

The End of the Earth Is Near



SABBATH—MAY 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation 6:12–17; Matthew 24:37–39; 2 Peter 2:4–11; Jude 5–8; Ezekiel 16:46–50; Genesis 18:17–32; Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 26, 27.

MEMORY VERSE: “These things happened to them to teach other people. They [these experiences and stories] were written in the holy writings to teach us who are living in the last days of the world [earth]. Therefore [so], when a person thinks, ‘I am strong; I can stand,’ let that person be careful, or he will fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12, WE).



Over the next couple of weeks, we will study some important stories to see what they can teach us about the Second Coming, God's work as judge, and other end-time happenings.

THE BIBLE is filled with stories about God's people. These stories help us better understand the end times and present truth. Present truth is the Bible truth that we need most for our time. Some of the Bible stories help us understand the end-time messages in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

In these Bible stories, we see how God led things to show us what will happen in the end times. Some of these stories include Sodom and Gomorrah and the Flood. These stories clearly explain what will happen during the end times. The meaning of other stories is not so plain. We need to read them more carefully to understand the Bible truths that God gives to us in them.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will study some important stories to see what they can teach us about the Second Coming, God's work as judge, and other end-time happenings. As we shall see, Jesus is the most important part of these stories. Everything the Bible teaches us about the end times begins and ends with Jesus.

THE LAMB'S ANGER (Revelation 6:12–17)

Read about the people in Revelation 6:12–17. These people live during the end of earth's history. What do you notice about the way they act and feel when they see what is happening?

Do you see that the lost aren't saying, "What's going on?" or "What's happening?" The lost seem to know exactly what's happening. They name Jesus the Lamb, which means they know something about Jesus. The lost also seem to understand that the day of the Lamb's anger has arrived. They ask, "Who can stand against it?" (Revelation 6:17, ICB).

Before the end comes, God's people will preach the Good News about Jesus to everyone on earth (Matthew 24:14). Everyone on the planet will hear about the Three Angels' Messages. But some people won't be ready. They heard the information that they needed so that they could be saved. But they refused to believe and obey it. That is the reason that some people will be lost in the end times.

What lessons does Jesus tell us we should take from the story about Noah? Read Matthew 24:36–44 for the answer.

Jesus uses the Flood story to warn us that His Second Coming will surprise many people. The Flood surprised the people living on the earth at the time, but not because they didn't know anything about it. Noah preached for 120 years about the coming Flood to the people on the earth. But they refused to accept his message. Noah told the people what was going to happen. They just didn't believe Noah.

The same thing will happen in the end times. People say that the earth is millions of years old. They believe that life on earth comes from changes that happened slowly over a very long time. So, they don't believe the Bible's messages about the end times. Peter talks about these people living in the end times: "In the last days [end times] people will make fun of the truth. They will laugh at it. They will follow their own evil desires [wishes]. They will say, 'Where is this "return [Second Coming] he promised? Everything goes on in the same way it has since our people of long ago died. In fact, it has continued this way since God first created [made] everything'" (2 Peter 3:3, 4, NIV).



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NOAH'S PREACHING (Matthew 24:37–39)

Noah “built a large boat to save his family.”

Peter tells us that many people won't be ready for the Second Coming because they “don't want to remember what happened long ago” (2 Peter 3:5, ERV) at the Flood. History shows us that many different people in the past believed in a worldwide flood. Both the Greeks during Bible times and the Mayans have a flood story. Today, many people make fun of the story about Noah and the Flood. The Bible says people in the end times will reject the Bible truth about the Flood.

In Matthew 24:37–39, Jesus said that life on earth would be much the same as it was during Noah's time. Compare Matthew 24:37–39 with Genesis 6:1–8. What sins caused the Flood? What happened during Noah's life that also will happen at the end of earth's history?

Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah “built a large boat to save his family. With his faith, Noah showed that the world [everyone on earth] was wrong. And he became one of those [people] who are made right [accepted] with God through [because of] faith” (ERV).

Can you imagine in your mind preaching for a hundred years the same as Noah? When he was done, only his own family went into the boat with him. If Noah were a modern preacher, many people would say he failed.

At this time, our church is preaching the Three Angels' Messages worldwide. Many people have accepted this message. They are coming to know the Lord. The Lord warns us that the time is coming when “His offer of mercy will come to an end. . . . Then the Savior's final work in saving people will be finished.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 428, adapted.

Until that time, we as a church have work to do.

How can we stay hopeful when other people don't seem to listen to us about Jesus? Why must we continue to try our best anyway? (Read John 4:37.)

THE STORY ABOUT SODOM AND GOMORRAH (2 Peter 2:4–11)

Peter tells another story about the end times: the story about Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities on the plain became famous for their evil and sin. Sodom and Gomorrah also became the first example of cities that God destroyed with fire from heaven.

Read 2 Peter 2:4–11; Jude 5–8; and Ezekiel 16:46–50. What were some of the sins that caused God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? How are these two cities a symbol of the cities and the sins that are happening in them today?

The story about Sodom and Gomorrah is a warning to the people living in the end times. God will destroy evil people with fire, as we read in Revelation 20. Sin causes us to be blind. When we are blind, we don't see the evil in our own hearts. But we can see the evil in other people. The Jewish people became this way during the time of Ezekiel the prophet, God's special messenger. God told His people that He loved them very much. At the same time, God warned Israel that they were worse than Sodom.

Israel was "cheating" on the Lord with other gods (Ezekiel 16:41). For sure, the people of Israel must have felt very surprised when they heard they were more guilty in God's eyes than the people of Sodom.

Sad to say, we are the same today as Israel was in the past. In Romans 1:18–32, Paul gives us a long list of human evil. Paul talks about the sins that the non-Jewish people were doing. Paul doesn't discuss other people's sins to make God's people feel better than the non-Jews. Paul wanted God's people to understand that their own sins were very evil. Nathan the prophet did the same thing when he talked with King David. Nathan told David the story about a rich man who stole a lamb from a poor man. This story made David very mad (2 Samuel 12:5). But David didn't understand the story was about him until Nathan told David, " 'You are that rich man!' " (2 Samuel 12:7, ERV).

We must remember that the Bible, for the most part, is written to God's own people, and not to people who don't believe in the Lord. When we read about the awful sins of the people in Revelation 13 and 17, we should see these sins as a warning. We must be careful. Or we can fall into the same trap of sin.



The story about Sodom and Gomorrah is a warning to the people living in the end times.

THE JUDGE OF THE WHOLE EARTH (Genesis 18:17–32)

This part of the story helps us remember the three angels in the book of Revelation who do the same in the end times. They invite God's people who live in Babylon to leave (Revelation 14:6–12; Revelation 18:1–4).

The Bible tells us an interesting story that happens just before Sodom is destroyed. This story happens on the plains of Mamre. God appears to Abraham. Two angels also are there with God. When Abraham sees them, he invites the visitors from heaven to a meal. Then God promises Abraham that Sarah will have a son. The promised Savior will be born from the future children of Abraham's son. Jesus came from the line of Abraham (compare with Galatians 3:16). Then the story talks about the evil cities on the plain.

Read Genesis 18:17–32. What do we learn from these verses about the love of God? How does God plan to solve the problem with evil on our planet?

God doesn't owe us an explanation about His actions. But He also chooses not to hide His reasons and plans from us. "When the Lord God decides to do something, he will first tell his servants, the prophets [special messengers]" (Amos 3:7, ERV).

Before God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, He announces that the only right thing to do is to tell Abraham what is about to happen. Then Abraham will be ready for what he sees next.

God stays with Abraham while the two angels go to the evil city to warn the people to leave. This part of the story helps us remember the three angels in the book of Revelation who do the same in the end times. They invite God's people who live in Babylon to leave (Revelation 14:6–12; Revelation 18:1–4). As the two angels give the final warning in Sodom, God discusses with Abraham what is about to happen. God allows Abraham to ask Him questions.

Abraham said, " 'May You never do such a thing as to destroy the good with the bad! May the good never be punished like [the same as] the bad! You would never do such a thing! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?' " (Genesis 18:25, NLV). Abraham examines the crimes of Sodom. He also examines God's love. In the same way, before God ends sin, He opens the books of heaven and allows us to look at them before He brings fire down on the earth (Revelation 20:4, 11–15). We will have 1,000 years to get all of the questions answered that, for now, we don't have answers for.

THE TIME WHEN GOD REMOVES ALL SIN (Daniel 7)

Daniel 7 gives us a view of God's work as Judge. We get to see how God will solve the sin problem while He saves the people who wish to live in a holy relationship with Him.

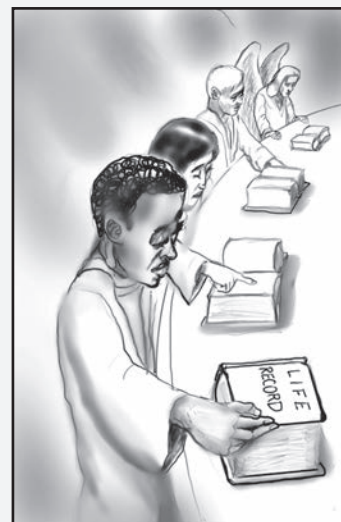
Read what Daniel says about the time when God examines the lives of His people (Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 22, 26, and 27). What work does God do as Judge? What decision does God come to at the end of His work? What does this decision tell us about His plan to save sinners?

God will judge all people. Ecclesiastes 12:14 tells us that "God will judge everything people do. That includes everything they try to hide. He'll judge everything, whether it's good or evil" (NirV). Paul tells us that we don't need to judge each other, because "we will all stand in God's courtroom to be judged" (Romans 14:10, NirV). Of course, God doesn't need records to know who is saved or lost. From the beginning, angels have been examining God's plan to save sinners (1 Peter 1:12). The angels will have questions. The angels saw Satan fight against God. They saw a third of heaven's angels leave heaven to join Satan in his fight (Revelation 12:4). Now God brings us into His light and glory. God opens the record books and allows His saints to see everything.

Abraham asks God to show mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah. This story shows us some important Bible truths about God's final work as Judge. God was examining the sins of Sodom. God says that the sins of the city were terrible. People cried out to God against the city (Genesis 18:20). God allowed Abraham to examine the guilt of Sodom and Gomorrah before He destroyed them. God also allowed Abraham to study His decision to destroy Sodom. Then Abraham could decide for himself if God was doing the right thing.

In the meantime, in Daniel 7, Jesus shows up in heaven's courtroom (Daniel 7:13; also read Matthew 20:28). Jesus is the only reason that God judges in favor of His people. Jesus' perfect life is the only thing that causes God to accept His people.

Imagine in your mind that you stand in front of our holy God. He knows all your secrets. What's your only hope? (Read Friday's study for the answer.)



God opens the record books and allows His saints to see everything.



“Jesus tells the Father to remember everything He did on Calvary. That is how Jesus wins the fight against Satan.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Flood,” pages 101, 102, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“In our own strength, we can’t argue against Satan. Satan accuses us of sin. We stand in front of God in clothes that are covered with stains. These stains are the same as sin. In these clothes, we confess our guilt in front of God. Jesus is our lawyer. He goes to God for us. He asks God to help the people who have said they were sorry for their sins. These same people in faith have asked God for His protection. Jesus asks God to show them mercy. Jesus tells the Father to remember everything He did on Calvary. That is how Jesus wins the fight against Satan. Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s law gives Him all power in heaven and on earth. Jesus asks His Father to show mercy for guilty sinners. Jesus brings them back to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 586, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Jesus told His followers that they must live on this earth. But they must not be part of the evil on this earth. (Read John 15:19; John 17:14–16.) We must win people to Jesus. At the same time, we must keep ourselves “clean from the wrong things in the world [this life]” (James 1:27, WE). How do we do that?
- ② What does Noah’s public preaching before the Flood teach us about how the worldwide war between good and evil works? In what ways do we do the same work today that Noah did in the past?
- ③ Before God destroys the lost with fire from heaven, He wakes the lost up from the dead. Then God allows Satan to work with them for a short while (Revelation 20:7–9). Why do you think that God allows this to happen before He makes everything new again?
- ④ Think about the stories we read this week. What lessons and warnings do these stories give you for your own life? What do these stories teach you about your hope in Jesus?

GIVING UP ALCOHOL: PART 6

Diana took her last drink of alcohol on July 4, which is Independence Day in the United States. Diana opened a can of beer and told friends, “There’s nothing better than an ice-cold beer on a hot summer day.” She took a big drink and almost spit it out. Diana thought the beer was bad, so she got a different brand of beer. That beer also tasted awful. But a friend said both beers tasted fine. That day, Diana quit drinking. The Holy Spirit changed her. She no longer wanted to drink.

A short time later, Loren’s father baptized him and Diana at a yearly family party. Diana was surprised when she heard the baptismal questions for the first time. One question included the line, “Do you believe that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Will you honor God with caring for your body temple? Will you avoid the use of anything that will hurt it, including meat that isn’t clean? Will you promise not to use, make, or sell alcohol, tobacco, or other poisons?”

Diana looked at Loren and thought, “How did we miss knowing about the health message?” Diana worked at a bar in the Salt Lake City airport at the time. With big tips and easy work, bartending was one of the best jobs for people who didn’t have any special skills.

Diana’s coworkers were surprised when she told them she was quitting her job. They wanted to know why. The bartender asked many times. He and other workers were interested in her new faith. Diana got a job in another airport shop, where she made and sold cookies. The job didn’t pay as well, but Diana didn’t have to work on the Sabbath.

Diana and Loren moved to Tennessee to help Loren’s grandparents. They moved near Southern Adventist University. Diana had many spiritual challenges at this time.

One of Loren’s family members heard that Diana worked at a newspaper in the past. He asked her to come work at the university’s radio station, where he worked as the top manager. Diana didn’t want the job, but Loren asked her to pray. Diana prayed and accepted the job. She worked at the radio station for almost 10 years. Seven of those years Diana worked as the station’s business manager for growth. During that time, God helped Diana to win the fight against sins that caused her to suffer since she was hurt in bad ways as a child.

Then Diana was asked to be the business manager for growth at an Adventist hospital in Florida. Diana didn’t feel she had enough experience to get the job. Again, Loren told her to pray. She worked in the hospital for the next 10 years. Then she heard about Holbrook Indian school.

Read more about Diana next week.

INSIDE
Story
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That day, Diana quit drinking.