

Final Restoration of Unity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:1–3, Isa. 11:1–10, Rev. 21:1–5, 1 Thess. 4:13–18, Rev. 22:1–5, Isa. 35:4–10.*

Memory Text: “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NKJV).

One of the greatest promises of the Bible is Jesus' promise to come again. Without it, we have nothing, because our hopes center in that promise and what it means for us. When Christ returns in the clouds of heaven, all that is earthly and human-made and thus temporary and at times meaningless will be swept away. After the millennium in heaven, this earth with its wars, famines, diseases, and tragedies will be made new and become the dwelling place of the redeemed, finally reunited with their Lord and with each other.

Hope in the second coming of Christ is a major theme of the New Testament, and for centuries Christians have longed for the fulfillment of this promise. We as Seventh-day Adventists also long for His return. Indeed, our name itself proclaims that hope.

In this final lesson, we look at this promise and what it means for Christian unity. Our oneness in Christ is often challenged by our human limitations and weaknesses. But we will no longer need to seek for solutions to our fragmentation, because there will be no fragmentation. At the Second Advent, we will be one with the Lord, finally reunited and forming one restored family.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 29.

The Certainty of Christ's Return

John 14:1–3 is the best-known promise of Jesus' second coming. What does this promise tell you about the kind of life the redeemed will live on the new earth?

Early Christians considered Christ's return the "blessed hope" (*Titus 2:13, NKJV*). They expected all the prophecies and promises of Scripture to be fulfilled at the Second Advent, for it is the very goal of the Christian pilgrimage. All who love Christ look forward to the day they will be able to share face-to-face fellowship with Him. His words in those verses suggest a closeness and intimacy that we will share, not only with Jesus but with each other, as well.

Christians believe in this promise because the Bible assures us of its fulfillment. We have this assurance because we believe in the words of Jesus, "I will come again" (*John 14:3, NKJV*). Just as Christ's first coming was prophesied, so His second coming also is foretold, even in the Old Testament. Before the Flood, God told the patriarch Enoch that the Messiah's coming in glory would put an end to sin. He prophesied, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (*Jude 14, 15, NKJV*).

A thousand years before Jesus came to this earth, King David also prophesied of the Messiah's coming to gather God's people together. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: 'Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice'" (*Ps. 50:3–5, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus is linked closely to His first advent. The prophecies that predicted His birth and ministry (*for example, Gen. 3:15; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 11:1; Dan. 9:25, 26*) are the foundation for our hope and trust in the promises about His second coming. Christ "has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. . . . So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (*Heb. 9:26, 28, NKJV*).

What are ways that you can even now draw hope and comfort from the promise of the Second Coming?

The Promise of Restoration

Read Isaiah 11:1–10. What promise is given to Israel, and what does it say about the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed?

The Bible begins with the story of the Creation of the earth (*Genesis 1, 2*). It is a description of a beautiful and harmonious world entrusted to our first parents, Adam and Eve. A perfect world and home for the human race, whom God had created. The Bible's last two chapters also speak of God's creating a perfect and harmonious world for redeemed humanity (*Revelation 21, 22*), but this time it is more accurate to say re-creation, the restoration of the earth from the ravages of sin.

In many places the Bible declares that this eternal home of the redeemed will be a real place, not an imagined fantasy or dream. The redeemed will be able to see, hear, smell, touch, and feel a new experience, a new life. The prophecy of Isaiah 11 is a beautiful passage foretelling the coming of the Messiah, who will create a new era. He will end all violence and usher in an eternal peace. The reign of God on this new earth will establish universal harmony.

Read Revelation 21:1–5. What will disappear forever as a result of this new harmony?

Ellen White wrote of what awaits the redeemed:

“As the years of eternity roll, they will bring richer and 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 achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed beat with a stronger devotion, and they sweep the harps of gold with a firmer hand; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 432, 433.

What are ways that we can understand even now the character of God? How does living in harmony and unity with others reveal something about the character and nature of God?

Resurrection and Restored Relationships

From the earliest days of the church the promise of Christ's return has, perhaps more than anything else, sustained the hearts of God's faithful people, especially during trials. Whatever their frightful struggles, whatever their inconsolable sorrows and pain, they had the hope of Christ's return and all the wonderful promises the Second Advent contains.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. What promises are included in this passage? What does this say about the hope of restored relationships?

Christ's second coming will affect all humanity in profound ways. An important aspect of the establishment of God's kingdom is the gathering of the elect. "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (*Matt. 24:31, NKJV*). At the moment of this gathering, the righteous dead will be resurrected and receive immortality (*1 Cor. 15:52, 53*). "The dead in Christ will rise first" (*1 Thess. 4:16, NKJV*). This is the moment we all have been waiting for. The resurrected ones will reunite with those who have been longing for their presence and love. This is how Paul exults at this event: "'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" (*1 Cor. 15:55, NKJV*).

It is not the diseased, aged, disfigured bodies that went down into the grave that come up in the resurrection, but new, immortal, perfect bodies, no longer marked by the sin that caused their decay. The resurrected saints experience the completion of Christ's work of restoration, reflecting the perfect image of God intended at Creation (*Gen. 1:26, 1 Cor. 15:46–49*).

At the moment of Jesus' second advent, when the redeemed dead are resurrected, the righteous alive on earth will be changed and also be given new, perfect bodies. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (*1 Cor. 15:53, NKJV*). So, these two groups of redeemed, the resurrected and transformed righteous, "shall be caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (*1 Thess. 4:17, NKJV*).

In our scientific age, even some Christians try to find a natural explanation for everything, including "miracles." What does the promise of the resurrection teach us about why only the supernatural acts of God can save us?

A New Earth for the Redeemed

“ ‘For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind’ ” (*Isa. 65:17, NKJV*). Both Isaiah and John (*Rev. 21:1*) saw in vision the promised new earth.

Consider John’s description of the fabulous city of the redeemed, the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21:2, 9–27. What do these verses imply about the unity and harmony that will exist in this city?

Read Revelation 22:1–5. The river of life that flows from the throne of God with the tree of life that spans it are two other important features of the new city. What will be their purpose on the new earth?

The tree of life, which Adam lost access to through his transgression (*Gen. 3:22–24*), will be restored by Christ in the New Jerusalem. Access to this tree is one of the promises to those who overcome (*Rev. 2:7*). Its bearing twelve kinds of fruit, a new kind each month (*Rev. 22:2*), might possibly suggest a reason that in the new earth “ ‘from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the LORD’ ” (*Isa. 66:23, NKJV*). The reference to the “healing of the nations” also underscores God’s intent to remove all barriers between people and to restore humanity to its original purpose: to restore all people, tribes, and nations into one undivided family, living in harmony and peace, united to give glory to God.

“ ‘The healing of the nations’ refers figuratively to the removal of all national and linguistic barriers and separation. . . . The leaves of the tree of life heal the breaches between nations. The nations are no longer ‘gentiles’ but are united into one family as the true people of God (*[compare] Rev. 21:24–26*). What Micah anticipated centuries earlier is now being fulfilled: ‘Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. Each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid’ (*Mic. 4:3–4; [compare] Isa. 2:4*). There on the banks of the river of life the redeemed will ‘invite his neighbor to sit’ (*Zech. [3:]10*) with him under the tree of life. The curing quality of the leaves of the tree will heal all wounds—racial, ethnic, tribal, or linguistic—that have torn and divided humanity for ages.”—Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 593.

Life on the New Earth

Read Isaiah 35:4–10 and 65:21–25. How different will life then be from what we experience now?

Several times in the book of Isaiah we read of something new: “new things” (42:9, 48:6), “a new song” (42:10), “a new thing” (43:19), “a new name” (62:2). What is new in chapter 65 is a new order of things. There is peace and harmony among all God’s creatures. The covenant curses on the land for disobedience and rebellion (*see Lev. 26:14–17, Deut. 28:30*) will be canceled forever, because sin is no more. Instead, there will be abundance of blessings, houses to live in, and food to enjoy.

What will life be like in such a beautiful place? Some people wonder if we will be able to recognize our friends and family, after our bodies receive immortality and are fully restored into God’s image. After Christ’s resurrection, His disciples were able to recognize Him. Mary recognized His voice (*John 20:11–16*). Thomas recognized Jesus’ physical appearance (*John 20:27, 28*). The two disciples of Emmaus recognized His mannerisms at the dinner table (*Luke 24:30, 31, 35*). So, if our bodies are to be similar to Jesus’ resurrected body, we certainly will be able to recognize each other, and we can look forward to an eternity of restored relationships. We safely can assume that we will continue our relationships with those we know and love and who are there with us.

“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 truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’ (*Ephesians 3:15*)—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. . . . For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16–18, NKJV). How can we in a world that’s so temporal, so fleeting, learn to reach out and grasp the unseen and eternal?

Further Thought: Ellen G. White, “‘Behold, I Come Quickly,’ ” pp. 355–359, in *Counsels for the Church*. Read the articles “Resurrection,” pp. 1082–1084, and “Heaven and New Earth,” pp. 863, 864, in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*.

“The resurrection and ascension of our Lord is a sure evidence of the triumph of the saints of God over death and the grave, and a pledge that heaven is open to those who wash their robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus ascended to the Father as a representative of the human race, and God will bring those who reflect His image to behold and share with Him His glory.

“There are homes for the pilgrims of earth. There are robes for the righteous, with crowns of glory and palms of victory. All that has perplexed us in the providences of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will then find explanation. The mysteries of grace will unfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying. As we realize the tender care of Him who makes all things work together for our good, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 358.

Discussion Question:

① Though other Christians (but not all) believe in the literal second coming of Jesus, what is unique about the Adventist hope in the second coming of Christ?

② Two fish were swimming when one said to the other, “How’s the water?”

The other fish answered: “What’s water?”

The point is that we can get so used to things that we don’t realize just how prevalent they are. For instance, how can we, as beings born in sin, filled with sin, and living in a sinful world, really get a good grasp on what a wonderful new existence we will have in the new heavens and new earth? Why, whatever the limitations, should we still try to envision what it will be like?

③ There’s no question that, whatever our existence will be like in the new earth, we will live in unity with everyone. What can we do, right now, to help prepare ourselves for when that happens?

Summary: The Bible speaks confidently of the time this earth will be recreated and the ravages of sin erased forever. At last humanity will be restored to its original purpose, and all people will live in harmony. Our current spiritual oneness in Christ, though not now fully realized, will then be a living and eternal reality.

My Bucket List

By BOB STUART

The doctor looked me straight in the eye.

“You have inoperable prostate cancer,” he said. “You have 18 months to live.”

Back at home, my family and I sat down to compile a bucket list of things to accomplish in my last 18 months. One of my four sons said he wanted to go on a cross-country bike ride with me. Another son spoke of running a half marathon in Seattle. My daughter wanted to cut a music CD together.

Then I thought to myself, *What do I want to do?* The answer was easy. I wanted to do more to share the gospel. I decided to bring at least one person to church every month.

My first chance to extend an invitation came two days later when someone asked me, “Bob, how’s your cancer?”

I told her about my bucket list and my plan to invite people to church. “Would you be willing to help me fulfill my bucket list by coming to church next Sabbath?” I said.

The woman looked at me with compassion. She saw this as a last wish. “Of course, I’ll come,” she said.

I have 2,200 clients a year, so I have a golden opportunity when they inquire about my health. It’s so easy to invite them to church.

At least two people—a married couple—have been baptized, and their eldest daughter will be baptized in a few weeks. Today, the wife leads a children’s Sabbath School class and is bringing other people to church.

“I’ll keep your gift going,” she told me. “I’ve got kids and their parents coming to church.”

Anyone can have a bucket list. It might be 20 years or more before you die, but you can start fulfilling that bucket list today by inviting someone to church every month. Imagine how quickly the Seventh-day Adventist Church would grow if each of the church’s 20 million members brought in just one person a year. Conceivably our church membership could double in just 12 months.

Twenty-seven months have passed since the doctor gave me 18 months to live. I have invited many people to church, and about half have come.



The bucket list has become a lot of fun. It’s wonderful to hear people say, “Yes, I will commit to visiting your church.” But the most gratifying moment of all is when they actually come. They hug you and sit with you in church. They become part of your family.

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During the first quarter 2019, we will study Revelation and focus on the book's major parts and themes. Our guide, entitled *The Book of Revelation* by Ranko Stefanovic, reveals Jesus Christ, His life, His death, and His ministry on behalf of His people.

Revelation was written from Christ's perspective. It is only through Him that the book's symbols and images receive their ultimate meaning and significance. Revelation's prophecies are analyzed and applied using the historicist method of prophetic interpretation, which teaches that prophecy follows the flow of history, from antiquity to the end of the world. We will make every effort to derive meaning from the text itself, studying its language, imagery, and context.

Revelation promises blessings to those who read or listen to its words, and who heed and keep the admonitions found therein. As we analyze this book, you are invited to discover the things that you need to hear, and heed, as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lesson 1—The Gospel From Patmos

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Title of the Book** (*Rev. 1:1, 2*)

MONDAY: **The Purpose of the Book** (*Rev. 1:1*)

TUESDAY: **The Symbolic Language of Revelation** (*Rev. 1:1*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Godhead** (*Rev. 1:4, 5*)

THURSDAY: **The Keynote of Revelation** (*Rev. 1:7, 8*)

Memory Text—*Revelation 1:3, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Revelation's prophecies are an expression of God's care for His people. They point us to the shortness and fragility of this life, but also to salvation in Jesus, and our calling to spread the gospel.

Lesson 2—Among the Lampstands

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **On Patmos** (*Rev. 1:9*)

MONDAY: **On the Lord's Day** (*Rev. 1:10*)

TUESDAY: **Encountering Christ on Patmos** (*Rev. 1:12–18*)

WEDNESDAY: **Christ's Messages for Then and Now** (*Rev. 1:11, 19, 20*)

THURSDAY: **Message to the Church in Ephesus** (*Rev. 2:1–4*)

Memory Text—*Revelation 3:21, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The Lord revealed to John some of life's mysteries and the struggles it brings. The sanctuary scene shown to him provided John with the assurance of Christ's presence and care—an assurance that he passed on to the churches and to the succeeding generations of Christians until the end of this world.

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