Sooner or later, final events will begin to unfold. We have not been told exactly when and how, but we have been told enough. Some kind of legislation enforcing Sunday-keeping in contrast to Sabbath-keeping will be passed. Revelation has revealed to us the crucial issues at stake, the crucial players involved, and, in broad sweeps, has depicted what will happen when instead of worshiping of the One “who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev. 14:7), people—all “whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8)—will worship the beast and his image. In other words, the names of all who have chosen to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and obey His commandments will remain in the book of life. How much better to be in the register of God than in the records of man!

God has raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to preach this message to the world. We therefore need to be believers of the truth as it is in Jesus, and we need to have been transformed and made new by the “everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14:6, which is centered on Christ’s death for us, the assurance of our salvation in Him.
Write out Revelation 18:1–4 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
PREPARING FOR THE FINAL CRISIS

The apostle Paul urged the believers at Thessalonica to “watch and be sober” in the context of the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 5:6). He also declared that they were “children of the light” (verse 5, NIV) and that they were “not in darkness so that this day [the return of Christ] should surprise [them] like a thief” (verse 4, NIV). If Paul urged the devout Thessalonian believers in this way, how much more would he urge us today?

Jesus used the word “watch” in connection with earnest, heartfelt prayer (Matt. 24:42; 26:40, 41). To watch is to be spiritually alert. To be sober-minded is to take seriously the times we live in and be focused on the things that really matter. Ellen G. White adds that “we who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise” (Testimonies for the Church [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948], vol. 8, p. 28). While Christ’s second coming might be a surprise to the world, it certainly should not be a surprise for us. Though we don’t know when it will happen, we can see enough, both in the Bible and in the world events around us, to know that it is coming, and that now, today, is the day to be ready. There is no time to waste.

Christ has given us the three angels’ messages so we can prepare for what we know is coming. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, combined with the modern gift of prophecy, provide divine insight into the future events of this world. The prophetic Word of God outlines salvation history in advance, and the prophecies of Daniel 2, which were fulfilled exactly as predicted, provide powerful, rational evidence that we can trust God.

God’s final appeal to His people is to flee the errors of Babylon and walk in the light of eternal truth found in His Word (Rev. 18). The key to everything is the Bible. As long as people stick to the Bible and follow what it teaches, they will not be deceived in the final crisis—particularly regarding the Sabbath. The message of the second angel further appeals to us to accept truth rather than error, Scripture rather than tradition, and the teachings of God’s Word rather than the false doctrines proclaimed by many fallen organizations.

The third angel’s message presents a warning against the mark of the beast. Throughout the prophecies of the Bible, a beast consistently represents a political or religious power. Eventually this religious power extended its influence over the whole world and led a movement to unite church and state. The goal was to achieve world unity at a time of economic upheaval, natural catastrophes, social turmoil, international political crisis, and global conflict. As Ellen G. White says, the United States will eventually take the lead in this global federation (see lesson 10). These messages conclude with an urgent appeal for Christ’s faithful followers to keep the commandments of God through fostering the living faith of Jesus in their hearts (Rev. 14:12).
ILLUMINATED WITH GLORY

God has raised up an end-time people to stand on the shoulders of the great reformers of the past with the Bible as their only creed, Christ alone as their source of salvation, the Holy Spirit as their only source of strength, and the return of our Lord as the consummation of all their hopes. Truths long obscured by the darkness of error and tradition, including the true biblical Sabbath, will be proclaimed to the world just before our Lord returns.

The three angels’ messages gave rise to this last-day movement to complete the Reformation and to participate with Christ in finishing His work on earth. The great prophecies of the last book of the Bible reveal a divine movement arising out of disappointment to proclaim God’s final message to the world. Revelation 14 describes a church that spans the globe, spreading the good news of the eternal gospel to every person on earth.

The three angels of Revelation 14 are joined by a fourth in chapter 18. This angel gives power to the proclamation of the three angels so that the world is illuminated with glory (Rev. 18:1). Chapter 18 focuses on the major events that will lead up to the climax of human history and the final, ultimate triumph of the gospel.

The angel who comes down from the glorious presence of God in the throne room of the sanctuary was commissioned to proclaim God’s last message of mercy and to warn the inhabitants of the earth of the calamities and triumph that are coming. The text says that the angel comes with “great authority” (Rev. 18:1, NKJV). The New Testament Greek word for “authority” is exousia. Jesus uses this word in the Gospel of Matthew when sending His disciples out. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples “authority” (NIV) over the principalities and powers of evil. He sends them out with the divine power to be victorious in the battle between good and evil. In Matthew 28:18, 19, He once again sends them out, but this time with “all authority” in heaven and on earth to go and “make disciples of all the nations.”

The great controversy between good and evil in the universe is also about God’s honor, or His reputation. Satan, a rebel angel, has declared that God is unjust—that He demands worship but gives little in return. The evil one declares that God’s law restricts our freedom and limits our joy.

Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection demolished that false claim. The One who created us plunged into the sin of this world to redeem us. On the cross He answered Satan’s charges and demonstrated that God is both loving and just.

Won by His love and concerned for His honor, His end-time people reveal His glory—His loving, self-sacrificing character to a self-centered, godless world, and the earth is illuminated by the character of God.

God’s glory is His character. The earth will be filled with the glory of God when we are filled with the love of God and our characters are changed by that redeeming love. Revealing His love in our personal lives reveals His glory, His character, to the world. The last message to be proclaimed to a world engulfed in spiritual darkness, the one carried by three angels, is a command to “fear God and give glory to Him” (Rev. 14:7).

(Cont. on p. 109.)
What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 18?

John 7:17; 8:32; 17:17
Habakkuk 2:14
1 Thessalonians 5:1–6
Revelation 4:11; 5:6, 12; 19:1
Exodus 33:18, 19

What other narratives come to mind in connection with Revelation 18?

Review your memorized verse from Revelation 18

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 108):

There is no glory for ourselves in our good works, our righteousness, or our goodness. Ellen G. White affirms this, saying, “The message of Christ’s righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other. . . . This is the glory of God which closes the work of the third angel” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 6, p. 19). White also writes: “What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923], p. 456).

No glory for ourselves, but yes, all the glory to God.

(Cont. from inSight, p. 111):

fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are “the times of refreshing” to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus.” Acts 3:19, 20.

Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.

The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side. (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 611, 612.)
THE LAMB, THE SLAIN LAMB

There are many symbols in Revelation, biblical symbols of importance such as a dragon in heaven (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7), angels flying in the midst of heaven (Rev. 14:6), and a woman riding a scarlet beast (Rev. 17:3). The Holy Spirit inspired John to include them in the Word of God, and they have important roles in revealing truth to those who read the words of this book and do them, for as it says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).

There is, however, another image that appears over and over all through the book of Revelation. It describes Him as not only a Lamb, but a Lamb “slain” (Rev. 5:6, 12; Rev. 13:8)—that is, Jesus Christ crucified. Here is the heart and soul, not only of the book of Revelation and of the three angels’ messages but also of the whole Bible. We cannot be faithful to our calling, we cannot do the work that God has raised up this church to do, unless we have the slain Lamb, Jesus crucified as a sacrifice for our sins, as the focal point of our message. Ángel Manuel Rodriguez explains this reality as follows:

“We must intentionally place the Lamb that was slain at the very center of our doctrines and mission and at the heart of every sermon we preach, every article we write, every prayer we make, every song we sing, every Bible study we give, and in everything we do. Let the love revealed by the Lamb on the cross transform the way we treat each other and move us to also care for the world” (“The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” unpublished manuscript, 70).

In other words, amid the imagery of dangerous beasts, of a dragon making war, of plagues, of persecution, and of the mark of the beast, there remains front and center the slain Lamb. And He alone, and what He has done for us, is doing now, and will do before it’s all over; He is ultimately what the three angels’ messages are all about.
THE BRIGHTEST LIGHTS

Humanity has in itself no light. Apart from Christ we are like an unkindled taper, like the moon when her face is turned away from the sun; we have not a single ray of brightness to shed into the darkness of the world. But when we turn toward the Sun of Righteousness, when we come in touch with Christ, the whole soul is aglow with the brightness of the divine presence.

Christ’s followers are to be more than a light in the midst of men. They are the light of the world. Jesus says to all who have named His name, You have given yourselves to Me, and I have given you to the world as My representatives. As the Father had sent Him into the world, so, He declares, “have I also sent them into the world.” John 17:18. As Christ is the channel for the revelation of the Father, so we are to be the channel for the revelation of Christ. While our Saviour is the great source of illumination, forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity. God’s blessings are bestowed through human instrumentality. Christ Himself came to the world as the Son of man. Humanity, united to the divine nature, must touch humanity. The church of Christ, every individual disciple of the Master, is heaven’s appointed channel for the revelation of God to men. Angels of glory wait to communicate through you heaven’s light and power to souls that are ready to perish. Shall the human agent fail of accomplishing his appointed work? Oh, then to that degree is the world robbed of the promised influence of the Holy Spirit!

But Jesus did not bid the disciples, “Strive to make your light shine;” He said, “Let it shine.” If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ are not the light of the world, it is because the vital power has left them; if they have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light. (Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956], 40, 41.)

The angel who unites in the proclamation of the third angel’s message is to lighten the whole earth with his glory. A work of world-wide extent and unwonted power is here foretold. The advent movement of 1840-44 was a glorious manifestation of the power of God; the first angel’s message was carried to every missionary station in the world, and in some countries there was the greatest religious interest which has been witnessed in any land since the Reformation of the sixteenth century; but these are to be exceeded by the mighty movement under the last warning of the third angel.

The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. As the “former rain” was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the “latter rain” will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.” Hosea 6:3. “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.” Joel 2:23. “In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.” “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:17, 21.

The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were (cont. on p. 109)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How do you understand Jesus’ words “the truth shall make you free”? What does it mean to be free in this context?

How do the issues in the last days ultimately come down to authority?

What are the implications of the glory of God filling the earth?

When does obedience become legalism? How can we guard against that?

In what ways can someone who doesn’t keep the commandments of God still be a legalist?

What answer can you give to those who criticize talking about the beasts and warnings in Revelation (besides the obvious answer that they’re in the Bible)?

How do we strike a balance between being aware of the times and not getting caught up in speculation?