

Signs That the End Is Near



SABBATH—JUNE 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 2:31–45; Daniel 3:1–12; Revelation 13:11–17; Acts 12:1–17; Matthew 12:9–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “For God did not give us a spirit of fear. He gave us a spirit of power and of love and of a good [healthy; strong] mind” (2 Timothy 1:7, NLV).

THIS WEEK, we will look at two more Bible stories that show us what will happen at the end of earth's history.

First, we will look at the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This story will help us better understand what Revelation 13 says about the end times. Then we will look at the experience of the early Christians in the New Testament. Their experience also can help us understand what to expect between now and the Second Coming.

Both experiences show us people who were filled with a lot of courage. These experiences will help us know how to be at peace during the hard times ahead.

Again and again, Jesus told His followers not to be afraid or to let their thoughts upset them. We must remember that the Bible's special messages about the future are all about Jesus. That's why we will see that these special messages are filled with the same advice Jesus gave His followers while He lived on earth. Jesus told His followers, “ ‘Do not let anything trouble your heart. You believe in God and you must believe in me also’ ” (John 14:1, WE). In other words, end-time happenings will be hard for God's loyal people. But we should think about these future happenings with hope, not fear.



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THE ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF DANIEL 2 (Daniel 2:31–45)

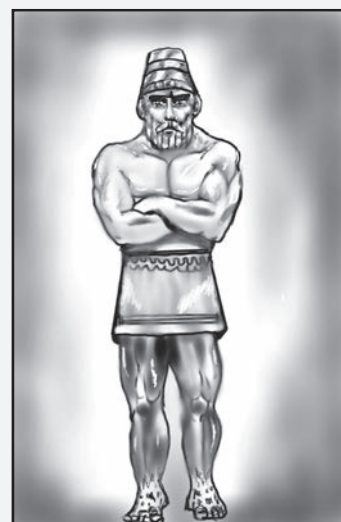
One of the most powerful end-time messages in the whole Bible is Daniel 2. Daniel wrote his book more than 500 years before Jesus was born. In Daniel 2, Daniel tells us about the future history of this earth. Daniel starts with his time and the kingdom of Babylon, then talks about the future kingdoms of Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. These kingdoms will control the earth after Babylon. Finally, Daniel talks about the break-up of Rome into the countries of modern Europe that we see today.

Daniel says this about these European countries: “ ‘You saw iron and clay that were mixed together. The two parts of that kingdom will try to become united by [with] marriage. But that [marriage] will not help them to stay together as one. Iron cannot mix properly [together] with clay’ ” (Daniel 2:43, EASY). This end-time message happened exactly as Daniel said it would. Leaders from the different countries of Europe married the daughters of leaders from nearby countries. With these marriages, these leaders tried to join their countries together. But their people continue to be divided.

What was Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? How did Daniel explain this dream? Read Daniel 2:31–45 for the answers.

The end-time messages in the book of Daniel all follow the same pattern or story that we see in Daniel 2. So, we can expect the rest of the end-time messages in the book of Daniel also to show us this same pattern. We see four worldwide kingdoms. Then the fourth kingdom divides into two parts. These two parts can never unite into one kingdom again. In other words, the end-time messages show us history from ancient times to our time. This explanation for end-time messages in the Bible is named the historicist rule. Seventh-day Adventists use the historicist rule to understand end-time happenings in the Bible. The historicist rule is very important for helping us have a correct understanding of the end times in the Bible. We must use the historicist rule when we study the book of Revelation. Then we will correctly understand its end-time messages.

How does Daniel 2 prove to us that God knows the future? How does Daniel 2 show us that God is in charge of the future, too?



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WORSHIPING THE STATUE (Daniel 3:1–12)

The king's command helps us understand that the wish to do things our way can blind us to God's truth about how the worldwide war between good and evil will end.

After Daniel explained King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the king was loyal to Daniel's God for a time (read Daniel 2; pay special attention to verses 46–48). But the king's loyalty didn't continue for long.

Read about King Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 3:1–12. Why did the king make the statue all gold? Why did the king command everyone to worship the statue? What do you think these two things meant?

The king refused to obey God's message about the future (Daniel 2). The king showed his refusal to obey with the statue he built on the plain of Dura. The king made the whole statue gold. The king's message? Babylon will be an everlasting kingdom that will not end. Also, Nebuchadnezzar will always be king. The king announced he would kill anyone who dared to question his idea. The king's command helps us understand that the wish to do things our way can blind us to God's truth about how the worldwide war between good and evil will end.

In some ways, King Nebuchadnezzar behaves the same as Lucifer. Both the king and Lucifer were proud and self-important, and they both wanted to be a success. Both of them fought against God's control and government. In other ways, Nebuchadnezzar and Lucifer were very different from each other. After some time, Nebuchadnezzar felt sorry for his sins. He confessed his faults and announced his faith in God. We have good reasons to believe that we will see Nebuchadnezzar in the kingdom he fought so hard against.

Read Daniel 3:17, 18. In these verses, the three Hebrew youths stand against the king's command. What does their courage teach us about faith? What does this story teach us that our faith may ask of us at times?

Think how easily these three men could have made excuses for bowing down. But they were willing to be burned alive instead. Does that mean they were a little crazy? Couldn't they have just faked their worship? They could bow down, pretend to tie their shoelaces, and pray to their own God in their hearts, right? Did they really need to risk their lives? They thought so, even if their words show that they knew they may not escape with their lives.

WORSHIPING THE STATUE, AGAIN (Revelation 13:11–17)

Bible students see a connection between Daniel 3 and the end-time happenings in the book of Revelation. And for a good reason, too. Daniel 3 talks about the command to worship the statue. Whoever doesn't worship it will be killed (Daniel 3:15). In the same way, the book of Revelation teaches us about the command to worship another statue. Whoever doesn't worship it also will be killed. "The second beast [animal] was given power to give life to the idol [false god] of the first beast. Then the idol could speak and order [command] all those [people] who did not worship it to be killed" (Revelation 13:15, ERV).

What is the fight about in the end times? Read Revelation 13:11–17; Revelation 14:9, 11, 12; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; and Revelation 20:4 for the answer.

God commands His people to worship Him because "He made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water [places where water comes out of the earth]" (Revelation 14:7, ERV). God's people must worship Him and not the beast and its false god. The three Hebrew boys must make the same choice. They refuse to worship anything other than the God who made them. What happened in Daniel 3 and what will happen in Revelation 13 may be different in some ways. But the command to worship a false god in both chapters, and not the God of heaven, is the same.

Read Romans 1:18–25. (Do you see the connection between Romans 1:18 and Revelation 14:9, 10 about God's anger?) Why is God angry? What is the worship of the false god really about?

Worship doesn't only mean bowing down and offering a gift of sweet-smelling perfume (but it can include these things). We worship whatever we serve or give our loyalty to. Think about who God is and what He did for us in Jesus. God made us. He gave Jesus to die for our sins. These reasons are enough for us to worship Him. Anything else we worship is a false god. Maybe this idea helps explain Jesus' words: " 'Whoever is not with me is against me. And anyone who does not work with me is working against me' " (Matthew 12:30, ERV). End-time happenings will show the truth of Jesus' words in the life of everyone on earth.



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ATTACKS AGAINST THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (Acts 12:1–17)

The New Testament also helps us understand end-time happenings. Life wasn't easy for Christians in New Testament times. Many Jews hated Christians because they believed the Christians were a danger to the Jewish religion. The Kingdom of Rome also hurt Christians during this time. "People and demons alike attacked the followers of Jesus. When they hurt Jesus' followers, they hurt Him. Some of the people who attacked Jesus' followers were the followers of false gods and people who worshiped nature. These people understood that if anyone accepted the Good News about Jesus, they would stop worshiping the gods in their temples and stop making offerings to them on their altars. So, these followers of false gods decided to destroy Christianity."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 39, adapted.

A story in the book of Acts (Acts 12:1–17) shows us in a powerful way what God's people can expect in the end times (read Revelation 13).

Read Acts 12:1–17. What parts of this story help you better understand some of the things that will happen in the end times?



The angel releases Peter from jail.

King Herod Agrippa chopped off James's head. Peter was next. In those days, you were killed for being a Christian. One of the most surprising parts of the story is that Peter is sleeping during what should be the worst night of his life. He slept so deeply that "the angel struck Peter on his side" (Acts 12:7, NIV) to wake him up!

The angel, of course, releases Peter from jail. Then Peter went to a meeting of Christians, who were praying for him. But when Peter showed up, the Christians had trouble believing Peter was really free. The Bible says they were surprised. How often do we pray for something, the same as these Christians, and then hardly dare to believe that God will answer us?

During this time, some Christians were saved from death. Other Christians were killed. As we near the end of human history, the same thing will happen. Peter also died for his faith a few years later (read John 21:18, 19).

THE MARK OF THE BEAST (Matthew 12:9–14)

As the years pass, some people have started to doubt the Adventist message about the end times. They start to wonder if worldwide Sunday worship will really happen. They doubt if the Sabbath is important in the final fight between good and evil.

The book of Revelation tells us plainly what will happen: we will worship God or worship the beast and his false god. The final test must be about something that shows our loyalty to God. When we worship God on the Sabbath, we show our loyalty to the God who made us. The Sabbath is as old as the Garden of Eden itself (read Genesis 2:1–3). So, we should not be surprised if the final test is about worship. For sure, the Sabbath will be important in the end times. The beast says that he changed the Sabbath commandment from the seventh day to Sunday. God didn't give the beast power permission to make this change. With these ideas in mind, we can understand why the day we worship on will be the final test. We will worship the God who made us (Revelation 14:6, 7). Or we will worship the beast. The New Testament helps us understand more about the final test.

Read the following verses: Matthew 12:9–14 and John 5:1–16. Why did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?

In Matthew 12, Jesus heals a man with a dried up, crippled hand (Matthew 12:9–13). When Jesus heals the man on the Sabbath, what do the Jewish leaders do? They “made plans to kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:14, ERV). Did you see that? **They wanted to kill Jesus because of the seventh-day Sabbath.** In John 5:1–16, Jesus does another healing miracle on the seventh day. Then “the Jewish leaders made trouble for Jesus because he did this [miracle] on the Sabbath day” (John 5:16, WE). So, they tried “to kill Him” (verse 18, NKJV).

Death because of man-made laws against healing on the Sabbath? (Nothing in the Bible says healing on the Sabbath breaks God's law. In the same way, nothing in the Bible teaches that Sunday replaced the Sabbath.) Of course, the problem about the Sabbath in these verses isn't the same as in the end times. But these verses help us understand that the test in the end times will be a choice between man-made laws and God's law. In both the story in John 5 and in Revelation 13, the test will be about the Sabbath.

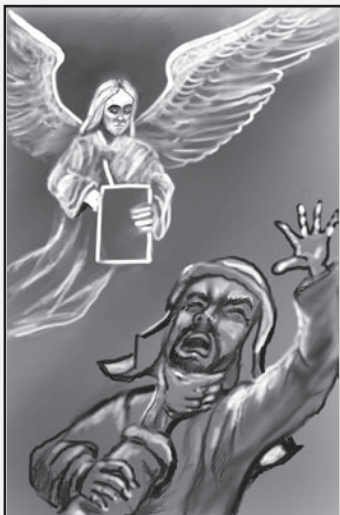


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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pages 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

“In all ages, God worked with His angels to help save His people. Angels have an important part in the work that God’s people do. Angels wear clothes that are as bright as lightning. Angels travel as men. Angels appear as humans to men of God. Angels rested, as if tired, under the oak trees at noon. They accepted hospitality from human homes. They served as guides to travelers. Angels, with their own hands, started the fires at the altar. They opened prison doors and helped the servants of the Lord to escape. Angels who wore the battle suit of heaven came to roll away the stone from the Savior’s grave.

“Angels who appear as men are often in the meetings of God’s holy people. Angels also visit the places where evil people meet together. Angels went to Sodom. There, they made a record of the things the people of the city did. The angels wanted to learn how evil the people were. The Lord loves to show mercy. For a few people who really serve Him, God will protect big crowds of people and stop disasters from happening. These sinners do not understand that they owe their lives to the loyal few that they make fun of and hurt.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 631, 632, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Read 2 Timothy 1:7. Talk about the end-time happenings and signs that worry you the most. The Bible warns us that we will be hurt for our faith. This warning scares many people. How do we replace the spirit of fear with hope?
- ② Right now, we may not see how Sabbath and Sunday will become the final test. But look at how fast things on this earth can change. What should this knowledge teach us about why we must put our faith in the Bible and not in what happens in the news?
- ③ Think about Daniel 2 and 7. All the kingdoms came and went just as the Bible said. Today, when we look back at history, we can see that only one more kingdom is to come. Which kingdom is that? Why can we trust that it will happen just as God says?

A DAILY FIGHT

17-year-old Anders complained that he heard voices. Anders was a student at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School in the state of Arizona in the United States. Loren Fish was a health worker at the school. Loren met with Anders and decided that Anders's problem wasn't in his mind. Teachers and school workers prayed.

But then Anders started acting the same as a person filled with demons. When Anders went home during school break, he went to an Indian festival. Back at school, the small teenager started to show super-human strength. Holbrook's teachers had trouble controlling Anders. Other times, Anders's eyes rolled back in his head. Then he asked the manager for the boys, "What does Legion mean?" Anders heard the word "Legion" in his head. The manager told Anders how Jesus healed a man filled with evil spirits. Jesus asked the man to tell Him his name. "The man answered, 'My name is Legion, because there are many spirits inside me'" (Mark 5:9, ERV). Legion is a name that means very many. A legion was about 6,000 men in the Roman army. One of the school workers asked Anders if he would like for the teachers to pray over him. The boy said yes.

The teachers came and stood around Anders and started to pray for him. All of a sudden, the boy moaned and fell to the floor. No one was sure about what to do. Many teachers prayed out loud while other teachers sang hymns. Another group of teachers told Anders to pray, "Jesus, help me." Anders started to laugh at the teachers. It was a strange, evil laugh.

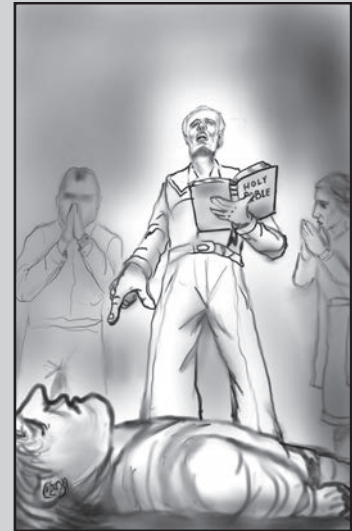
The school's business manager for growth was Diana Fish. Diana felt ashamed. She thought, "The devil knows that we don't know what to do." Diana pulled out her cellphone, and searched on Google for information on how to help someone filled with a demon. Diana found an article named "Ellen White on How to Face Evil Spiritual Powers." Diana said, "Listen, everyone. We need to command the spirit to leave in Jesus' name."

Right away, a teacher commanded the spirit, "Come out in the name of Jesus." Then Anders said, "Jesus, help me!" All the teachers cried out, "Praise God!" Anders screamed. The school's business manager felt something the same as a strong wind go past her out of the room. Then peace filled the place. Anders lay crying on the floor. Two teachers brought in a cot. Anders slept for the rest of the afternoon. After that, Anders was better and went home. When he came back to school, the problem started again. Then Anders left the school.

Diana said, "We continue to pray for Anders. We know he's in a spiritual fight. The fight isn't over. We see the worldwide war between God and Satan daily in our students' lives."

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



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