

# Images of the End



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 12:38–42; Jonah 3:5–10; Rev. 18:4; Dan. 5:1–31; Rev. 16:12–19; 2 Chron. 36:22, 23.*

**Memory Text:** “So he said to them, ‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ ” (*Jonah 1:9, NKJV*).

This week will be our final look at accounts that help elucidate our understanding of last-day events. This time we will look at the mission of Jonah to Nineveh; the fall of Babylon; and the rise of Cyrus, the Persian king who liberated God's people and enabled them to return to the Promised Land.

As with the other stories we've examined, these historical accounts have held profound meaning for every generation. But they also have *special* relevance to the final generations living before Christ returns. That is, we can mine from these historical accounts various elements that can help us better understand what we call “present truth.”

At the same time, we must remember one thing concerning all these stories that appear to foreshadow last-day events: we must be careful to look at broad themes and allusions and not try to parse every detail to the point of creating prophetic absurdities. As in the parables of Jesus, we should look for the major points and principles. We should not milk every detail in hopes of finding some hidden truth. Instead, we should look for the outlines, the principles; and from these we can discover elements relevant for the last days.

\* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.*

## The Reluctant Prophet

The story of Jonah (*see Jonah 1–4*), while brief, delivers considerable impact. Many believers have found reflections of themselves in this reluctant prophet. The story also contains remarkable overtones of future events.

**Read** Matthew 12:38–42. Which parts of the story of Jonah does Jesus refer to as He addresses the scribes and Pharisees? What lessons about the judgment are found in His statement?

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Jesus declared that He was greater than Jonah. He knew that coming to this world would mean the Cross, and still He came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (*Luke 19:10*). Jonah spent three days in the great fish because of his own sins; Jesus spent three days in the tomb because of ours. That’s what it took to save the lost.

Today, we know Jonah as a reluctant prophet, unwilling to go to Nineveh. From a human perspective, it is easy to understand—the Assyrians ran a brutal regime. Assyrian murals are replete with scenes of unusual cruelty; conquered peoples were put to death by the most cruel methods imaginable. Who would want to face the prospect of preaching repentance in their capital city?

There is an important moment in the story that may point forward to the last-day remnant movement. When Jonah is asked who he is, he responds, “‘I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’”—a statement much like the first angel’s message (*Jon. 1:9, NKJV; Rev. 14:7*). Indeed, his emphasis on the Lord as the One “‘who made the sea and the dry land’” is, of course, pointing to Him as the Creator. This fact is foundational to why we should worship Him, and worship is central to last-day events.

At the same time, we, too, have been charged with preaching a potentially unpopular message in spiritual Babylon. To say “come out of her, my people” (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*) is to tell the world they must repent—a message that has almost always provoked a negative response from many people, even when delivered in the kindest way possible. Who of us when witnessing has not received negative, or even hostile, responses? It just comes with the job.

**How much of Jonah do you find in yourself? How can you move beyond this wrong attitude?**

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## A Work of Repentance

Jonah had a very distinct message for the people of Nineveh. “And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ” (*Jon. 3:4, NKJV*). It seems pretty clear: the place was doomed. After all, was that not a word directly from a prophet of the Lord?

Yet, what happened to Nineveh?

**Read** Jonah 3:5–10. Why was this prophecy not fulfilled?

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Yes, the whole city repented, and the prophesied doom was averted, at least for a time. “Their doom was averted, the God of Israel was exalted and honored throughout the heathen world, and His law was revered. Not until many years later was Nineveh to fall a prey to the surrounding nations through forgetfulness of God and through boastful pride.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 271.

Can we expect something like this in the last days, with the final message to the fallen world? Yes—and no. That is, there will be, all over the world, many people who heed the call, “ ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’ ” (*Rev. 18:4, NKJV*). All over the world, people will take their stand and, in defiance of the beast, will “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12*). These people, like those in Nineveh, will be spared the judgment that falls upon the lost.

Some prophecies, such as God’s announcement that Nineveh would be destroyed, are conditional. (Ninevah would be destroyed *unless the people turned away from their evil* [see *Jer. 18:7–10*].) Yet, some prophecies don’t come with these conditions. They are going to be fulfilled, no matter the human response. The Messianic prophecies of Christ’s first and second comings, the mark of the beast, the outpouring of the plagues, end-time persecution—these are not conditional; they will take place regardless of what humans do. What humans do, and the choices they make, will determine instead what side they will be on as final events, foretold by the prophets, unfold.

**What choices are you making now that could help determine what choices you will make when the issue of worshipping God or the image breaks upon the world?**

## Belshazzar's Feast

After the city of Nineveh had been humbled (612 B.C.) by a coalition army that included both Medes and Babylonians (led by Nebuchadnezzar's father), the city of Babylon experienced a revival, the likes of which the city had not seen since the days of Hammurabi, their great lawgiver. Under Nebuchadnezzar, who was now free from the problem of Assyrian raids, the city of Babylon grew in wealth and influence to the point where the neighboring nations had little choice but to grudgingly acknowledge her dominance. She was queen of the world, and nations who wished to prosper declared their loyalty to her.

Meanwhile, as far as we can tell, Nebuchadnezzar died as a believer, professing that Daniel's God was, indeed, the rightful ruler of all nations (*Dan. 4:34–37*). The next account that Daniel provides is that of his successor, the vice-regent Belshazzar.

**Read Daniel 5:1–31. What important spiritual messages can we take from this account? What ultimately tripped up Belshazzar?**

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Perhaps the saddest, most tragic part of this account is found in Daniel 5:22. After recounting to the king the downfall and then the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel says to him, “ ‘But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this’ ” (*NKJV*). That is, though he had the opportunity to know truth, though he might have even witnessed firsthand what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, he chose to ignore these events and, instead, embarked on the same course that brought his predecessor so much trouble.

As Nebuchadnezzar had done by erecting the golden statue, Belshazzar was openly defying what Daniel's God had predicted. By using the temple vessels in a profane manner, he was likely underscoring the fact that Babylon had conquered the Jews and now possessed their God's religious articles. In other words, they still had supremacy over this God who had predicted their demise.

It was, indeed, an act of total defiance, even though Belshazzar had more than enough evidence, proof, to know better. He had enough head knowledge to know the truth; the problem, instead, was his heart. In the last days, as the final crisis breaks upon the world, people will be given the opportunity to know the truth, as well. What determines their choice, as with Belshazzar, will be their hearts.

## The Drying of the Euphrates

One of Babylon's strengths was the way that the Euphrates River flowed underneath its walls, providing the city with an unlimited supply of water. It also proved to be its weakness. Nitocris, an ancient Babylonian queen, had created earthen works along the river to develop it as a route to the city. In the process, she had diverted the river into a swamp to allow crews to work comfortably. Cyrus realized that he could do the same thing: dry up the Euphrates enough that he could comfortably march his troops under the wall. Once inside the city walls, he found the defensive walls that followed the river through the city unguarded, and the city fell in a single night. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells us that "those who lived in the centre of Babylon had no idea that the suburbs had fallen, for it was a time of festival, and all were dancing, and indulging themselves in pleasures."—Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Tom Holland (New York: Penguin, 2015), p. 94. Can there be any doubt that this is the same feast as portrayed in Daniel 5?

**Read Daniel 5:18–31 and Revelation 16:12–19. What parallels do you find between some of the plagues of Revelation and the story of Babylon's fall?**

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In explaining how to discern the signs of the times, Jesus warned His disciples, " 'Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into' " (*Matt. 24:42, 43, NKJV*). Just as in the fall of Babylon, the sudden appearance of Christ will catch modern Babylon by surprise. It does not need to be this way, however; we have been given ample evidence of the soon coming of Jesus in a multitude of detailed prophecies.

The world will not be caught by surprise merely because it is ignorant of what God has predicted; it will be surprised because it has chosen not to believe what God has said would happen.

**Read Revelation 16:15. Even amid these end-time warnings, what gospel message is found there? What does it mean to not "walk naked"?**

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## Cyrus, the Anointed

When Cyrus sacked the city of Babylon, the years of captivity for God's people were over, and the Persians permitted the Jews to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple. Under Cyrus, the Persian Empire became the largest in history, with what historian Tom Holland calls "the largest agglomeration of territories that the world had ever seen."—*Dominion* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), p. 25.

As was the custom among the Persians, Cyrus was even called "the Great King" or "King of kings."

Cyrus foreshadows what will happen when Christ returns for His church: He is the King who comes from the east (*compare with Matt. 24:27*), waging war against Babylon, and liberating His people finally to escape from Babylon and return to the Land of Promise. (*See Rev. 19:11–16.*) This is why God refers to Cyrus as "His anointed" (*Isa. 45:1, NKJV*); not only did this famous Persian liberate God's people, but his campaign against Babylon is also a type of Christ's second coming.

**Read 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23. In what ways does the story of Cyrus parallel that of Nebuchadnezzar? In what ways does it differ? What is the significance of the decree? After all, how did it impact the whole first coming of Jesus centuries later?**

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The original order of Old Testament books has been changed in our day to end with Malachi, but originally, this is where the Old Testament ended—with this declaration from Cyrus. The next episode in the canon of Scripture would be Matthew, which begins with the birth of Christ, the antitypical Cyrus. Cyrus would orchestrate the rebuilding of the earthly temple; Jesus would inaugurate His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, leading up to His return and our liberation.

Cyrus, of course, was not a *perfect* representation of Christ; no type lines up perfectly with antitype, and we must be careful not to read too much into every tiny detail. Nevertheless, he broadly functions as a type of "Savior."

**How fascinating that God would use a pagan king in such a marked manner to do His will. Despite how things appear to us on the outside, how can we learn the truth that, long term, the Lord is going to bring about end-time events as prophesied?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Unseen Watcher,” pp. 535–538, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that the fact might be determined whether it would fulfill the purposes of the Watcher and the Holy One. Prophecy has traced the rise and progress of the world’s great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with the nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed. While nations have rejected God’s principles, and in this rejection have wrought their own ruin, yet a divine, overruling purpose has manifestly been at work throughout the ages.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 535.

In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah observes a potter doing what a potter does: molding and shaping whatever he is working on. It is this imagery, that of a potter molding his clay, that God uses to explain the principle of conditionality in biblical prophecy. And just to make sure we understand, the Lord speaks through Jeremiah, saying: “ ‘The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it’ ” (*Jer. 18:7–10, NKJV*).

## Discussion Question:

- ❶ Think about Jesus’ statement that the judgment will be easier for Nineveh than for the people of God who had strayed from the truth. (*See Matt. 12:39–42.*) What lesson can God’s church derive from this warning?
- ❷ Notice Ellen G. White’s statement that with each succeeding empire, “history has repeated itself.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 535. What do you see as common threads among all the empires listed in prophecy? In what ways did they follow the same prophetic path? How is our current world following them, as well?
- ❸ Think through the idea that it’s not often the mind, the intellect, that keeps people from faith, but the heart. How might this knowledge impact how you witness to others?

## “Let’s Make a Deal”

By LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN

Maria was happy when a homeowner invited her in to look at the books that she was selling in a non-Christian country in Southeast Asia. Maria pulled several health books from her bag, but the man stopped her.

“I see what you’re doing,” he said. “You’re bringing out the lighter, more neutral books first, and after I drop my guard, you’re going to bring out the Christian books that you really want me to see. I know your intentions, so share the Christian books first.”

Maria sent up a silent prayer. “Lord, please help me,” she said. “I don’t know what to say.” Out loud, she said, “I have several books on health and religion. I want to share whatever people want to see. If they have an interest in health, I share those books. If they have an interest in religion, I’m happy to share those books, too.”

The man rubbed his chin. “Let’s make a deal,” he said. “If I can ask questions about your religion and you can answer them, I’ll buy all of your books.”

Maria felt anxious. She took a deep breath and said, “I’m not wise enough to answer anything that you ask. I need help. May I pray first?”

The man agreed. Maria prayed out loud. She asked for wisdom and knowledge, and she ended the prayer in the name of Jesus.

Immediately, the man asked, “We say Jesus was a prophet, but you say He is a God. Why do you say that? How can a mere man become God?”

Without pausing, Maria said, “Many people think that Jesus only started to live when He was on earth as a baby, but He was around years before that. Jesus was part of the Godhead, and God sent Him to this earth in the form of a baby as a regular human being. Then Jesus was called to be a prophet, then He was called to be a sacrifice, and then He was called to be a high priest. So right now, He is interceding for our sins. Jesus is not just a prophet. He was called to be more than a prophet. He is a high priest—not just for me but for all who accept Him.”

The man put his head in his hands. “That is about the nicest thing I’ve ever heard,” he said.

That was his first and only question. With tears in his eyes, he bought every book that Maria had. As they bid each other goodbye, he said, “You really explained to me what I wanted to know. Now I look forward to reading all your books.”

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*Pray for Maria and other missionaries seeking to reach unreached people groups in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, where this story took place. Maria is a pseudonym. Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this Sabbath that will help spread the gospel in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.*

The God revealed in Exodus is the loving Lord, who, at the appointed time, brought deliverance to His people. The Exodus from Egypt and the Red Sea crossing were pivotal and unique events—God’s spectacular and marvelous acts. No greater or more glorious events ever happened in the Old Testament. It’s the gospel but according to Moses.

God demonstrated His care and protection for the Hebrews despite their backslidings. This series of divine interventions was the beginning of their renewed journey with God from Egypt that led to Canaan.

Exodus, our study this quarter by Jifí Moskala, is a book about the God of love who ultimately went to the cross for us. By studying Exodus, we will get a unique look at what God is really like.

The events in the book should serve as a warning and a source of unforgettable instruction for us now. We should study and learn from them because no matter how different the circumstances, the spiritual principles behind them remain the same.

May the Lord bless us as we study this pivotal book, which reminds us of how God wants to lead His people from slavery to sin, from death to life, and from the wilderness to the New Jerusalem (*Heb. 12:22*).

## Lesson 1—Oppression: The Background and the Birth of Moses

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **God’s People in Egypt** (*Exod. 1:1–7*)

MONDAY: **The Historical Background** (*Gen. 37:26–28*)

TUESDAY: **The Hebrew Midwives** (*Exod. 1:9–21*)

WEDNESDAY: **Moses Is Born** (*Exod. 2:1–10*)

THURSDAY: **A Change of Plans** (*Exod. 2:11–25*)

**Memory Text**—*Exodus 2:23–25, NIV*

**Sabbath Gem:** God hears the cry of the oppressed, sees their struggles, notes their tears, and, moved by their agony, comes to help.

## Lesson 2—The Burning Bush

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Burning Bush** (*Exod. 3:1–6*)

MONDAY: **The Angel of the Lord** (*Exod. 3:7–12*)

TUESDAY: **The Name of the Lord** (*Exod. 3:13–22*)

WEDNESDAY: **Four Excuses** (*Exod. 3:11, 13; Exod. 4:1, 10*)

THURSDAY: **The Circumcision** (*Exod. 4:18–31*)

**Memory Text**—*Exodus 3:7, 8, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** It is true that we can be useful to God in many ways, but following God’s call in our lives, and doing what He leads us to do, is surely the path to the most satisfying existence.

**Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind** The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: [services@christianrecord.org](mailto:services@christianrecord.org); website: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).