

Worship *the* Creator



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rev. 14:6, 7; Matt. 24:14; Gal. 3:22; Luke 23:32–43; Gen. 22:12; Rev. 14:8–12.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Revelation 14:6, NKJV*).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe in the biblical concept of “present truth” (*2 Pet. 1:12*). It’s basically the idea that God unfolds truth to humanity at the time it is needed, with more and more light being given by the Lord over the ages. The first gospel promise, in Genesis 3:15, revealed to the fallen pair that hope would come through the seed of the woman. The promise to Abraham, that he “shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (*Gen. 18:18, NKJV*) is a fuller revelation of the gospel promise. The coming of Jesus, who proclaimed that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*), is, of course, an even greater revelation of the gospel truth.

Today we believe that the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12 is “present truth” for those living in the last days prior to Christ’s return and the fulfillment of all our hopes as Christians.

This week, we will focus particularly on the first angel’s message, for it contains truths crucial for those who seek to stay faithful amid end-time perils.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 26.

The Universality of the Gospel

Read Revelation 14:6, Matthew 24:14, and 28:19. What is the similar theme found in these texts? How do these texts work together to help us understand how important outreach and witness are to our purpose as a church?

In a sense, one can say that the first angel's message is the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19*) given now in the context of the last days. It is, indeed, "present truth."

Notice that all three texts place an emphasis on outreach to all the world, to "all the nations," and to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." In other words, this message is universal in scope. Every person needs to hear it.

Read Galatians 3:22. What does this text say that helps us to understand why all the world needs to hear the gospel?

The universality of sin explains the universality of our mission and calling. "Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" has done wrong, has violated God's law, and has been "confined . . . under sin" (*NKJV*). Adam's fall in Eden has impacted every human being; no nation or tribe or people has been immune. We all face the immediate consequences of sin, and without a remedy, we all would face the ultimate consequence: eternal death.

That remedy, of course, has been provided: the life, death, resurrection, and heavenly sanctuary ministry of Jesus, who is the only solution to the sin problem. Everyone needs to know the great hope of what God has offered them in Jesus Christ. This is why Seventh-day Adventists have gone throughout all the world, seeking to bring the message of Jesus to those who have not yet heard it.

Why is spreading the gospel message to others so spiritually beneficial for those doing it? That is, why is reaching out to others one of the best ways to be prepared for the coming of Jesus?

The Thief on the Cross and the “Everlasting Gospel”

In Revelation 14:6, the message to be proclaimed to the world is “the everlasting gospel.” It’s a message of hope for people in a world that, in and of itself, offers no hope at all.

Read Luke 23:32–43. How does this story reveal the great hope of the “everlasting gospel” for all sinners?

Writing about the thief, Ellen G. White said that although not a hardened criminal, he had been “seeking to stifle conviction” about Jesus, and so “had plunged deeper and deeper into sin, until he was arrested, tried as a criminal, and condemned to die on the cross.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 749.

Yet, what happened to him? As he hung on the cross, the thief got a glimpse of who Jesus was, and so he cried out: “ ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’ ” (*Luke 23:42, NKJV*).

And how did Jesus respond? Did He say: *Well, friend, I’d like to help you, but you should not have stifled your convictions by plunging deeper and deeper into sin?* Did Jesus quote one of His earlier sermons: “ ‘Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ ” (*Matt. 5:20, NKJV*)? Did Jesus, in any way, bring up the thief’s past mistakes?

No. Instead, Jesus turned to this criminal, this thief with a faulty character who had nothing to offer in the way of righteousness and who earlier had been cursing Him (*Matt. 27:44*). Seeing him as a new man, Jesus said (essentially): *I am telling you, right now, I am giving you the assurance, right now, that your sin, your crimes, your faults, are forgiven, and thus “ ‘you will be with Me in Paradise’ ”* (*Luke 23:43, NKJV*).

Here is the “everlasting gospel,” the foundation of the first angel’s message. Without this truth, nothing else we teach about the law, the Sabbath, or the state of the dead matters. What good are these teachings without the “everlasting gospel” at the heart of them all?

What hope can you take for yourself from this story?

Fear God and Give Glory to Him

After talking about the proclamation of the “everlasting gospel” to all the world in Revelation 14:6, the first angel expands on this message. Therefore, as we proclaim the “everlasting gospel,” we must include the truths that are part of this gospel message for this time. In other words, “present truth” for the last days also includes Revelation 14:7.

Read Revelation 14:7. What does it mean when the angel says, “Fear God, and give glory to [H]im”? How are we to do that? How do these concepts fit in with the gospel?

To fear God and to give Him glory are not unrelated concepts. If we truly fear God in the biblical sense, we will give glory to Him. One should lead directly to the other.

Read the following texts. How do they help us to understand what it means to “[f]ear God” and how that relates to giving glory to Him? *Gen. 22:12, Exod. 20:20, Job 1:9, Eccles. 12:13, Matt. 5:16.*

In the verses above, the idea of fearing God is linked to obeying Him, and when we obey God, when we do what is right, we bring glory to Him. Although it is often said that to fear God is to be in awe of God and to reverence Him, it should go deeper than that. We are fallen. We are sinners. We are beings who deserve death. Who hasn’t at moments faced the startling realization of the evil of their deeds and what they would deserve at the hands of a just and righteous God for those deeds? This is *the fear of God*. And it is the fear that drives us, first, to the Cross for forgiveness and, second, to claim the power of God to cleanse us from the evil that, if it were not for the Cross, would cause us to lose our souls (*see Matt. 10:28*).

What has been your own experience with fearing God? How could a good dose of this fear be good for us spiritually and help us to take our faith and what God asks of us more seriously?

The Hour of His Judgment Has Come

In the first angel's message, the idea of fearing God and giving glory to Him is linked to judgment (*Rev. 14:7*). If the Bible is clear about any teaching, it is clear that God is a God of justice and of judgment. One day the judgment and justice so lacking in this world will indeed come.

No wonder people need to fear God.

And that's why the "everlasting gospel" also includes the reality of judgment. What is the relationship between these two elements? The gospel means "good news." This means in turn that although we are all sinners and have broken God's law, when Judgment Day comes, like the thief on the cross, we will not face the penalty and punishment that we deserve for our sin and lawbreaking.

Read the following texts and then ask yourself: **How well would I do standing on my own merits?** *Matt. 12:36, Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 2:6, 1 Cor. 4:5.*

The God who knows the number of hairs on our heads is going to judge the world. But that is precisely why the "everlasting gospel" is such good news. Judgment comes, but there is "no condemnation" (*Rom. 8:1*) for the faithful followers of Jesus, those "washed," "sanctified," and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (*see 1 Cor. 6:11*), because Jesus Christ is their righteousness, and His righteousness is what gets them through that judgment.

"Man cannot meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims of His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 471.

What does the reality of judgment teach us about our utter need for forgiveness? How can you learn to give to others who have wronged you the kind of grace and forgiveness God offers us through Jesus?

Worship the One Who Made the Heavens and Earth

Read again Revelation 14:6, 7. What are the specific elements found in the first angel’s message, and how do they relate to one another?

Along with the gospel, the call to witness to the world, and the call to “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him’ ” (*NKJV*) comes the call to worship God as the Creator. And no wonder. All these other aspects of “present truth”—the everlasting gospel, the call to witness, the judgment—what do they mean apart from God as our Creator? These truths, and all other truths, arise from the foundational truth of the Lord as the One who has made all things. By worshiping the Lord as Creator, we are getting back to basics. We are getting back to the foundation of what it means to be human and alive and unlike any other earthly creatures—to be made in the image of God. By worshiping the Lord as Creator, we acknowledge our dependence upon Him for existence and for our future hope. This is why the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is so important. It’s a special acknowledgment that God alone is our Creator, and we worship only Him. That is, along with the gospel, along with the judgment, the call to worship the Lord as Creator is given prominence here.

Read Revelation 14:8–11. What do these verses say that could help us to understand the importance of worshipping the Lord as Creator?

As final events unfold, pressure to worship the beast and his image rather than the Creator will come upon all the world. If we consider the fearsome warning about the fate of those who worship the beast and his image, we can better understand the emphasis on worshipping God as Creator, as the only One worthy of human worship. In the final crisis, this truth will become more crucial than ever.

Take time to dwell on the incredible marvels of the created world. What can and do they teach us about the One who created it all, and why He alone is worthy of our worship?

Further Thought: Bible students have long seen a link between the call in Revelation 14:7 to “worship [H]im who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water” (*RSV*), and the fourth commandment, in Exodus 20:11, when the Sabbath points back to the fact that “‘in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them’” (*NKJV*). However closely related the language, there is a change in which the text in Revelation points to the Lord as the One who made “the fountains of water.”

Author John Baldwin argues, “Assuming divine intentionality behind the phrase ‘fountains of water,’ why does Jesus have the messenger break the parallel listing of things mentioned in Exodus 20:11? Why does the angel mention ‘fountains of water’ and not some other class of created thing, such as trees, birds, fish, or mountains?”

“Perhaps the reference to ‘fountains of water’ in the context of a divine announcement of the arrival of a unique time of divine judgment seeks to direct the reader’s attention to a previous period of divine judgment. . . . Perhaps God intends that the possible allusion to the flood by the words ‘fountains of water’ should underscore the truth that He is indeed a God of judgment, as well as a God of everlasting faithfulness and graciousness (both evidenced in the narrative of the Genesis flood). If so, the personal and spiritual implications of the flood connotation triggered by the phrase ‘fountains of water’ might be to encourage the reader to take seriously the momentous arrival of a new end-time process of individual divine judgment now announced by the first messenger of Revelation 14.”—John Baldwin, ed., *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), p. 27.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Isaiah 53:6 reads: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” The word in Hebrew used in this text for “all of us” is *cullanu*. In the same text, Isaiah says that the Lord laid upon Jesus “the iniquity of us all.” The word for “us all” here, too, is *cullanu*. How does this show us that no matter how great the sin problem is, the solution to it is more than sufficient to solve it?
- 2 What other lessons can we learn from the story of the thief on the cross? Suppose the thief received a pardon and was brought down from the cross and survived. How different a life do you think he would have lived? What does that answer tell us about the power of Christ to change our lives?

“House on Fire”

by Andrew McChesney, Adventist Mission

Dan Frein, a utilities company manager in the U.S. state of Michigan, stopped attending the Protestant church of his youth for about 20 years. His wife, raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home, also wasn't an active church member.

But the day came that Dan wanted to return to church, so he walked into his former church on a Sunday morning. What he saw and heard surprised him. This was not the church that he had left. He found that the church now endorsed homosexuality and other nonbiblical practices that it had preached against two decades earlier.

Disappointed, Dan told his wife that he longed to find a church that followed the Bible. His wife remembered the Adventist church in the nearby town of Muskegon, where her parents were members.

The couple began to attend worship services with her parents. At the same time, Dan read every Ellen White book that he could find.

On a Tuesday night after prayer meeting, he stopped the pastor in the parking lot.

“I want to let you know that I am ready,” he said.

“Ready for what?” asked the pastor.

“I am ready to be baptized,” Dan said. “I’ve been reading Ellen White’s books. I am ready, and I am on board.”

The pastor went through baptismal studies and found that Dan did know and agree with the church’s teachings. Dan was baptized, his wife was rebaptized, and their son also was baptized.

“I praise the Lord that Dan came in despite our lack of personal outreach,” said the pastor, Kameron DeVasher. “I know that personal ministries work and evangelism are absolutely not dead, but I have a feeling that there are a lot more Dans out there, just waiting to be gathered in.”

He said Dan’s experience also speaks of the importance of Ellen White’s books. “I think that there is power in the Spirit of Prophecy, so we should feel no shame in sharing those books,” he said.

As for Dan, he has led multiple evangelistic campaigns at the church, served as a deacon, and participated in prison ministries. Members describe him as “a house on fire.”

“This is a person who has been in the church less than five years, and he is preaching the Word and winning souls,” Pastor DeVasher said. “He reminds us that the work of the local church is first and foremost evangelism, winning souls, and discipleship, and every member should have a part in that work.”



Pastor KAMERON DEVASHER

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand the message of the first angel and relate it to the “present truth” of the end times.

Feel: Awaken the sense of the fear of God, in order to deepen and intensify a sense of awe and reverence.

Do: Proclaim this message to the world, and worship God as Judge and Creator.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Present Truth of the First Angel

A What is the present truth of the first angel?

B Why is the first angel’s message the “present truth” for the end times?

II. Feel: The Fear of God

A What does it mean to fear God? And why should we fear Him?

B How does the fact that God created the world and is the Judge of the world inspire awe and reverence?

III. Do: The Proclamation of the Message

A How should we proclaim the message of judgment?

B How should we proclaim the message of Creation?

► **Summary:** The first angel’s message is relevant and universal because it concerns the fate of the world.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 14:7; Daniel 7:9–11, 26*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: If worship is the heart of spiritual life, it should inspire and nurture our spiritual lives daily—when we pray, study the Scriptures, and are engaged in corporate worship.

Just for Teachers: The first angel’s message enjoins us to “fear God.” A component of the fear of God involves an acute awareness of God’s presence. Impress upon the hearts of your students how this awareness should affect our daily lives at any moment and place.

Opening Discussion: How does the message of judgment apply to human history?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The first angel’s message is made of two exhortations followed by an explanation. The first exhortation is to “fear God and give glory to Him” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*) because of the impending judgment. And the second exhortation is to “worship” because of God’s act of Creation. Analyze what this reference to judgment and Creation really means. What lessons are implied by each of these two notions in the context of this passage? Explore also the existential components of the truths of judgment and Creation and what each of these two notions should mean in daily life. Place the message of the first angel within the context of Daniel 7 in order to be able to apprehend the direct apocalyptic intention of the message. What does the association of “judgment and Creation” mean?

Bible Commentary

I. The Message of Judgment (*Review Revelation 14:7 with your class.*)

Both statements to “fear God” and to “give glory to Him” convey the same message. We have to take God seriously. The biblical concept of “fear of God” has nothing to do with superstitious feelings or with the absurd idea that we should serve God by being afraid of Him. The expression “fear God” is often used in the wisdom texts to encourage the disciple to be aware of the presence of God in all his or her dealings in the marketplace

(*Prov. 3:7*). It is the idea that we cannot hide anything from God because He sees everything. In fact, the two verbs “see” and “fear” seem to come from the same root (*yra/raah*). The two notions are related: “Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him” (*Ps. 33:18, NKJV*). It is because God can see everything, even what is hidden, that He is qualified to judge: “Fear God. . . . For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (*Eccles. 12:13, 14, NKJV*).

The biblical concept of “give glory” refers to the Hebrew word *kabod*, which means “heavy.” The first angel’s message is thus an appeal to give “weight” to our religion. The reason given to justify this appeal is the day of judgment. Yet, the first angel’s message is not just about the announcement of the event—“the hour of His judgment.” Rather, the message is a pressing call for righteousness. Later in the same passage, the text refers to the “saints,” who are characterized by their obedience to the commandments of God (*Rev. 14:12; compare with Eccles. 12:13*).

Consider This: Why is the event of judgment good news?

II. The Message of Creation (*Review Revelation 4:11; Psalm 95:6, 7; and Psalm 100:3 with your class.*)

According to the Bible, Creation is the reason we worship. In the book of Nehemiah, worship is justified on the basis of Creation: “You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host. . . . The host of heaven worships You” (*Neh. 9:6, NKJV*). Likewise in the book of Revelation. Within the context of a heavenly scene of worship, the 24 elders give the same reason for worship: “ ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created’ ” (*Rev. 4:11, NKJV*). It is no accident that the Psalms—which reflect the spiritual life of Israel and express their sentiments in Israel’s act of worship—place Creation at the core of worship. The Hebrew verb for worship (*hishtakhaweh*), which appears 25 times in the Psalms, is always found in the context of worship. For the psalmist, only God can be worshiped, because “it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (*Ps. 100:3, NKJV*).

The first biblical report of worship is a direct response to the divine act of Creation. Worship was not only the first human act; worship was the first human response to Creation (*Gen. 2:3*). For this reason, the first angel’s message alludes to the Sabbath commandment, using exactly the same words as the commandment itself (*Exod. 20:8–11*). Henceforth, from Sabbath to Sabbath, humans would remember that Creation was the funda-

mental reason for worship. As Ellen G. White puts it: “ ‘The importance of the Sabbath as the memorial of creation is that it keeps ever present the true reason why worship is due to God.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 437.

Consider This: Why is worship related to Creation? Because worship is the human expression of our faith in Creation, how should that knowledge govern the way in which we worship? In what ways is the seventh-day Sabbath a response to Creation? How does this relation between Sabbath and worship affect the Sabbath?

III. The Message of Judgment and Creation (*Review Ecclesiastes 11:1, 6; 12:13, 14; and Revelation 14:6–13 with your class.*)

The association of judgment and Creation refers to the Day of Atonement, which is the only festival that associates the two notions and places us in the context of Daniel 7. For the Israelites, the Day of Atonement symbolized the purification of the world, the true re-creation. In the text of Leviticus 16, the key text of the Day of Atonement, the expression “all their sins” runs as a leitmotif, or dominant recurring theme (*Lev. 16:21, 22, 30, etc., NKJV*). The Day of Atonement is the moment the sins of “all” Israel receive forgiveness. The Day of Atonement was the only time the totality of the people of Israel and the whole space of the sanctuary were completely purified (*Lev. 16:17, 33, 34, NKJV*).

With this sense of re-creation in mind, Daniel uses the expression “evenings and mornings” to designate the final Day of Atonement at the end of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (*Dan. 8:14*). This technical phrase occurs only in the context of Creation (*Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31*). Yet, our passage alludes to more than just Creation. The unexpected mention of the springs of water against the regular pattern with the three traditional components of Creation (heavens, earth, the sea) is particularly meaningful. The springs of water designate the New Jerusalem, where the Lamb leads His people (*Rev. 7:17, 22:17*). Likewise, the book of Ezekiel describes the New Jerusalem abounding with springs of water (*Ezek. 47:1–12*).

Another interesting feature of the apocalyptic text that carries the three angels’ messages is that its placement in the book of Revelation parallels that of the apocalyptic text in Daniel 7. How striking that the vision of the three angels’ messages in the book of Revelation parallels the vision of the judgment in Daniel. Specifically, the vision of the three angels’ messages is located in the same place in the sequence of vision as the judgment is located in Daniel, following the same earthly vision of the four animals (*Rev. 13:2–18; compare with Dan. 7:1–8*) and preceding the coming of the Son of man (*Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 14:14*). This placement means that the proclamation of the three angels’ messages on earth parallels the Day of Atonement in heaven.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What lessons are implied by the fact that the human proclamation of the three angels' messages on the earth parallels the divine Day of Atonement in heaven?
- ❷ What does the message mean that the end time is a Day of Atonement?
- ❸ Why does John add the unusual expression "sources of water"?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: To say that we live today in the time of the Day of Atonement will not be an easy task. Explain the characteristics of the Day of Atonement. Show the rich lessons of this truth. Emphasize the existential and practical aspects of this message. Analyze Daniel 12:12 and discuss the happiness dimension of the Day of Atonement message.

Application Questions:

- ❶ How does the Day of Atonement message apply to the daily life of the Christian?
- ❷ Does the message mean that we are required to live an ascetic life of deprivation? Explain.

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The doctrines of the sanctuary and of the Day of Atonement are two of the most difficult and abstract beliefs to teach. Be aware of the fact that many young people and pastors shy away from attempting to teach them. Do not teach these subjects dogmatically. Find ways to make them insightful and surprising.

Activities:

- ❶ Bring a picture or, if possible, have some class members build a sanctuary.
- ❷ Organize a visit to a synagogue on the Day of Atonement. Discuss later with the class the elements that struck them most forcibly about the service.