to imagine it. Also, the huge dimensions of the city inform us that there is no shortage of space. There is room for everyone.

Look around at the beauty of the natural world and consider what it tells us about the character of God, even despite the ravages of sin. How can what we see here now help inspire us to trust in the hope of what we don’t yet see?

No More Tears

Read Revelation 21:3–5. What do the tears in these verses mean?

We are all experienced with what it means to cry. We are also familiar with the action of wiping tears from another's eyes: a mother comforting a child; a close friend comforting a companion; or one parent comforting the other in the midst of tragedy. We also know we do not allow many people to touch our face. So, what does it mean that God touches our face other than that we will have an intimate tie with our Maker?

It is hard to imagine a world without death, sorrow, or crying. Pain, sweat, tears, and death have been the norm for humankind ever since the Fall (*Gen. 3:16–19*). Yet, from that time on God has assured the human race that failure and loss are not all there is to look forward to. God has given little indicators along the way that He will one day redeem us and bless us with His presence.

God does so first with the promise of a Redeemer (*Gen. 3:15*); then with the assurance of His presence in a tabernacle (*Exod. 25:8*); then with the reality of the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us (*John 1:14*); and finally, by placing the throne of the universe in our midst (*Rev. 21:3*).

Many Bible verses give a summary of this covenant assurance, using such words as, "I will be their God," "you shall be my people," and "I will dwell among you." One example is: " 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people' " (*2 Cor. 6:16, NIV*).

Jesus came the first time to neutralize the effects of the broken covenant. Jeremiah described the consequences of the broken covenant this way: " 'Why do you cry about your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable. Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased, I have done these things to you' " (*Jer. 30:15, NKJV*). Thanks to Jesus, that is now history. Revelation 21:3 gives us the climax of the Bible. Perhaps the tears are what we shed over the final annihilation of the lost, but God Himself wipes them away, and sorrow and suffering are forever "passed away."

These texts imply an intimacy with God once we are in heaven. We, though, don't have to wait until then to have that kind of relationship with Him. How can you, even now, walk closely with the Lord?

Further Thought: Think about the millennium, and about our understanding of it. Though we are not told a lot, we are told enough to know a few things. First, the millennium occurs *before* the final destruction of the lost. Second, before that final destruction, the saved spend this time getting a lot of questions answered. So much so that they themselves get to help partake of that judgment. That is, they themselves are judging. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2, NKJV). And: “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:3, NKJV). Also, as we read this week, during this thousand years “judgment was committed to them” (Rev. 20:4, NKJV); that is, the saints. Thus, these two points together reveal an important truth: none of the lost will face final judgment until after the millennium, until the saved not only understand why the wicked are lost but will also play a role in passing judgment upon them. Think about what this tells us about the character of God and the openness of His government: before a single person faces the ultimate fate of the lost, God’s people will get to see very clearly the justice and fairness of God’s final judgment upon them. It’s going to be painful, for sure; but when it’s finished, as we have already seen, we will shout: “‘You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were’” (Rev. 16:5, NIV).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does the reality of the great controversy help us better understand why suffering and death exist now, even though many difficult questions remain unanswered?
- 2 If someone were to ask you: “How can I have a closer and more intimate walk with the Lord?” what would you say?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea of being prepared now for heaven. What does that mean? How do we understand this idea in light of the gospel?
- 4 What are some of the questions that you would like answered? Until they are answered, how do you learn to trust in the goodness and righteousness of God amid so much tragedy?

“Are You an Angel?”

Days were lonely for Florie in her new home, so she decided to visit her neighbors and invite them to study the Bible. Four people agreed. One person was a man named Nildo. When he didn't show up, Florie went to visit him. She knocked on the door, but there was no answer. When she went to the back door, she thought she heard someone moaning. She found the door unlocked and opened it.

She found an old man lying on a bed in a back room. Florie, a nurse's aide, could see that the man's bed was soiled and his clothes were wet. He was hungry and thirsty. Florie bathed and dressed him in fresh clothes. She changed the bed linens and fixed him some porridge. As she cared for him, the man asked, “Are you an angel?”

“No,” she answered. “I'm Florie, and I'm from the Adventist church. I came looking for Nildo. He asked for Bible studies but didn't come today.”

“I want Bible studies, too,” the old man said eagerly.

Florie looked at the man and said gently, “I came to bring a message to you.” Then she sang a song for him.

When she finished singing, he exclaimed, “I know that God sent you here.” Then he added, “Nobody likes me. But today I've learned that God cares for me. I've done some terrible things. I thought that God couldn't forgive me, but now I have hope.”

Florie spent the rest of the afternoon chatting with the old man, whose name was Benedicto. She stayed for several hours, but as she was getting ready to leave, Benedicto's daughter walked in. She was surprised to find Florie there and asked what she was doing.

“I'm Nildo's Bible teacher,” Florie answered. “When he didn't come to the study, I came looking for him but found your father. I saw that he needed help; so, I helped him.”

But the man's daughter wasn't pleased. “If you knew what kind of man he is, you wouldn't have helped him!” she said. “He isn't worth it! He shot my mother, and now she can't use her arm! Just leave him alone to die!”

Florie answered quietly, “If you'll permit, I'm willing to come every day and care for your father.”

“You'll do it alone,” the woman said. Then she continued to paint a black picture of the old man as Benedicto sat on his bed listening. His head was bowed, but she could see tears on his cheeks.

Florie came every day to care for Benedicto. She began giving him Bible studies. She invited Nildo, his sister, and other family members to join them. After the Bible study, she cared for Benedicto's needs.

During the next few months, Nildo learned to forgive his father, and he found grace and forgiveness in Christ. Benedicto, Nildo, and one of his sisters were baptized. Six months later, Benedicto died peacefully.

FLORIEUNICE OLIVEIRA DOS SANTOS *continues her ministry in Salvador, Brazil.*

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 21:4*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand how the great controversy between Christ and Satan is finally resolved, once and for all.

Feel: Rejoice in the assurance that God will bring an end to all pain, suffering, and death.

Do: Exercise individual freedom and choose Christ in order to reign with Him for a thousand years and forevermore.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Final Resolution of the Great Controversy

A As the long-fought great controversy between Christ and Satan comes to its end, what does the binding of Satan, as described in Revelation 20:1–3, tell us about his activities now?

B What is the key to understanding why sin arose in a perfect world? Why did God not destroy Satan as soon as he rebelled against Him?

II. Feel: God Will Wipe Away All Tears.

A In what ways have humans shed tears through the centuries in this sin-infested world? What does it mean to “wipe away all tears”? List physical, emotional, and mental “tears” that we humans often shed.

B Discuss the power of Satan’s deception and how it can potentially blind us to the joy of victory that is ours if we are on God’s side.

III. Do: Recognize That There Is Still Time to Choose Wisely

A What personal commitment is called for in the wake of the impending resolution of the great controversy?

► **Summary:** Each one has a choice: to accept the victory already won by Christ or to reject it and perish with Satan. As the great controversy nears its end, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that indeed God is love.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 21:4*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: During the millennium, the saints reign and judge the world with Christ for a thousand years. As for Satan, he is imprisoned for that same thousand years before he is ultimately annihilated.

Just for Teachers: This week's lesson brings into sharp focus the two divisions of humanity as the great controversy comes to an end. On the one hand, there are Christ's followers, whose names are found written in the book of life. On the other, there are those whose names are not written in the book. There is nothing mysterious about one's name being found in the book. Either we accept Christ's offer of salvation by faith or we are Satan's victims.

Opening Activity: The one thousand years will offer ample time for believers to get answers to all the bewildering questions of the ages such as: Why was evil permitted, resulting in all the pain, suffering, and death that humanity has ever suffered? Begin by asking each member of the class to share stories of physical pain, emotional trauma, and mental anguish that either they or others have gone through. You also may want to share some perspectives related to recent calamities due to hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, terrorist hijackings, explosions, plane crashes, and disappearances.

Consider This: At the end of the great controversy, God will wipe away all tears. What does this mean to you?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This week's study focuses primarily on the thousand years following Christ's return. At the beginning of this period, believers take part in the first resurrection (saved from the condemnation of the second death), Satan is bound and remains in chains for the entire period, and the saints reign with Jesus. At the end of the period, there is the second resurrection and a final judgment against the wicked. The great controversy ends. God's judgment is acknowledged by all to be true and just.

Bible Commentary

I. Reigning With Christ for a Thousand Years *(Review Revelation 21:1–4 with your class.)*

John sees an angel descending from heaven; he has the key to the bottomless pit and a chain with which to bind Satan. The purpose is to stop the devil from his continued work of deception. The devil has been preoccupied with deceiving humans throughout the ages, often unbeknownst to them.

Meanwhile, those who were martyred and those who refused to worship the beast and his image reign with Jesus for one thousand years. It is to this group of saints that the work of judgment is given. Granted, the Greek of Revelation 20:4 is not clear as to whether there are distinct groups who sit on thrones to judge, along with those who were martyred for not worshipping the beast and its image. John simply says that he “saw thrones and they sat on them and judgment was given to them, and the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and of the word of God, and those who did not worship the beast nor its image and did not receive the mark on their forehead or on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (*Rev. 20:4*, author’s translation).

Consider This: What does the fact that Satan has to be forcibly stopped from deceiving “the nations” tell us about his present activity? How aware and wary are individuals, both believers and unbelievers, of Satan’s present preoccupation?

■ *How does 1 Corinthians 4:5, which says that the Lord “will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart” (NRSV), provide comfort in the face of unanswered questions?*

II. Final Judgment and the Second Death *(Review Revelation 20:7–15 with your class.)*

No sooner is the devil temporarily released from his prison house in the bottomless pit (*Rev. 20:7*) than he embarks on his universal scheme of deception. He is still determined to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth (*Rev. 20:8*), those raised in the second resurrection, and now gathers them in order to declare war. Satan’s vast army surrounds the camp of the saints, the New Jerusalem, hoping to take it (*Rev. 20:9*). But his forces are making a fatal mistake: just then fire descends from heaven and consumes them, both Satan and his angels and his deceived ones of

the earth. They are tormented “for ever and ever” in fire and brimstone (*Rev. 20:10*). This verse does not mean that Satan and his followers will suffer unending torment; but, rather, that they will burn until they are consumed.

Then, finally, once the devil and all those who were not found written in the book of life (*Rev. 20:15*) have been eliminated in the cleansing fires of the second death, death itself is done away with (*Rev. 20:14*). The way is made clear for a new heaven and a new earth, as John now describes in Revelation 21.

Consider This: What purpose does judgment in Revelation 20:12 serve?

III. The New Heaven and the New Earth (*Review Revelation 21:1–9 with your class.*)

In Revelation 21:1–4, John describes the new heaven and the new earth at the center of which is the New Jerusalem. The point of this description is to show that God pitches His tent alongside the redeemed. He dwells in their midst as their God and they as His people. God wipes away every tear from their eyes and banishes death, mourning, crying, and pain.

Consider This: What is significant about John not seeing the sea in the new heaven and the new earth (*Rev. 21:1*)?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Each of us must ask ourselves a simple question: **Will my name be found written in the book of life when the great controversy is finally over? Encourage each member of the class to answer this question for himself or herself.**

Thought/Inductive/Application Questions:

❶ What does Revelation 20:1–4 teach us about the reality of Satan and his work of deception? Why is it foolhardy for a person to deny the existence of Satan as many do?

❷ Suppose you are giving a Bible study to one of your neighbors. She asks you why God permitted evil in the world. What would your answer be?

③ If humans have the power and free will to choose, why is it that not as many people as we might expect accept Jesus?

④ Imagine your name being written in the book of life. How does that make you feel? Do you have the assurance that your name is indeed written in the book of life? Why, or why not?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The end of the great controversy includes an examination of books. Individuals whose names are written in the book of life reign with Christ for a thousand years. For one’s name to be written in the book the criterion is simple: he or she must be among those who, by faith, have accepted the righteousness of Christ as his or her own.

Activity: This activity assists class members in appreciating what it feels like for one’s name to be omitted from an important list. For example, individuals may acknowledge those who have been instrumental in completing a task, only for some names to be inadvertently left out. Ask volunteers in the class to write two lists of people who have been important in their lives. One list is created before the volunteers have had a chance to reflect at great length on the list of names. The other list is comprised after more time has been spent reflecting on who should be listed.

The point is to assist each member in noting the names he or she had omitted at first. How would you feel if the people you missed were in the audience? How should they feel? As demoralizing as this may be, imagine your name missing in the book of life. In the case of Christ’s book of life, there will not be any mistaken omissions or inclusions, but rather, only those “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV*).

An “official” version of Jesus’ story is given in the book of Matthew, our topic for second quarter, written by Andy Nash. Matthew, a Jewish believer in Jesus and one of the original disciples of Jesus, recounts the story of Jesus from his own Spirit-inspired perspective. Though the book of Matthew’s theme is the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, Matthew focuses strongly on the fact that Jesus is the Promised Messiah. He wants his readers to know that the redemption of Israel is found in Jesus, the one of whom the prophets spoke and to whom all the Old Testament types pointed. Although his audience was primarily Jewish, his message of hope and redemption speaks to us today as well, a people who must be saved from outside ourselves because we need someone to do for us what we never can do for ourselves. And Matthew tells the story of Jesus doing just that.

Lesson 1—Son of David

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **A Book of Genesis** (*Matt. 1:1*)

MONDAY: **A Royal Line** (*Isa. 11:1, 2; Acts 2:29, 30*)

TUESDAY: **Jesus’ Early Family Tree** (*Matt. 1:2–6*)

WEDNESDAY: **While We Were Yet Sinners** (*Rom. 5:8*)

THURSDAY: **The Birth of David’s Divine Son** (*Matthew 1*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 1:22*

Sabbath Gem: Looking at Matthew’s heart, the Lord chose him, a despised tax collector, to be among His disciples. And when called, Matthew accepted, giving up the life he had before for a new life in Jesus. So, Matthew followed the Lord and kept records, and one day he would give back something not only to his people but to the world—a precious account of the life of Jesus.

Lesson 2—The Ministry Begins

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **John the Baptist and “Present Truth”** (*Matt. 3:1, 2*)

MONDAY: **The Contrast in the Wilderness** (*Matt. 4:1*)

TUESDAY: **The Temptation** (*Matt. 4:1–12*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Land of Zebulun and Naphtali** (*Matt. 4:13–16*)

THURSDAY: **The Call of the Fishermen** (*Matt. 4:18–22*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 4:19*

Sabbath Gem: In Jesus—His pre-existence, birth, life, death, ministry in heaven, and second coming—we can find the answers to life’s most pressing questions.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.