

A Moment of Destiny



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:14, Rev. 14:14–20, Matt. 16:27, Acts 1:9–11, Mark 4:26–29, Rev. 16:1.*

Memory Text: Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe’ ” (*Revelation 14:14, 15, NKJV*).

God has always spoken to His people, giving them whatever relevant truths they needed to hear at the time. From the warning about the Flood (*Gen. 6:7*) to the first coming of Jesus (*Dan. 9:24–27*) to the pre-Advent judgment (*Dan. 7:9, 10; Dan. 8:14*) to final events before Christ's return (*Revelation 12–14*), God has spoken to us. In these last days of human history, He has sent a special message to the world and to His people, designed to meet the need of the hour. He pictures this message as being carried by three angels flying in midheaven with their urgent, end-time message to all the world.

The three angels' messages are Jesus' final message of mercy, a call that leads us from trusting in our own righteousness to trusting the righteousness of Jesus to justify us; to sanctify us; and, at the end of time, to glorify us.

As always, though, we must choose Christ, to surrender to Him and to obey Him, and the choices we make now will, indeed, impact the choices we make in the final crisis ahead of us.

Thus, now is the time to prepare.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 8.

Eternal Choices

Revelation 14 is Jesus' final message of mercy to a fallen and rebellious world, one that has, for about six thousand years, been steeped in sin and evil. There will come a day when every human being on planet Earth will make a final, irrevocable decision, either for or against Jesus. Revelation's message of Christ's righteousness delivering us from the condemnation of sin, as well as the grip of sin in our lives, will echo and reecho throughout the earth.

Read Matthew 24:14 and compare it with Revelation 14:6. What promise did Jesus give to His disciples regarding the worldwide spread of the gospel just before His return?

Jesus' promise that " 'this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world' " (*NKJV*), given in Matthew 24:14, finds its final fulfillment in Christ's last-day message, in Revelation 14:6, which says that the gospel is proclaimed to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (*NKJV*).

Three times in Revelation 22 Jesus says that He is coming quickly (*Rev. 22:7, 12, 20*). In the context of His soon return, our Lord adds, " 'He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still' " (*Rev. 22:11, NKJV*). Revelation moves to one glorious climax in which every person is led to decide for or against Christ.

Of course, every day, by our choices even in the "little things," we are choosing either for or against Jesus. It's not likely that someone constantly making the wrong choices in their life now will suddenly, in the final crisis, come forward on the side of Jesus, especially when the force of the whole evil world is against them. Now, today, and every day we must choose to be faithful to Christ and to His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (*1 John 5:3*). As Ellen G. White has said: "Jesus does not change the character at His coming. The work of transformation must be done now. Our daily lives are determining our destiny."—*Last Day Events*, p. 295.

How does God shape our characters? What means does He use for us to grow in grace? What can we do to more fully allow the Holy Spirit to transform us to be more like Jesus?

The Son of Man Returns

Revelation 14 contains the key texts in regard to the Lord’s last-day message to His people and to the world. Central to it all is the return of Jesus, the fulfillment of His promise that “ ‘you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’ ” (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:14. What title is used to describe Jesus as He returns to earth? Why do you think John uses this title for Jesus?

Jesus used the term “Son of Man” to refer to Himself 82 times in the Gospels. It was one of His favorite titles. He used it as an expression of endearment to identify with us. He is a Savior who understands us, has experienced our temptations, and has passed through our trials. He is the “Son of Man” who is returning to take us home. The Jesus who comes for us is the same Jesus who lived among us. He is qualified to redeem us because He became One of us, and yet, as one of us, He met the full fury of Satan’s temptations and, yes, was victorious.

What do we learn from the following Bible verses in Matthew about Jesus, the Son of Man?

Matt. 16:27 _____

Matt. 24:27, 30 _____

Matt. 25:31, 32 _____

Notice some elements in these passages: (1) Jesus, the Son of Man, is coming in glory with His angels. (2) He will divide the sheep from the goats (basically a judgment). (3) The destiny of the nations and all humanity will be decided for eternity.

Think about the term “Son of Man” and what it says of Christ’s humanity. Though God, He became one of us, just like us, but unlike us, He never sinned. What amazing hope does this offer to you in terms of (1) knowing God’s love for us and (2) knowing that He can relate to your struggles and give you victory over them?

The Heavenly Judgment

Read Revelation 14:14 and Acts 1:9–11. What similarities do you discover?

John states that “I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man” (*Rev. 14:14, NKJV*). When Jesus ascended to heaven, Luke records in Acts 1:9 that as the disciples stood gazing up into heaven, “while they watched, He [Jesus] was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (*NKJV*). Jesus ascended in a cloud of angels and will return with a cloud of angels. The angels then declared to the amazed disciples in Acts 1:11, “‘This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’ ” (*NKJV*). There is a divine truth embedded in this passage that may not be apparent. This “same Jesus,” the “Son of Man”—the One who walked the dusty streets of Nazareth, ministered in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, healed the sick in the villages of Israel, and preached on the grassy hillsides of Galilee—is coming again.

The Son of Man also is mentioned in the light of the judgment in Daniel 7.

Read Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14. Why did Daniel call Jesus the “Son of Man” in something as serious as the judgment? What, given what we have already looked at, should be comforting in knowing that the “Son of Man” is so central to judgment?

In Daniel 7:9, 10, Daniel views the seating of the heavenly court with ten thousand times ten thousand angelic, heavenly beings gathered around the throne. The judgment is set, and the books—the celestial records of our lives—are opened before the universe. In Daniel 7:13, 14, the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days, the Father, and receives His eternal kingdom. The judgment reveals before the entire universe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done everything possible to save all humanity. This judgment vindicates not only the saints but also God’s own character against the false charges of Satan (*see Job 1, Job 2, Ps. 51:1–4*).

Think about the fact that your whole life will come under scrutiny before God. What, then, is your only hope when this happens? (See Rom. 8:1.)

The Victor's Crown

John describes Jesus as the “Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle” (*Rev. 14:14, NKJV*). The word for “crown” is *stephanos*. It is a victor’s crown. When an athlete won an important contest, he was given a *stephanos*, a crown of honor, of glory, of victory.

Jesus once wore a crown of thorns, symbolizing shame and mockery. He once was despised and rejected of men. He was reviled, ridiculed, spat upon, beaten, and whipped. But now He wears a crown of glory and comes again but now as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Read Revelation 14:15 and Mark 4:26–29. What similarities do you see between the texts? What are they both talking about?

The angel comes from the presence of God in the glory of the temple and says, “It’s time. The harvest is fully ripe.” Go and get Your children and bring them home.

Jesus uses illustrations from agriculture repeatedly in the New Testament. On more than one occasion, He uses the symbolism of a ripening harvest to illustrate the growth of the seed of the gospel in the lives of His people.

“The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a beautiful figure of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace; there can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the development of the Christian life. At every stage of development, our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 65, 66.

The ripening of the golden grain represents all those transformed by grace, motivated by love, and living obedient lives to the glory of Christ’s name. Their hearts are one with Jesus’ heart, and all they want is what He wants.

How do you understand Ellen G. White’s statement that “at every stage of development, our life may be perfect”? What does that mean, especially when we can see our faults and defective characters now?

Every Seed Produces a Harvest

In Revelation 14 there are two harvests. The harvest of golden grain represents the righteous, and the harvest of gory grapes represents the unrighteous or the lost. Both harvests are fully ripe. Every seed sown is fully mature.

Read Revelation 14:17–20. What does the expression “the great winepress of the wrath of God” mean? See also Revelation 14:10, Revelation 15:1, and Revelation 16:1.

“Another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire” (*Rev. 14:18, NKJV*). Here is the angel who commands the fires of God’s final judgment. The harvest is ripe. Sin has reached its limits. Rebellion has crossed the line of God’s mercy. As evil and bad as things have been, it’s going to get even worse before it’s all over. A loving God has done everything He can do for us, which included offering Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*; see also *Gal. 3:13*).

What more could God have done beyond that cross? There is nothing more grace can do to redeem those who have repeatedly rejected the Holy Spirit.

Here is the urgent prophetic message of Revelation 14. Every seed has gone to harvest. The grain is fully ripe, and the grapes are fully ripe. The people of God reveal His image of grace, compassion, mercy, and love before the universe. The children of the evil one reveal greed, lust, jealousy, and hate. The character of Jesus is revealed in one group and the character of Satan in the other.

The universe will see in the people of God a revelation of righteousness that, perhaps, no generation before it has ever witnessed. In contrast to the righteousness of Christ revealed in His people, the universe will see the full results of rebellion against God. Wickedness, evil, sin, and lawlessness will be on full display before men and angels. The contrast between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience, will be apparent to all the universe, to both humans and angels.

How well can you discern the contrast between good and evil? Why is it important that we do? (*See Heb. 5:14.*)

Further Thought: “It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 555.

Subtly, imperceptibly, almost unnoticed at first, our characters and our personalities change based on the seeds that we are sowing in our minds. Sow good seeds, and you will produce good fruit. Sow the evil seeds of this world, and you will produce the fruit of this world in your character. If we sow indifference to God and spiritual values and priorities, we reap the fruit of indifference—apathy, spiritual complacency, and frustration in our spiritual lives. This is why those who think, *Well, I know that one day final persecution will come, the “mark of the beast” and so forth, but when it does, then I will get it together*, are choosing a very dangerous path. God calls us now, at this moment, to surrender our lives to Him. The longer one delays responding to the Holy Spirit, the harder and harder one’s soul becomes to the promptings of God and more susceptible to fall for, and believe in, the lies of the evil one.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the relationship between being saved by grace and growing in grace, in the context of Revelation 14:14–20 and the harvest principle?
- 2 Discuss the elements necessary for the growth of plants and compare them to those necessary for our spiritual growth. What are the similarities? That is, what can we learn from how plants grow that we can apply to our own lives?
- 3 Is there a difference between our God-given ability to choose and willpower? Why is understanding this difference important for the growing Christian?
- 4 Why is the title “Son of Man” an encouragement in the judgment hour as we anticipate the second coming of Christ? Why is it comforting to realize that a man, a human being, is up there representing us in the judgment?

700 Former Rebels Baptized

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The Philippines was mired in conflict with rebels on Mindoro Island for 52 years. Land and money were offered to the rebels in exchange for peace, but nothing seemed to work. A seemingly endless cycle of ambushes and counterattacks left 40,000 people dead.

In 2017, Adventist World Radio (AWR) began broadcasting in Mindoro as part of a Seventh-day Adventist world church initiative known as TMI evangelism. TMI stands for Total Member Involvement, a program that encourages every church member to bring someone to Jesus. AWR leased time on local radio stations, and local church members got involved by giving Bible studies and inviting neighbors to evangelistic meetings. About 1,400 people were baptized at the meetings, and the broadcasts continued.

In 2019, rebels holed up in the lush, green mountains of Mindoro began to listen to AWR. As COVID-19 swept through the world in 2020, a number of them decided to surrender to Jesus.

Rebel leader Ka Martin could not understand what was happening, and he started to listen to AWR.

“He was hiding in the jungle, watching and trying to figure out why his fighters were leaving him,” said AWR president Duane McKey. “So he started listening to the radio.”

Martin was responsible for the deaths of dozens of people, including 21 soldiers whom he ambushed while they slept and shot dead with one of their own machine guns. But as he listened to AWR, he also decided to give his heart to Jesus.

A bloodstained chapter of Philippine history drew to a close when about 700 former rebels, including Martin and his wife, laid down their weapons and were baptized at AWR-led evangelistic meetings. In all, over 60,000 people were baptized during the “Earth’s Final Countdown” meetings across the Philippines about a year ago.

“What bullets couldn’t do, God has done,” McKey said.

The Philippine government has granted amnesty to the former rebels. AWR is working with the government and a nongovernmental organization, ASI member Farm Stew, to help the former rebels earn a livelihood through farming.



“We won’t stop the AWR broadcasts,” said McKey, who also serves as assistant to the General Conference president and is in charge of Total Member Involvement. “The local churches are now running the broadcasts, and we provide the sermons. The laypeople make this happen. This is a perfect example of Total Member Involvement.”

Part I: Overview

The book of Revelation is a book of contrasts. Each of these contrasts calls us to make eternal choices. We will worship either the dragon or the Lamb. We will receive either the mark of the beast or the seal of God. Either we will fall for the cunning deceptions of the woman in scarlet—Satan’s counterfeit movement—or we will walk with the woman in white—God’s true church. Either we will accept the deceptive teachings of spiritual Babylon, or we will rejoice in the truth that flows from the New Jerusalem.

This week, we will especially study the two harvests in Revelation 14:14–20. They are the harvest of golden grain gathered into the garner of God and the harvest of gory grapes, tread in the winepress of His wrath.

Throughout the Bible, God uses the symbolism of the harvest to describe the completion of the work of God’s grace in the soul. When that work is complete and the gospel is proclaimed to all nations, “the end will come” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*). The Gospel of Mark puts it this way: “‘But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’” (*Mark 4:29, NKJV*). Jesus adds, “The harvest is the end of the world” (*Matt. 13:39*). Before the return of Jesus, every human being on planet Earth will have a reasonable opportunity to respond to His love, receive His grace, and walk in His truth. This week we will study earth’s final harvest and discover how we can be part of the harvest of “golden grain” and not “the gory grapes.”

Part II: Commentary

Revelation 14:14–20 describes the result of the proclamation of the three angels’ messages, blazoned with a loud voice to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*NKJV*) in verses 6–12. The second coming of Christ happens only after these messages have been promulgated. The preaching of these messages prepares the world for the coming of Jesus. Thus, these messages are of eternal significance. To accept these messages means eternal life. To reject them results, ultimately, in the second death, an annihilation whose results are irreversible and permanent.

In Revelation 14:14, John declares, “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man” (*NKJV*). Throughout Scripture, clouds represent the presence of God. During the Exodus “the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way” (*Exod. 13:21, NKJV*). At Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments, the record states, “A cloud covered the mountain” (*Exod. 24:15, NKJV*). God’s glory rested upon Sinai, and “the cloud covered it six days” (*Exod. 24:16*).

When the ancient sanctuary in the wilderness was dedicated, the presence of God was revealed as a cloud resting at the door of the sanctuary. When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, God's presence was also made known by His appearance "in the cloud above the mercy seat" (*Lev. 16:2, NKJV*).

In the magnificent judgment scene described in Daniel 7:9–14, Daniel beholds "One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!" (*Dan. 7:13, NKJV*) to His Father, the Ancient of Days. At His ascension, Jesus ascends in a cloud (*Acts 1:9*). Jesus ascended in the clouds, and when He comes again in glory, He will descend in the clouds (*Rev. 1:7*).

"The Son of Man" is Jesus' favorite title for Himself. It is used more than 80 times in the four Gospels. It is fascinating to observe that no one except Jesus uses the title Son of Man to identify who He is. Jesus uses this title to reveal His total identity with our humanity. He is "one with us." He is our Savior who is exceedingly near. He understands our weaknesses, has experienced our trials, and has known our sorrows. As the book of Hebrews so eloquently puts it: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (*Heb. 2:14, NKJV*).

It is the Son of Man who returns in clouds of glory to take us home. It is the same Jesus who walked the dusty streets of Galilee. This same Jesus healed the sick. He cleansed the lepers. He opened blind eyes. He unstopped deaf ears. He delivered demoniacs from the power of Satan and his legions of evil angels. Jesus forgave adulterers, thieves, self-righteous Pharisees, and faltering disciples. This Christ who came once is coming again. John uses Jesus' favorite title for Himself, the Son of Man, to reassure each one of us that those who have been redeemed through the Cross, accepted His grace, and have been transformed by His power will look up on that glorious day with rejoicing and experience the fullness of Isaiah's promise: "And it will be said in that day: 'Behold this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation'" (*Isa. 25:9, NKJV*).

The Concept of the Harvest

What does it mean that the harvest is fully ripe? Specifically, what does the angel mean when he says to the Son of Man, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (*Rev. 14:15, NKJV*)? Most farmers wait until their crops are ripe before they harvest them. In the same way, Jesus, the Divine Harvester, will not return until the crop is fully ripe. Revelation 22:11, 12 describes this harvest in another way: "He who is unjust, let him

be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work'” (*NKJV*). The preaching of God’s last-day message leads men and women to make eternal decisions. The Holy Spirit brings conviction to their hearts. Their choice to accept or reject Jesus’ love, grace, and truth settles their eternal destiny forever. Thus, they make their final, irrevocable decision.

When these conditions are met, the harvest will now be ripe for the harvest. At that time, there will be only two classes upon the earth: those that are fully, unreservedly committed to Christ—nothing can shake their loyalty to Him—and those that have compromised their integrity and have sold out to the devil. At this point, the entire universe will see the character of Christ revealed in the redeemed and the character of Satan revealed in the lost.

It is the purpose of the message that we are studying this quarter to produce the glorious harvest for the kingdom of God. Commenting on the harvest principle in Mark 4, Ellen G. White writes, “ ‘When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.’ Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 69.

Here is the incredibly good news. Jesus will complete what He has started in the lives of His people. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (*Heb. 12:1, 2*). As the apostle Paul declares to the church at Philippi: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6, NKJV*). Grace is greater than sin, for “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*).

It may be difficult to understand how Jesus will produce a final harvest in these sin-polluted lives of ours, but it is all accomplished by grace through faith. And though we are always, and only, saved by Christ’s imputed, credited righteousness for us, by grace through faith, we accept His sanctifying power in our lives as well, and we daily grow in our spiritual walk with Him.

Part III: Life Application

For Personal Reflection: Our study this week clearly reveals that Jesus will complete the work He has begun in this world. “ ‘This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world **as a witness** to all the nations, and then the end will come’ ” (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). The word “witness” in this verse is especially significant. A witness gives a testimony under oath in a court of law. The evidence submitted by the witness proves the veracity of his or her statements. Thus, the final proclamation of the gospel will be more than a mere verbal proclamation of gospel truth, but it will be a living demonstration, as attested by the divinely transformed lives of Jesus’ followers, of that truth to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” before the return of our Lord (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). This “witness” will cause one of two reactions: either acceptance or rejection of the claims of Christ by the people on earth. Their response, in turn, will lead to the final harvest.

Here is the good news. History is not an endless cycle of events. It is not an infinite circle of time going nowhere. All of history is catapulting toward one climactic event: earth’s final harvest and the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There can be no neutrality in earth’s final hours. Men and women will either be saved by His grace, transformed by His righteousness, filled with His Spirit, and witnessing to the glory of His name or wrapped in the self-centeredness of their uncommitted lives, controlled by the power of demons. The seriousness of our times and the reality of the eternal choices before us lead us to ask some life-changing questions, as outlined below.

Instructions to Teachers: Read aloud the questions to your students. Ask them to ponder the questions in their hearts as you read them aloud. Pause between the questions to give your students time to reflect internally on their answers.

- 1. Is there anything in your life that keeps you from being totally committed to Jesus in these last, climactic hours of earth’s history? If so, what are these things?**

2. Read Hebrews 12:15. All roots produce fruits, whether good or evil. Are there any roots of bitterness, jealousy, anger, resentment, lust, or selfishness in your heart?

Closing Prayer: As you close class, invite your students to take a moment to reflect on their own lives, asking God, by His grace, to give them victory over anything that would keep them from being ready for His return. Before you pray, ask for a student to read this encouraging promise to the class: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, NKJV).

Notes
