

THREE COSMIC MESSAGES

EARTH'S FINAL
CONFLICT
MARK FINLEY



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Review&Herald®

Mark Finley

Three Cosmic Messages: Earth's Final Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

There is a conflict raging in the universe. It is all around us.

We feel it deep within our own hearts. Beyond what our eyes can see there is a cosmic battle for the control of the universe. It is a Star-Wars-like intergalactic drama that is far more intriguing and thrilling than the academy award winning movie. The throne of the universe is at stake. Will the forces of light triumph over the forces of darkness? Will right defeat wrong? Will Christ finally triumph over His archrival Satan? Will evil one day come to an end?

The prophecies of Revelation pull the curtain aside and give us a glimpse of this conflict. They reveal the climatic final events in this titanic struggle between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil. Amazingly enough, God has sent three cosmic messages with divine urgency to prepare every person on planet earth for what is coming. These urgent end-time messages come directly from God's heart of love. They reveal His last-day plans for our troubled planet. They carefully detail what is coming and how to prepare for the events that will soon burst upon this world as an overwhelming surprise.

Just look around you. The scene is being set. The threat of nuclear war is ever present. Even a limited nuclear war would kill millions and wreak

environmental catastrophe on our planet. Climate change has become a grim reality. Many scientists are predicting serious consequences if something is not done soon. The economy of our world hangs on a slender thread, and the next global monetary collapse may be just around the corner. Who knows when viruses now present will break out into the next pandemic killing millions? And hunger and starvation are real threats in many parts of the world. Could it be that a political/religious alliance under the auspices of the antichrist will one day step forth as the solution to earth's problems? Revelation has the answers.

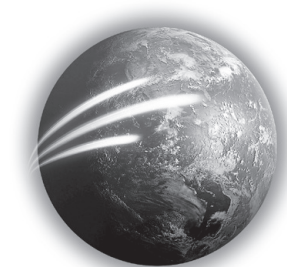
In *Three Cosmic Messages: Earth's Final Conflict*, I unfold Christ's last message of love to this planet. This message is found in the heart of Revelation in chapter 14. You will thrill as you read these thought-provoking, hope-filled chapters. Each chapter is drenched in God's love as it candidly confronts the issues of our time from the perspective of Revelation's three prophetic cosmic messages. It is my prayer that as you read these pages you will be drawn closer to the Christ who made you, who loves you with an everlasting love, and who is soon coming to take you home.

—Mark A. Finley

“A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...”

So began the epic Star Wars media franchise. Yet countless light-years before George Lucas’s theatrical juggernaut made its 1977 screen debut, a far more stupendous war began. This was the first-ever war in all the universe—the war behind all wars that still rages. It’s real, not fictional. It’s the last-ever battle of all time—a war in which two great forces battle. Do they battle for territory? No, they battle for minds and hearts. For your mind. Your heart. It’s a battle between God’s indescribably great love for you and an enemy who hates you and is out to destroy you.

The story of the greatest war of all wars is chronicled in the Bible’s last book: Revelation. Find a Bible. Turn in it now to Revelation, chapter 12.



CHAPTER ONE

Jesus Wins—Satan Loses

INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

England was fighting for survival. Just eighteen miles across the English Channel, Hitler's powerful forces seemed poised to conquer Britain. But in underground war rooms—which London visitors can still see today—Winston Churchill and his team plotted a strategy that would bring them victory. One important part of their strategy: They broke the enemy's code!

Recently, Simon Singh wrote a book titled *The Code Book: The Secrets Behind Codebreaking* in which he describes the code breakers in England's Bletchley Park during the war. These carefully selected mathematical geniuses were successful in breaking the Nazis' secret code.

Under a brilliant crypto-analyst, Alan Turing, they constructed complex machines to decipher Germany's Enigma machine-generated codes. Near the beginning of their work, there were 159 quintillion

combinations to check! But Turing's work enabled them to exploit weaknesses in the Enigma machine, and before long, on good days, the code breakers at Bletchley were finding the daily Enigma key within an hour. At times, they could decode Nazi messages in real time!

Turing's work was so important that one of the code breakers, Jack Good, said: "I won't say that what Turing did made us win the war, but I daresay we might have lost it without him."

Other observers were not so optimistic but did acknowledge that the code breakers at Bletchley shortened the war in Europe by at least two years. Their work enabled the U-boat hunters to pinpoint where the German submarines were so they could tell the convoys how to avoid them and the hunters where to find them. The code breakers made all the difference. They revealed the plans of the enemy and provided a strategy for the allied forces to achieve victory.

In the great cosmic war between good and evil, we too are able to break the enemy's code. The Bible's last book, Revelation, is a code breaker. It unmask the plans of Satan and reveals God's plan for complete victory. It reveals, in great detail, God's strategy for victory in earth's last war.

We begin this Bible study series on God's final message for humanity in Revelation, chapter 12. Revelation 12 provides the backdrop for the great controversy between good and evil waging in the universe. It provides the setting for heaven's most urgent message for an end-time generation who are described in Revelation 14.

The theme of Revelation, is: JESUS WINS—AND SATAN LOSES

Earth's last great battle in the cosmic war is outlined in Revelation, chapter 12. This magnificent chapter is the focus of our study today. This chapter presents four episodes—snapshots from the opening of the battle in heaven to the closing of the battle on earth.

EPISODE 1: THE BATTLE FOR THE THRONE: JESUS WINS—SATAN LOSES

In your Bible, please turn to Revelation 12, verses 7–9:

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

War broke out in heaven. What a strange place for war! “Michael and His angels fought...and the dragon and his angels fought.” Was the battle a physical battle or simply a mental war game? It was both. Notice carefully that every angel in heaven had to make a choice. There was no neutrality—no middle ground. Not one heavenly angel could say, “I don’t want to participate. I think I will just be a bystander.” Every angel had to make the all-important choice regarding whose side they would be on. In earth’s final conflict there is no neutrality. The messages from the throne room of God, and especially Revelation 14, are God’s final messages to humanity. These messages lead us to choices that will decide our eternal destiny.

“I MADE SURE THEY NEVER KNEW I WAS A CHRISTIAN”

Several years ago, a student from a Christian college desperately needed a summer job. As he searched the newspapers’ “want ad” sections and checked for available jobs on popular computer job sites, he discovered an ad for college students to work cutting timber in the forests of Canada. He applied for the job and was hired. When he told his Christian buddies about his intentions for the summer, they said, “What? Are you crazy? You will be ridiculed, harassed, and made

fun of all summer by those rough lumberjacks.” They urged him not to take the job, but he took it anyway.

When he returned to college for the next year’s term, his friends asked him how he was able to survive as a Christian among men who partied, caroused, and sometimes used foul language. His reply? “It was no problem at all. I made sure they never knew I was a Christian.”

When the cosmic war broke out, heaven’s angels didn’t have that option. Every angel had to make an eternal, life-or-death decision—and to make it publicly. They had to make up their mind whose side they were on. The freedom to choose is a fundamental principle of God’s government, but we will be held accountable for the choices we make. There is a powerful statement written in 1899 by one with deep spiritual insight.

“Christ shows that there can be no such thing as neutrality in His service. The soul must not be satisfied with anything short of entire consecration—consecration of thought, voice, spirit, and every organ of mind and body. It is not enough that the vessel be emptied; it must be filled with the grace of Christ” (Ellen White, *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 14, Manuscript 78, 1899).

There is no neutrality in earth’s final war. But here is the incredibly good news: Revelation 12 describes Christ’s triumph in the galactic battle, the great controversy, the Star Wars conflict that began in heaven so long ago. In that battle, Jesus defeated Satan. Satan was cast out of heaven, and as Revelation 12, verse 8, describes it, the devil and his evil angels “did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” In that battle for the control of the universe in heaven over the throne of God, Jesus and His angels won, and the devil was defeated. Jesus has never yet lost a battle with Satan. In fact, His greatest victory occurred here on earth, on a Friday at a place called Calvary. *That was the day when—and the place where—the war was won!*

Describing this cosmic war, Revelation 12:8 declares, “But they did not prevail.” Notice this divine “but.” There was war in heaven...*but...* they did not prevail. In this first episode Jesus wins—and Satan loses.

Jesus is:

The Mighty Warrior

The Conquering General

The Victorious Lord

The Triumphant King

In the battles we face in our own personal lives, and in the struggles we confront every day, we can have the absolute assurance that in Christ—because of Christ and *through* Christ—we are conquerors. He has never yet lost a battle with Satan. This leads us to the second episode in this cosmic drama in Revelation 12.

EPISODE 2: SATAN ATTACKS JESUS: JESUS WINS—SATAN LOSES

Read now Revelation 12:3–5. Centuries pass, and Satan focuses his attention on destroying Jesus. Revelation 12:4–5 declares:

“And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

In the Bible, a rod is a symbol of dominion or rulership. A rod of iron is a symbol of an unbreakable, all-powerful, invincible rulership. Jesus faced every temptation that we experience and came off conqueror. Satan failed to destroy Him as a child, failed to defeat Him in His life, and failed to demolish Him in his death. The all-powerful risen Christ has defeated Satan.

As the Apostle Paul puts it in Colossians 2:15, “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in [the cross].” The devil is a defeated foe. Christ has triumphed over Him in his life, death, and resurrection. Since Jesus has already defeated the devil on Calvary’s cross, we can be victorious too. How? By faith in what Christ has already done.

Read Revelation 12:10:

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come...’”

What has come? Salvation in Christ. Have you received it by faith?

What has come? The strength and the power of His Christ. Have you received it by faith?

When we accept the righteousness of Christ as our righteousness and we are declared righteous through Christ’s death, the dying Christ declares us righteous through His blood. The living Christ makes us righteous through His intercession.

Look please at verse 11: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” Christ has overcome. Accept it. Believe it. Say it: Satan is a defeated foe!

Ellen White gave counsel to a husband who looked on the gloomy side of life. His wife was extremely sick, and his negative, morose attitude affected her deeply. This man was a defeatist, and rather than living in the joy of Christ’s victory, he lived in frustrated defeat. Ellen White offered him this divine counsel:

“Your life is now miserable, full of evil forebodings. Gloomy pictures loom up before you; dark unbelief has enclosed you. ... Yet no one can help you as well as yourself. If you want faith, talk faith; talk hopefully, cheerfully” (E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 699).

Here is an eternal truth: Our faith grows as we accept Christ's victory as our own. Our own attitudes greatly affect our actions. Faith-filled Christians live in Christ's victory and thus triumph over the powers of hell.

Accepting Christ's victory as your own, believing His victory is yours, focusing on His strength and not your weakness, and speaking out his victory, you will be victorious.

The devil suffered a deadly blow at Christ's death on the cross. Revelation 12:10 describes Christ's victory over Satan on the cross in these words:

"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'"

Commenting on this victory, the Apostle Paul states in Colossians 2:15:

"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in [His cross]."

Christ's victory over Satan was complete, but the great controversy between Christ and Satan is not over yet. Satan was defeated in heaven—defeated at the cross—but he still wages war against the people of God on earth.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers ... in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The battle still rages, but victory for born again believers is certain. And if you are not yet born again, you want to be.

Now let's focus our attention on Revelation 12:11:

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

They *overcame* the accuser—victory is ours....

They are not overcome—they overcame...

They are not defeated—they are victorious...

They are not conquered—they are conquerors...

They do not lose the battle—they win the battle.

The word *overcome* (*nikao* in the original language of the Greek New Testament text) can be literally translated "to conquer," "to prevail," "to triumph," or "to come through victoriously."

How is this possible? Revelation's answer: "by the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 12:11).

The Lamb is a central figure in the book of Revelation. The Lamb of God, our perfect Savior, who gave His life in a perfect sacrifice, is mentioned twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, numbers are significant. *Seven* in the book of Revelation is a symbol of perfection. *Four* is a symbol of universality. It represents the four points of the compass—North-South-East-West. Jesus our perfect Savior provided on the cross of Calvary salvation for all mankind.

Let's look at just one of these twenty-eight passages and catch the majesty of this symbolism of a lamb. Turn to Revelation 5:6:

"And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

The Lamb is a symbol of sacrifice. Remember when John the Baptist, seeing Jesus, declared: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)? Through His sacrifice, our guilt is gone, our sins are forgiven, and we are no longer condemned for our transgressions. They are taken away from us. He bears the guilt, the shame, and the condemnation of our sin.

When we accept in faith what Christ has done for us, our debt is canceled, and our sins forgiven. If we are forgiven, there is nothing for which we can be accused.

The renowned preacher John Piper puts it this way, “When Christ died and “wiped out” the record of our debts—our recorded trespasses—the courtroom-file of accusations was taken away from our prosecuting attorney, Satan, the great “accuser” (Revelation 12:10). Satan has no grounds for accusation anymore—none that stick” (John Piper, online article: DesiringGod.org, “Satan Disarmed, Sin Forgiven, Soul Alive,” July 20, 2014).

And Charles Wesley’s hymn so beautifully frames it:

Arise, my soul, arise!
Shake off thy guilty fears,
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.

In His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus conquered and overcame forever the worst that sin and evil could do to Him. He made the full assault on evil and overcame it. When we accept Jesus by faith, His victory is ours.

Our victories over Satan on this earth are rooted in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. His work has great implications for you and your battle. *How is this so?*

Listen carefully to what I say next: If you have come to Christ, accepted His sacrifice on the cross, and are His child, *your place in heaven has already been assured through His victory!*

Ephesians 2:4, 6 declares:

“But God... raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Such verses show that there is a great bond between Christ and His people. We are united with Him in His death, raised with Him in His resurrection, and seated with Him in heavenly places in His exaltation.

United with Christ, His death for sin assures us that we do not have to die for our sins. Because we were united with Christ when He rose again and ascended into heaven—we have a status in heaven.

Heaven is our true home. We Christians have a right to it. We have a certain status there as God’s children.

WELCOME HOME!

My wife and I were traveling in a Middle Eastern country that had been in conflict with Israel for many years. Since my travels were extensive internationally, I had an Israeli stamp on my passport. This was problematic. The passport control officer checked my passport, left us standing at the passport exit counter, entered an office, and discussed the situation with the airport customs officials. He returned, looked through the passport once more, and left again.

When the officer finally returned, he simply said “Israel.” I calmly responded, “Yes, I travel internationally to countries throughout the world, including the Middle East.” The officer left again and did not return for what seemed like ages, although it was likely just a few minutes. When the officer returned again, he looked through the passport and then simply said, rather angrily, “Go...go...go on!” He did not have to tell us twice. We immediately rushed to our gate to catch our flight.

Entering America, it was an entirely different experience. At Passport Control we gave the immigration officer our American passports. He smiled and simply said, "Welcome home." What was the difference? We are American citizens. We belong here.

Through Jesus, we belong. Living on earth, through His blood, we have our passport to the eternal world.

Through Jesus, because of Jesus, we have the right—the guarantee—of eternity. Satan is a defeated foe. The stranglehold of death is broken. By faith, through the blood of Christ, eternity is ours. No matter how contrary it may seem in today's troubled world, Satan is a defeated foe.

Satan's charge against God in heaven was that God was a dictator—a tyrant who did not have the best interest of His creatures in view. The cross defeats that argument and reveals a God of infinite love who will do anything to save us.

The cross satisfies the claims of a broken law. The lawgiver pays the penalty of our breaking the law. The Creator becomes our Redeemer. The Innocent One accepts our guilt. The Sinless One accepts the penalty for our sins and pays the ransom price to redeem us.

Love triumphs over hate. Righteousness defeats unrighteousness. Truth triumphs over error. Life defeats death. Hope is the victor over despair.

Napoleon once made this insightful statement:

"Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him."

Lift your head. There is no reason for discouragement. There is no reason for despair. Trials? Yes! Disappointments? Certainly! Obstacles? Definitely! Heartaches? Yes, even these sometimes. But Christians are still the most joyful people in the world, because they daily hear the

words of Christ echoing in their ears, "...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The daily presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit reminds us that a better world is coming and that through Jesus we have a place guaranteed there.

Satan is a defeated foe. In Christ, victory in the battle is certain.

EPISODE 3: SATAN ATTACKS GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

ONCE AGAIN JESUS WINS—AND SATAN LOSES.

Let's look at Revelation 12:6, which says:

"Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

We continue in verses 13 and 14:

"Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."

Please notice these phrases: *a place prepared by God* (verse 6); *her place, where she is nourished* (verse 14); and *the earth helped the woman* (verse 16). Every time the devil attacks a child of God, He has a place of refuge prepared for His children.

Bible prophecy often uses *code* languages. It speaks of strange beasts, mystic symbols, and unusual signs. The good news is that the same God who revealed this prophetic symbolism provides the keys to unlock its mysteries in His Word.

When the prophecy is symbolic, the time periods are symbolic. Here are three Old Testament passages that help us more clearly understand these 1260 days when the woman, or church, escaped to the wilderness. In Numbers 14:34 we read:

“According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years...”

The twelve Israeli spies visited the land of Canaan for forty days. Ten of them returned with a negative report. God’s prophetic word declared that, for each day they spied out the land, Israel would wander in the wilderness for one year. As predicted, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. This helps to establish in Scripture what is known as the *day/year* principle. Each prophetic day equals one literal year. We find this principle delineated in other places in the Bible. Ezekiel 4:6 says, of God’s judgment on His people: “I have laid on you a day for each year.” In Genesis 29:27, Laban commands Jacob to labor for Rachel for a week—or seven years. One of the great confirmations of Bible prophecy is that when the day/year principle is applied, it fits perfectly the historical events described by the prophecy.

Back to Revelation 12, we find the prediction that the people of God would be persecuted for 1260 prophetic days—or literal years. History records that during the Middle or Dark Ages, from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798, this persecution occurred.

Then, in A.D. 538, terrible persecution began against Christians who differed from the medieval church. Inquisitions were held against those

believed to be heretics. In the Middle Ages, God's people were often oppressed and persecuted. They were often hunted, and some were martyred. They were "hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8–9).

But exactly 1260 years later, in 1798, General Berthier led the armies of France into Rome and captured Pope Pius VI. Inquisitions no longer threatened those who believed in Scripture alone as their spiritual authority. It all happened exactly as Revelation had foretold!

Victory is ours, not because there is no struggle or no battles to fight but because Christ is already victor through His life, death, glorious resurrection, and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary—and soon, very soon, Satan will be vanquished forever.

We are still in the battle, but the victory has already been won.

One religious writer uses this wonderful illustration:

"Imagine a city under siege. The enemy that surrounds the city will not let anyone or anything leave. Supplies are running low, and the citizens are fearful. But in the dark of the night, a spy sneaks through the enemy lines. He has rushed to the city to tell the people that in another place the main enemy force has been defeated; the leaders have already surrendered. The people do not need to be afraid. It is only a matter of time until the besieging troops receive the news and lay down their weapons" (Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, pp. 149–150).

Similarly, we may seem now to be surrounded by the forces of evil—disease, injustice, oppression, and death. But the enemy has been defeated at Calvary. Things are not the way they seem to be. It is only a matter of time until it becomes clear to all that the battle is over.

Throughout the Middle Ages, God was with His people. His victory over Satan in His life, death, and resurrection assures us that whatever

the circumstances we find ourselves in, through Jesus we will be victorious. Listen to this hopeful statement:

“Christ rejoiced that He could do more for His followers than they could ask or think. He spoke with assurance, knowing that an almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that truth, armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the contest with evil; and that the bloodstained banner would wave triumphantly over His followers. He knew that the life of His trusting disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter” (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 679).

Christ has called us to victory, not defeat; to triumph, not loss; to success, not failure.

There is one last episode in our passage: Revelation 12:17.

EPISODE 4: SATAN WILL VICIOUSLY ATTACK THE REMNANT, BUT ONCE AGAIN JESUS WILL WIN, AND SATAN WILL LOSE.

Our Lord has never yet been defeated by Satan, and He will surely not be defeated in earth's last war.

Let's examine Revelation 12:17:

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring...”

According to Revelation 12:9, the dragon represents Satan. In this passage, Satan is angry with the woman, God's church. The devil is

furious with a people who keep the commandments of God, and he will do everything he can to destroy them.

Eventually, he instigates a decree so that they cannot buy or sell and will be imprisoned and face torture and death. Earth's last war is not centered on the Middle East; it is focused on the minds of God's people. It is a battle between two opposing forces—the forces of heaven and the forces of hell.

The central questions in this final war are, “Who has our loyalty? Where is our allegiance?” Heaven calls for a final generation of believers who are so charmed by Christ's love, redeemed by His grace, committed to His purposes, empowered by His Spirit, and obedient to His commands that they are willing to face death itself for His cause.

Our world is headed for a major crisis. We are on a collision course. But here is the incredibly good news: We are on the winning side. Christ and His church are going to triumph. In Jesus, by Jesus, through Jesus, and because of Jesus, we will triumph at last. Christ's victory is the eternal guarantee of our victory. Our heavenly High Priest will never let us down. He will get His people through earth's last hours.

CONCLUSION: THE DAN CRAWFORD STORY

On a high hill overlooking the town of Luanza, nestled on the shores of Lake Mweru in what is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a cemetery containing the last remains of several brave missionaries who gave their lives for the cause of Christ. Among those graves is that of Dan Crawford, who is often referred to as the one who most closely followed in the footsteps of David Livingstone. Crawford had requested that his body be buried as that of an African—wrapped with a blanket and then with a grass mat. But his body was also placed in a roughly made wooden casket.

Sometime during the night of May 29, 1926, he was restless. Having turned roughly and quickly in his cot, he knocked the back of his hand against the shelf near his bed. Nothing was done at the time. The next day, he noticed swelling and inflammation of this seemingly insignificant wound. But gangrene set in very quickly. In his own words:

“This week I suffer under a grave disability. My left arm is poisoned, and this poison is knifing me very hard. So, we are in God’s hand, and all is well. It is harrowing and might have been avoided, only I was sleeping in my little den in a deep sleep. This made me forget the iodine, which is the panacea of my life. To say that it is harrowing is only to remind you that it is the harrow that produces the smiling lands of corn, and this explains that ‘*we glory in tribulation*’ verse—but do we? Goodbye dear friends. We will meet at the ‘*appearing in excellent glory*’.”

The infection continued to spread rapidly up his arm, and he recognized that it was a fatal illness. He slipped into a coma and died about 6:30 p.m. on June 23, 1926, at 57 years of age. *Konga Vantu*, the name the Africans gave him, literally means “the gatherer of the people.” This name was given because he gathered together thousands of people to the foot of the cross, where they found joy, hope, and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The day Dan Crawford was found dead, a well-read and well-worn copy of the New Testament was found in one of his pockets. On the inside cover was a hand-written verse from a hymn called, “We Two”:

“I cannot do it alone! The waves dash fast and high; the fog comes chilling around, and the light goes out in the sky. But I know that we two shall win in the end —Jesus and I. Coward, and wayward, and weak, I change with the changing sky, today so strong and brave, tomorrow too weak to fly; but—He never gives in! So we two shall

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win—Jesus and I!” (Barry Blackstone, *Though None Go With Me*, 2016; Emily P. Miller, “We Two,” 1915).

Do you feel too weak to make it through earth’s final hours?

Have Satan’s temptations at times overwhelmed you?

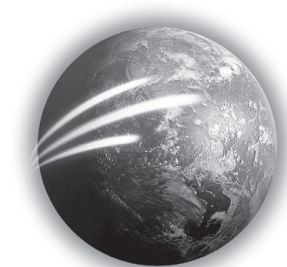
At times, does the thought of the future seem to frighten you?

Here is the incredibly good news: You and I do not have to face the future alone. With our hands in the hands of the One who has never lost a battle with Satan we will triumph at last. We can claim with Dan Crawford, “In the end we too shall win—Jesus and I.”

EARTH'S FINAL CONFLICT

IT'S CELEBRATED IN STORIES, POETRY, SONGS, MOVIES, AND BOOKS.

It's the most powerful force in all the universe. It's, as one lyric has it, "what the world needs most but has far too little of." It's also, as the Bible has it, the most perfect expression of God's law and of God Himself. For untold eons stretching into a past without beginning and too long to measure, love flourished unchallenged to the farthest reaches of the limitless universe. But then, unimaginably, horrifically, love came under siege—under constant attack by an enraged opponent who declared all-out war against love and Jesus, the Source of all love. The war continues even now. But it is almost over. Find a Bible. Turn in it to Revelation, chapter 14. From the terrors of war, let us focus together on the best news ever!



CHAPTER TWO

A Movement of Destiny

Western society is at a crossroads. We are at a moment of destiny.

Moral values are waning. Honesty, integrity, and purity are in short supply. One writer put it this way:

“Christian morality is being ushered out of American social structures and off the cultural main stage, leaving a vacuum in its place—and the broader culture is attempting to fill the void. New research reveals growing concern about the moral condition of the nation, even as many American adults admit they are uncertain about how to determine right from wrong” (Barna Group, *The End of Absolutes: America’s New Moral Code*).

According to a recent poll by the Barna Group, 80 percent of Americans, regardless of ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or political ideology, express concern about the nation’s moral condition. Though measurable differences exist between population segments, moral concern is widespread across the demographic board.

In 1960, approximately 72 percent of the United States population said they trusted the government almost always to make the right decisions. That statistic has dramatically plummeted, until today only 19 percent of the population that says they trust the government to “almost or always do the right thing,” according to the reputed polling firm Pew Research. This means that a whopping 81 percent of Americans have lost confidence in their government leaders. This is true not only in the United States, but polls indicate that there is a waning confidence in populations around the world in the ability of their political and social leaders to do the right thing.

A SOCIETY IN TROUBLE

When popularity is more important than purity, a nation is in trouble. When money is more important than morality, a nation is in trouble. When entertainment is more important than ethics, a nation is in trouble. When pleasure is more important than purity, a nation is in trouble. When there is a confusion of sexual roles and sexual orientation and God’s original plan of one man married to one woman for a lifetime is flagrantly violated, a nation is in trouble. When crime is rampant in the streets, and Christ is mocked in the schools, a nation is in trouble.

The ancient prophets speak to this generation in trumpet tones. Their messages resonate with a twenty-first-century generation seeking for answers to the deepest questions of life.

The wise man declares in Proverbs 14:34, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Nations are great, because nations are good. When a nation ceases to be good, it soon ceases to be great. There is a direct correlation between the erosion of moral values and the collapse of the social structures in society.

Honesty, integrity, truthfulness, purity, and family values are the bedrock foundations of all nations. When these values are compromised, societies crumble.

Solomon also adds, “Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow, So a curse without cause shall not alight” (Proverbs 26:2). The King James Version makes it even clearer: “The curse causeless shall not come.”

PARALLELS WITH ROME'S COLLAPSE

Distinct parallels exist between the fall of the Roman Empire and the state of Western society today. In 1787, after twenty years of labor, Edward Gibbon completed his book *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In it, he attributed the fall of the Empire as being due to:

The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home—the basis of human society. (Morality rapidly declined. The family unit fell apart, and immorality became commonplace.)

Higher and higher taxes (national debt—the rich got richer, and the poor became poorer). Public monies for free bread (a welfare state) and circuses (entertainment) for the populace.

The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal (today's comparable analogies: video games, TV, violent and sex-ridden movies).

The building of gigantic armaments, when the real enemy was within—the decadence of the people; an overextended military—money lavishly spent to build their army.

The decay of religion—faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS

The Bible's last book—Revelation—reveals that what is true of nations and societies is also true of individuals. Nations are made up of people. Legislators often legislate what people want. They bow to the popular will of the people. They conform to the desires of their constituency. If society is ever to be transformed, it is because people are transformed. If nations are ever to be changed, it will be because there is a radical moral transformation in the hearts and minds of its people.

God is never caught by surprise. In these last days of human history, He has sent a special message designed to meet the need of the hour. He pictures this message as being carried by three angels in the midst of heaven, flying with their urgent, end-time message to the ends of the earth. Revelation's message invites all humanity to make their eternal choice. This is a moment of destiny—a moment of choice.

As James Russell Lowell put it in his poem "Once to Every Man and Nation":

"Once to every man and nation,
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side."

Our world is at a crossroads. This is a moment of destiny; each one of us is at the crossroads in the decisions we make every day. Character is not formed in an instant. It is the result of a lifetime of daily decisions.

As the Holy Spirit impresses our minds, as we daily yield to His impressions and allow our characters to be molded by the grace of Christ, we become more like Jesus day by day. Revelation's message is Jesus' final message of mercy to lead us from trusting in our own goodness and righteousness to totally living by faith and trusting in His grace. There will come a day when every human being on planet earth will have made their final, irrevocable decision. Revelation's message of Christ's righteousness, delivering us from the bondage of guilt and the grip of sin in our lives, will echo and re-echo throughout the earth. The day will finally come when the words of Christ will be fulfilled:

"And 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"
(Matthew 24:14).

ETERNAL CHOICES

Revelation 14 is at the very heart of Revelation's last-day message. The Bible's final book reveals God's message to His people living at the close of this earth's history. The heart of the book of Revelation is Revelation 14.

Let's focus now on Revelation 14:14–20. Revelation 14 is divided into three parts. The first five verses picture a group of people called the 144,000—the redeemed—standing with Christ in heaven. In a future chapter, we will study these 144,000. In Revelation 14:6–12, we discover Christ's last-day message for humanity. In future presentations we will study these verses very carefully.

In Revelation 14:6–20, six angels are mentioned. The first three angels announce the final judgment. The first angel announces that the hour of God's judgment has come. The second angel announces judgment on Babylon, the apostate religious powers of our day. The third angel announces judgment on the beast who oppresses, persecutes, and declares war on the people of God.

The last three angels execute the judgment announced by the first three angels. The Son of Man stands in the center of these six angels, in triumph over the powers of hell, to deliver His people

Let's focus now on the last part of Revelation 14, verses 14–20, that describe the execution of heaven's final judgment.

If you have a Bible near, turn to Revelation 14:14.

“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.”

You will recall that 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.”

The angels then declared to the amazed disciples in verse 11:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

Revelation 14:14 is the fulfillment of Acts 1:11. Jesus ascended in a cloud of angels and will return with a cloud of angels.

Notice the expression Scripture uses to describe Jesus in Revelation 14:14: “Then I looked and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the *Son of Man*” (emphasis added).

Jesus is “the Son of Man.” This was His favorite title He used for Himself. It is used eighty-two times in the gospels alone. Matthew uses it thirty times. It is often used in connection with the second coming of Christ.

Consider the following three Bible passages:

“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27).

“For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be...Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:27, 30).

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory” (Matthew 25:31).

Notice the three elements in each of these passages:

1. Jesus is coming.
2. He will execute judgment when He comes.
3. The destiny of the nations and all humanity will be decided for eternity.

The Son of Man is also mentioned in the light of the judgment in Daniel 7:9–10 and 13–14. In verses 9 and 10, Daniel views the seating of the heavenly court with ten thousand times ten thousand of 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 (verse 9):

“I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.
His throne was a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;”

In verses 13 and 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—the divine heavenly trio—have done everything possible to save all humanity (verse 14):

“Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed.”

In the judgment, the records of our lives are opened. The choices we have made are revealed. The question in the judgment is not good deeds weighed against bad deeds; it is, rather, what have we done with Jesus? What have our daily choices been in relation to Him? Have we responded to His grace? Have we accepted His loving sacrifice on Calvary's cross? Has our response to His grace, prompted by His Spirit, made a difference in our lives?

Jesus unfolds before millions of heavenly beings that His sacrifice was enough. The cross was enough. His death was enough. His righteousness was enough. His obedience was enough. His power was enough. His victory was enough. Notice what He wears on His head when He returns to reap earth's final harvest.

THE VICTOR'S CROWN

John describes Him as the "Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle" (Revelation 14:14). The word for crown is *stephanos*. It is a victor's crown. When an athlete won an important contest, they were given the *stephanos*—the victor's crown. It was a crown of honor. It was a crown of glory. It was a crown symbolizing victory.

Jesus once wore the crown of thorns, symbolizing shame and mockery. He was once despised and rejected of men. He was reviled, ridiculed, spat upon, beaten, and whipped, but now He wears the crown of glory. He comes as King of kings and Lord of lords. Notice what the angel says:

"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 14:15).

Where does the angel come from? The angel comes from the presence of God in the glory of the temple. God looks at the angel and says, "It's time. The harvest is fully ripe." The angel flies from the

temple to Jesus and declares with a loud voice: “It is time. The harvest is ripe, Jesus. Go... go... go... Marshal the forces of heaven...Command the angels! ‘Go and get Your children and bring them home.’ The long night of earth is over. Their suffering is over. They have been faithful. Go...get my children and bring them home.”

ANOTHER HARVEST

In Revelation 14, verses 17–20, there is another harvest—the bloody harvest of unholy grapes. Both harvests are fully ripe. The harvest of golden grain represents the deliverance of the righteous.

“And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.” (Revelation 14:18–20).

“Another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire...” 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. A loving God has done everything He can do. There is nothing more grace can do to redeem those who have repeatedly rejected the claims of His Holy Spirit.

Throughout Scripture, God’s wrath is His judgment on sin. The time has come to execute God’s final judgment on sin and make an utter end of rebellion. Some have wondered what the text means when it declares that “blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

One thousand six hundred furlongs is about 200 miles. That's approximately the length of Israel from north to south. The imagery is clear. The destruction of evil will be complete. There will not be one vestige of sin left in the land. There will not be a trace of evil to be found. Sin will be finally, completely blotted out forever.

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, hate, jealousy, and impurity. The character of Jesus is revealed in one group and the character of Satan in the other.

Every seed will come to harvest in that day. The universe will see in the people of God a revelation of righteousness that no generation before it has ever revealed. The righteousness of Christ will be on display in the people of God. 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.

SOWING AND REAPING

In the last days, the seeds of righteousness and the seeds of wickedness will be fully ripe. Every one of us is sowing seed and growing seed in the choices we make day by day. What seeds are you sowing? The fruit we produce in our lives is the result of the seed we sow in our lives.

You cannot sow the seeds of evil and reap righteousness. You cannot sow the seeds of immorality and reap purity. You cannot sow the seeds of dishonesty and reap honesty. You cannot sow the seeds of worldliness and reap heavenly mindedness. You cannot sow the seeds of anger and reap patience. You cannot sow the seeds of intemperance and reap health. You cannot sow the seeds of the world's mass media entertainment and reap heaven's character.

Here is a thought-provoking statement:

“The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell” (Ellen White, *Great Controversy*, p. 555).

What does the mind do? It gradually adapts itself to those subjects on which it is allowed to dwell. Subtly, imperceptibly, almost unnoticed at first, our characters and our personalities change based on the seeds 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.

In every harvest, there are distinct and certain laws of sowing and reaping. This is true in the natural world and in the spiritual world. Galatians 6:7 states it clearly:

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Notice the expression, “God is not mocked.” The root word for “mocked” comes from the Greek word *mukter*—the nose. It literally means “to turn up the nose at, to treat with contempt, to ridicule.” We cannot ignore and treat with contempt God’s Word, His truth, His laws, and His eternal heavenly principles without experiencing the consequences in our own lives and characters.

Notice the next phrase in our text: “For whatever.” “Whatever” makes this law of sowing and reaping universal and all-inclusive—it applies to anything and everything we sow. Sow good seed, and you will have positive results. Sow evil seed, and you will have negative results.

Since everything reproduces after its kind, God can never be mocked. Just as no one can sow beans and produce watermelon, or breed cows and produce thoroughbred horses, just so no one can sow evil and produce good. We cannot sow discord and produce unity. We cannot sow lies and produce truth. We cannot sow sin and produce holiness.

We cannot sow unrighteousness and produce righteousness. We cannot sow intemperance and produce health. We cannot sow criticism of others and produce positive relationships with them. We cannot sow prayerlessness and produce godliness. We cannot sow a life with a lack of Bible study and produce the depth of spiritual 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. Here is something for us to think about:

Sow a *thought*, reap an *act*;
Sow an *act*, reap a *habit*;
Sow a *habit*, reap a *character*;
Sow a *character*, reap a *destiny*.

The promise and warning of Scripture is that we reap what we sow. This means that life's choices are filled with consequences both good and bad—both temporal and eternal.

Christians often make two fatal mistakes regarding this law of sowing and reaping. The first is spending time grieving over the seeds they sowed in the yesterday of past years. Their past mistakes, failures, and sins haunt them. Second, they spend time worrying that the seeds they have already sown are going to ruin a future life of joy and fruitfulness in God's cause. They have the idea that their past shapes their future.

THREE DAYS

There are three days in every week about which we should not worry—three days that we have little control over.

One of these days is *yesterday*, with its mistakes and missteps, its aches and anxieties, its faults and failures. Yesterday has passed forever beyond our control. All the money or worry in the world cannot bring back yesterday. We cannot undo a single act we performed;

we cannot erase a single word we said. Worry won't make right what we did wrong yesterday. Yesterday is gone.

The other day we should not worry about is *tomorrow*, with its possible adversities and poor performance, its burdens and its large promise. Tomorrow is beyond our immediate control. It is still in the future. It may come to us as the beauty of a sunrise in a calm blue sky or with the dark clouds of a thunderous storm.

That leaves only one day—*today*. Anyone, by the grace of God, can face Today in the confidence of God's abiding presence. Any of us can recognize that Today is a new day, and God is longing to do a new thing in our lives.

Only when you and I live in the joy of Christ's presence and the delight of His salvation can our lives be filled with the abundant life He offers. If we live in the guilt of yesterday and the worries of tomorrow, we will certainly be discouraged.

Our Heavenly Father is working in our lives today to prompt us to make positive choices. Jesus is wooing us, drawing us to Himself, to make the best positive decisions for time and eternity. And all the while, the Holy Spirit is empowering us to carry out the desire He has placed in our hearts to make right choices.

It is harvest time...

Every seed is going to result in harvest...

Seeds of righteousness and seeds of wickedness.

Seeds of good and seeds of evil.

Echoing down the centuries come the words of Scripture:

"...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

Will you choose *today* to respond daily to the wooing of His Spirit and to live in the joy of His grace and rejoice that we have a Savior who has done, is doing, and will do everything possible to save us?

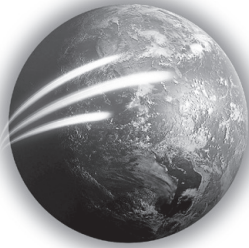
THE BOOK OF REVELATION. THE LAST BOOK OF THE BIBLE.

Revelation and its Old Testament counterpart, Daniel, are filled with symbols: fearsome beasts, daunting numbers, and mystifying predictions.

Yet there's a good reason that the Bible's final book is called Revelation. In it, Jesus Christ is revealed—not as a distant and uncaring deity, but as a God of purest love.

God's love is limitless and unconditional. And from the beginning of earth, He has poured it out on each person who has ever lived, who lives now, or who ever will live.

Revelation: God's love revealed. And perhaps nowhere in Revelation is this more clearly presented than in Revelation, chapter 14.



CHAPTER THREE

Hope's Grace-Filled, End-Time Message

Businesses, political parties, and religious movements all have their slogans.

Here are a few popular slogans you will likely recognize if you grew up in America:

MasterCard: “There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s MasterCard.” Nike: “Just Do It.” Apple Computers: “Think Different.” *The New York Times*: “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” L’Oréal: “Because You’re Worth It.”

According to Entrepreneur.com’s small business encyclopedia, a slogan is “a catchphrase or small group of words that are combined in a special way to identify a product or company.” In many ways, these slogans are like mini-mission statements.

Brief one-line statements powerfully identify a business. They shape the attitudes of both the employees and consumers regarding what the business is all about. In a sense, just like a rancher brands cattle—with a mark of the owner’s identity—these statements brand businesses or products.

ISRAEL'S STATEMENT OF FAITH

God brands religious movements as well. He places His identifiable stamp of approval on them to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. In the days of ancient Israel, when the heathen nations around them were polytheists worshiping multiple gods, Israel's clear, identifiable, powerful statement of faith was found in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Twice a day, in the morning and the evening, Jewish families repeat: "*Shema Israel, Adonai Eluheno, Adonai Ekhad.*" "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

"*Hear O Israel.*" Throughout the centuries of their exile, the chanting of these words—the Shema—reminded Jews of the spiritual vision and path which united them as a people. That statement of faith also strengthened Israel's resolve to resist the various attempts to force them to abandon their spiritual vision and path.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is one of the first verses that a Jewish child is taught as soon as he or she learns to speak. Jewish mothers also teach their young children to chant the Shema before going to sleep.

This declaration of faith produced long-lasting effects. After the Second World War ended in 1945, some leading rabbis visited Christian orphanages in order to search for Jewish children. During the Holocaust, some Jewish parents in Europe had placed their children in Christian orphanages in order to save their lives. These parents hoped that they would later be reunited with their children and that, if the parents did not survive, surviving relatives or friends would find their Jewish children.

After the war, most of the priests and nuns who ran these orphanages were unwilling to release the Jewish children and allow them to return to their people. The priests and nuns who ran the orphanages would usually deny that they had any Jewish children. During one visit, a leading rabbi asked the priest in charge of the orphanage to allow him to return in the evening when the children were going to sleep. The priest reluctantly agreed to the rabbi's request. When the rabbi

returned, he entered the children's room, and as he walked through the aisles of beds, he chanted the Hebrew words of the Shema. One by one, children burst into tears and cried out, "Mama!" Many repeated the words of the Shema.

The priests were caught off-guard—totally surprised. They were unable to erase these children's memories of their Jewish mothers putting them to bed every night with the *Shema* on their lips. The head priest had no choice but to admit that he was "mistaken"; thus, these lost children of Israel were able to return "home" to their people and to the Torah.

Burned into their consciousness, indelibly impressed upon the minds of these children, were those words that confirmed their Jewish Identity. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES OUR RALLYING POINT

For Seventh-day Adventists, the three angels' messages in Revelation 14 are our Shema—our rallying point. They are our identifying statement of faith. They define who we are as a people and describe our mission to the world.

We find our unique prophetic identity outlined in Revelation 14:6–12, and it is here that we find our passion to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. Ellen White puts it this way:

"In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import,—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention" (Ellen White, *Evangelism*, p. 119).

In this chapter, we begin a detailed study of Revelation 14:6–12 with new eyes—eyes of grace and new ears too—to listen again to God speaking to our hearts. Previous messages have given us the background of these three angels flying in mid-heaven. We have discovered that in the blazing light of eternity, in this cosmic battle between good and evil, Jesus has sent His last-day message to the world to prepare this planet for His soon return. This message is a grace-filled message full of hope for men and women groping for answers to life’s most perplexing questions.

A GRACE-FILLED BOOK OF HOPE

When most people think about the Bible’s last book, Revelation, they do not think about grace. Their thoughts turn almost immediately to frightening beasts, mystic symbols, and strange images. The book upsets many people. On one occasion, a barber commented to an Adventist pastor, “I read the book of Revelation last evening and became so frightened that it was difficult to sleep.” Thankfully, the pastor was able to reassure him that the message of Revelation is one of hope.

It is unfortunate that so many people are hesitant to read Revelation, and that they view it through the eyes of fear. The first verse of the first chapter proclaims the book as the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Let’s read it:

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1).

Revelation is a grace-filled message of end-time hope. It describes Christ as the slain Lamb twenty-eight times. It tells us in chapter 1, verse 5, that He is the one “who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” It proclaims that in Christ we are forgiven. Grace pardons our past, empowers our present, and provides hope for our future.

In Christ, we are delivered from sin's penalty and power, and one day soon we will be delivered from sin's presence. This is the hope-filled, grace-filled message of the Bible's last book, Revelation.

REVELATION'S END-TIME MESSAGE

The heart of the book of Revelation is an urgent last-day message found in the fourteenth chapter. In the imagery of three angels flying in mid-heaven, God proclaims His last message of mercy to a dying world. Revelation 14:6 declares:

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.”

Here is a message that is urgent—the angel flies in mid-heaven. It is eternal—the angel has the everlasting gospel. And it is universal—it is to be proclaimed to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

A message that is urgent, eternal, and everlasting must be incredibly relevant and important for an end-time generation.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

Notice that the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 begin with the eternal or “everlasting gospel.” The gospel is the foundation stone upon which Revelation's messages rest. If we fail to understand the depth of the gospel, we will miss the entire point of the three angels' messages. We can never fully understand the issues in God's judgment-hour message if we do not understand the gospel. We will never fully understand heaven's warning about the fall of Babylon and God's call for His people to come out of Babylon if we fail to understand the gospel. We will never understand the fateful warning about the mark of the beast if we fail to understand the gospel.

What is the gospel? Theologians have discussed that question for centuries. Maybe our clearest answer can be found at Calvary. A few feet from where Jesus hung on the cross, a convicted thief was also being crucified. The pain of crucifixion was terrible—hand-forged spikes flattened the sensory-motor median nerve that runs through the arm, wrist, and hand. This is the same nerve that sends jolts of pain down the arm when an elbow bumps against a sharp surface. But in crucifixion, there was more than a momentary jolt of pain. The nerve was flattened by the head of an iron spike, and the pain continued without relief. Crucified victims usually responded with screams and curses, and the thief did exactly that. For a time, he even cursed Jesus. But then he heard Jesus react to the same pain—not with a curse, but with a prayer for forgiveness.

Something awakened in his mind—perhaps from his early boyhood memories of the Shema at bedtime, perhaps a Torah extract he had heard at synagogue that revealed Israel’s suffering Messiah. And then he did three remarkable things.

First, he accepted his own guilt. He acknowledged that he was a sinner. Then he accepted the righteousness of Christ. And finally, having confessed that he didn’t deserve salvation, he asked for it anyway—and got it, an assurance direct from the Lord himself!

That is the elegant simplicity of Calvary. That is the heart of the gospel. On the cross, Christ took the initiative. With outstretched arms, He reached out to lost humanity. The dying thief saw, in the crucified Christ, God’s love revealed. In the light of Christ’s love, we acknowledge our own mistakes, we acknowledge the righteousness of Christ, and then, based on His righteousness alone, we accept the salvation He so freely offers.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes this eloquently,

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand... For I

delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3–5).

Paul is clear in his definition of the gospel. The gospel is the incredibly good news of Christ's death for our sins, His glorious resurrection, and His ever-present love and concern for us.

The gospel is the joyous reality that Jesus will deliver us from sin's *penalty* and sin's *power*—and finally, from its very *presence*. By faith in His shed blood and His resurrection power, we are delivered from the guilt and the grip of sin.

Christ filled the Apostle Paul's thoughts and was the foundation and center of his teaching and preaching. The crucified Christ redeemed him from the condemnation and guilt of his past. The resurrected Christ gave him power for the present, and the returning Christ gave him hope for the future.

Paul cries out from the depths of his being, "I am a debtor to grace."

He continues describing this amazing grace throughout the book of Romans. Let's get a glimpse of the Holy Spirit's revelation of the magnificence of grace throughout the book to more deeply understand the everlasting gospel in Revelation 14.

Notice now Romans 3:24–26:

"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Notice three points in this passage:

1. We are justified freely by grace.
2. Grace is a declaration of God's righteousness.
3. Through grace God justifies those who believe in Jesus.

Let's continue our study in Romans 5:6–8:

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Christ's grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned. Jesus died the agonizing, painful death that lost sinners will die. He experienced the fullness of the Father's wrath or judgment against sin. He was rejected so we could be accepted. He died the death that was ours so we could live the life that was His. He wore the crown of thorns so we could wear a crown of glory. He was nailed upright in torturous pain upon a cross so we could sit upright on a heavenly throne with the redeemed of all ages wearing the robes of royalty forever. Marvel of all marvels, wonder of all wonders, and in our shame and guilt, Jesus did not reject us—He reached out in love to accept us.

Ellen White explains the significance of the cross in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753:

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because

of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

"Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."

On the cross, Christ assumed the penalty of sin for all humanity. He bore the guilt and shame of sin for the entire human race. The dark shadows of death hung over the cross, and Jesus experienced the death all sinners will die as the result of the guilt and shame of sin, (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is the story of a Savior's love beyond measure. This is the story of a Jesus who loves us so much that He would rather experience hell itself than have one of us lost. This is the story of a boundless, unfathomable, incomprehensible, undying, unending, infinite love which longs for us to be with Him eternally and who was willing to assume the guilt, condemnation, and consequences of our sin and if need be, stay separated from His Father forever, if that is what it took to save us.

Redeemed by grace, motivated by love, and empowered by Christ's Spirit who dwells in our hearts by faith, sin no longer reigns in our lives (see Romans 6:12). Although at times in our humanness we may fail, we are no longer under the domain of sin. Its hold on us has been broken. According Romans 8:15, the Apostle Paul says:

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

THIS IS THE STORY OF GRACE.

Not an afterthought... God is never caught by surprise. He is not subject to the changing winds of humanity's choices. His plan to deliver us from the domain of sin was not some afterthought when sin reared its ugly head.

John speaks of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). The Apostle Peter adds,

“...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:18–20).

The phrase *everlasting gospel* in Revelation 14:6 speaks of the past, the present, and the future. When God created humanity with the capacity to make moral choices, He anticipated that they could make errant choices. Once His creatures had the capacity to choose, they had the capacity to rebel against His loving nature.

The only way to avoid this reality would be to create robot beings controlled and manipulated by some divine cosmic plan. Forced allegiance is contrary to God's very nature. Love requires choice, and once beings were given the power of choice, the possibility of making the wrong choice existed. Therefore, the plan of salvation was conceived in the mind of God before our first parents' rebellion in Eden.

In the book *The Desire of Ages*, we read this insightful statement:

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Romans 16:25, R. V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne” (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22).

The phrase *everlasting gospel* speaks of a God who loves the beings He created so much that, although He fully knew the consequences of their choices, He made provision for their eventual rebellion even before it happened.

There is another sense in which the gospel is eternal. To a generation starved for genuine, authentic love and longing for meaningful relationships, the gospel speaks of acceptance, forgiveness, belonging, grace, and life-changing power. It speaks of a God of unconditional love who cares so deeply that He will go to any length to redeem us because He wants us with Him forever.

The “eternal gospel” speaks not only of the past but promises a future with hope. It speaks of living eternally with the One whose heart is aching to be with us forever. The gospel speaks of an eternal relationship with the Christ who created us and redeemed us so that we could live with Him through the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Considering the controversy between good and evil raging in the universe, and Satan's distortion of God's character, the gospel of God's grace and boundless love will be preached to the ends of the earth as a witness of His eternal goodness.

What is the gospel? As shown to a dying thief at Calvary, it is the good news that salvation is a gift of God. He saves us not because we are good, but because He is good. Our salvation is not dependent upon our works, but it is dependent on His grace. All our good works are motivated by love and empowered by grace.

When Ellen White was asked by some people who were concerned whether the message of "righteousness by faith detracted from the three angels' messages," her response was:

"Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message in verity'" (*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890).

Righteousness by faith, God's unending love, and His abounding grace are not a preamble to the three angels' messages. They are not some add-on until we get to the "meat" of the message. They are at the very heart of the three angels' messages.

This is the message of the everlasting gospel that is to rapidly go to the ends of the earth to prepare a world for the coming of Jesus. We can never be ready to share the gospel unless we have experienced the gospel—and once we have truly experienced the salvation that Christ so freely offers and the grace that He so graciously bestows, we cannot be silent. The Apostle Paul stated it succinctly when he said, "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

INTO ALL THE WORLD

According to the urgent, end-time message of the first of these three angels, the "everlasting gospel" is to be proclaimed to every nation, tribe,

tongue, and people. Here is a mission so grand, so large, so great, and so comprehensive, that it is all-consuming. It demands our best efforts and requires our total commitment. It leads us from a preoccupation with our own self-interest to a passion for Christ's service. It inspires us with something larger than ourselves and leads us out of the narrow confines of our own minds to a grander vision.

Our faith in what the Holy Spirit will accomplish through our consecrated efforts. It leads us to fulfillment of Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19, 20, in which He told His disciples, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:18, 19). As Revelation 14:6 declares, the gospel will be proclaimed to "every nation, tribe, tongue and people."

In his book, *The Quest for More*, Paul David Tripp discusses the psychological need of every human being to be part of something larger than themselves. He states it this way:

"Human beings were created to be part of something bigger than their own lives. Sin causes us to shrink our lives down to the size of our lives. The grace of Christ is given to rescue us from the claustrophobic confines of our own little self-focused kingdom and frees us to live for the eternal purposes and satisfying delights of the Kingdom of God. We live in a culture that has institutionalized self-focus and personal entitlement. If you look around, it is very clear that we need to be rescued from ourselves. Things like debt, addiction, obesity, divorce, etc. are the fruits of a culture of self-focus, where we look for meaning where meaning cannot be found. There is freedom to be found in living for something bigger than yourself.... Ultimately it means living for the glory of God and the success of his agenda for the world he made."

There is nothing more inspiring, more fulfilling, more rewarding than being part of a divine movement, providentially raised up by God

to accomplish a task far bigger, far larger than any one human being could ever accomplish on their own. The commission given by God as described in Revelation 14 is the greatest task ever committed to His church. It is an earnest appeal to give our lives to heaven's grandest task.

In His end-time sermon in Matthew chapter 24:14, Jesus makes a similar statement: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come."

Notice the words "as a witness." The logical question is, "As a witness to what?" The answer is simply this: to God's gracious, loving character. Jesus will return when the entire planet has had a reasonable opportunity to grasp the depth of His Father's love and respond to His grace. Both Matthew 24 and Revelation 14 speak of a message of God's incomprehensible love revealed just before Jesus returns. And He intends the world to see this in our lives.

Motivated by love and compelled by Christ's grace, accepting this challenge, Adventist missionaries have given their lives to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth for decades. Consider the sacrifice of Abram LaRue.

ABRAM LA RUE: MISSIONARY TO CHINA

Abram La Rue, a shepherd and woodcutter from California, had a burning ambition to take the good news to China. He wrote to the General Conference but was told that at 65 he was too old. Moreover, they didn't have the money to send him. Not discouraged, La Rue negotiated his way onto a ship where he could work his way to Hong Kong. He arrived there in 1888 and began preparing pamphlets for distribution. Fourteen years later, J. N. Anderson, the first official church missionary to China, arrived in 1902. La Rue witnessed the first six people baptized in that part of Asia, and he died one year later.

Here are John's words written from a rocky, barren outcrop on the island of Patmos:

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6).

John says, “Then I saw...” What did you see, John? He saw the everlasting gospel being preached throughout the world to prepare men and women for the return of our Lord.

The preaching of the everlasting gospel leaps across geographical boundaries. It penetrates earth's remotest areas. It reaches people of every language and culture. It impacts the entire world. The foundations of hell are shaken, and the forces of evil tremble.

“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” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612).

The power of Christ is greater than the power of the evil one. The love of Christ is a stronger motivation than the world's cheap allurements. The appeal of the eternal is greater than the appeal of the transitory pleasures of this life.

Jesus' plan and purpose and people will triumph at last. The church, battered by Satan's attacks, oppressed by the powers of evil, harassed by the forces of hell, and crushed by persecution will rise and proclaim God's last-day message of grace in the context of the three angels' messages to the ends of the earth.

This is the destiny to which you are called. This is heaven's calling to your heart. This is Christ's appeal to your soul. Will you accept heaven's appeal? Will you answer Christ's call?

As a debtor to grace, will you give all you have to this Christ who paid such an infinite price for you and participate in His mission of sharing His last-day message with a dying world?

Today we no longer have to board slow-moving sailing ships, as did La Rue, to take the gospel message to the world. Instantaneous communications such as social media can make an entire world aware—overnight—of a politician’s youthful indiscretions. Those same channels of communications can make the world aware—overnight—of end-time issues, such as the fact that, through faith, the gospel can change human lives for the better. That is a message badly needed by a world descending into hate-filled rhetoric and proliferating existential threats.

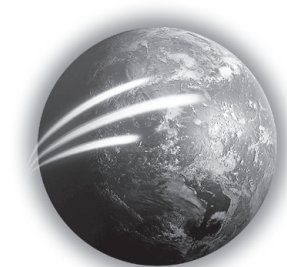
Can it be that we are only hours away from a worldwide proclamation of the gospel—waiting for the healing power of the gospel in our own lives?

IN THE GREAT WAR BEHIND ALL WARS, EACH OF US HAS A PART TO PLAY.

Our part is to choose each day which of the two great leaders in the war we will support. Will we support Prince Michael (Jesus), who stands for love and truth and life? Or will we—either by choice or by default—give our loyalties to Satan, who stands for selfishness and lies and death?

The Bible says that shortly before Jesus returns to earth heaven will be the scene of a judicial inquiry called the judgment, in which the lives of all who have ever lived or will yet live are to be investigated to determine which side of the great war they are on.

You can just imagine who the prosecutor is—the great enemy of us all. But have no fear! Jesus, who gave His life for us, is not only our **Judge** but also our **Defense Attorney!**



CHAPTER FOUR

Jesus and the Judgment:

WHY THE JUDGMENT IS GOOD NEWS—NOT BAD NEWS

Daniel Webster was one of America's best-known statesmen and orators.

His career as a brilliant orator and his ability to captivate audiences throughout young America made him one of the most popular speakers of his day.

On one occasion, he was asked what he regarded as his greatest insight. He replied: "The sense of my individual responsibility to God."

He went on to elaborate in these words: "This thought is not pleasant to those who are living in their sins and out of relationship to Him, and consequently are not prepared to face the tremendous issues involved. But whether the issues are faced or not, the fact remains: 'So then each of us shall give account of himself to God'" (Romans 14:12).

We all are responsible to God, as the Word of God declares, and cannot escape our responsibility.

Daniel Webster's words lead us to carefully consider our daily choices. Choices are the stuff life is made of, and our choices will determine our eternal destiny. God has created us with free will, and we are responsible for the choices we make. The judgment implies moral responsibility.

As Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

But the judgment is much more—much, much more than about us. The judgment is more about the age-long issues in a controversy waging between the powers of righteousness and the forces of hell. The judgment is more about God's justice and mercy, His law, and His love. In a sense, He is on trial, too. And Christians can witness to the power of the gospel.

- ▶ There is no question that we are accountable to God.
- ▶ There is no question that we are responsible for our actions.
- ▶ There is no question that the decisions we make will determine our eternal destiny.

But what I want to study with you now is a larger picture and a broader understanding of the judgment that powerfully impacts our lives.

Many Christians fear the judgment. They dread having their lives reviewed before a righteous God. But as we study the judgment in this presentation, remember three mighty principles of heaven's judgment:

1. In the judgment, Jesus is our Judge. "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22).
2. We are judged not by the stern, demanding God many people picture, but by a Savior who was willing to die for us. (But the news gets better still!)

3. Jesus is not only our judge; He is also our defense attorney.
“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

What is an advocate? That is your attorney. You are being judged by your defense attorney!

With these reassuring truths constantly before us, let's look at the Bible's description of the last-day judgment to discover when it happens and how it happens. Throughout our study, everything will be laced with God's pervasive grace and His determination to use every possible mechanism to save us.

REVELATION'S LAST-DAY JUDGMENT

The Bible's last book, Revelation, focuses on the end of the age-long controversy between good and evil. Lucifer, a rebel angel, challenged the justice, fairness, and wisdom of God. He claimed that God is unfair and unjust in the way that He has administered the universe. At the very center of this conflict over the character of God is Revelation's final judgment.

Notice Revelation 14:6–7. In previous chapters, we saw that God has sent a last-day message to humanity, pictured as three angels symbolically flying in mid-heaven to carry God's final message to the ends of the earth. The foundation of this message is “the everlasting gospel” (Revelation 14:6). It is the good news of God's grace that changes us, transforms us, and delivers us from the condemnation and bondage of sin. Changed by grace and rejoicing in the salvation that Christ so freely provides, we are motivated to cooperate with Him in sharing the message of His everlasting love. Notice especially in Revelation 14:7 that God's good news of the everlasting gospel includes the expression, “the

hour of His judgment is come” (Revelation 14:7). The hour of *whose* judgment has come? It is clear in the text. It is the hour of *God’s* judgment.

This is the hour for the entire universe to see the goodness of our God. Once and for all, the beings on unfallen worlds will see, in the light of the judgment hour, that God has done everything He could to save every human being. Christ’s life and death revealed His character of unselfish love. The judgment reveals to the entire universe how Christ’s infinite love pursued each person on planet earth. It reveals His gracious actions to save every person who would respond in faith. It reveals that the gospel has power to change human lives.

There are four key facts about Revelation’s end-time judgment I want to clearly present:

1. The Judgment reveals God’s justice and mercy. It says something about His love and law. It speaks of His grace to save and His power to deliver. It reveals to a waiting world and watching universe His provisions to save all humanity. The judgment is part of God’s ultimate solution to the sin problem. In the great controversy between good and evil in the universe, God answers the charges of Satan that He is unfair and unjust in the final judgment. When our names appear in judgment before God, Jesus will ask in the presence of the entire universe, “Could I have done anything more to save this individual?” Heaven’s infinite, detailed records will be opened. We are so precious to God that the entire universe pauses to consider the choices we have made in light of the wooing of the Holy Spirit and the redemption so freely provided by Christ on Calvary’s cross.

The entire universe and the unfallen worlds will see the countless times God sent His Holy Spirit to our hearts. They will see the numberless times Jesus drew us to Him:

- ▶ How He sent angels to beat back the forces of Satan.
- ▶ How He arranged the providences in our life.
- ▶ How He revealed Himself in the natural world.
- ▶ How He gave us opportunity after opportunity to respond to His loving appeals.

All of this was for one purpose: to save us. In the final analysis, every being in the universe will see that Calvary is enough—the cross is sufficient. Jesus could do nothing more. He has done everything He could. The entire universe will burst into rapturous song:

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Revelation 15:3).

Revelation’s judgment reveals God’s unfathomable love as well as His justice in dealing with the controversy between good and evil. It reveals once and for all, now and forever, in the present and through all eternity, that heaven could not have done one more thing to save us.

THE INTERSECTION OF JUSTICE AND MERCY

The cross and judgment both reveal that God is just and merciful. The broken law demands the death of the sinner. Justice declares, “For the wages of sin is death,” but mercy responds, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). If God’s law could be changed or abolished, it would have been totally unnecessary for Jesus to die. Christ’s death establishes the eternal nature of the law, and the law is the basis for judgment. Revelation 20:12 makes this eternal truth plain:

“And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”

Works reveal our choices. Our deeds reveal our loyalty.

According to Ephesians 2:8–10: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God” (verse 8). But when Christ saves us, He changes us, “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (verse 9). “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (verse 10).

Our good works, empowered by the Holy Spirit, do not save us, but they do testify that our faith is genuine. God’s final judgment strips away all pretense, all hypocrisy, all falsehood, and pierces into the very depths of our being. Christ reveals that He has done everything possible to save us, and the judgment reveals how we have responded to Christ’s saving grace.

There is a second eternal truth about the three angels’ announcement about the judgment that we cannot miss:

2. The judgment has arrived. It is a present-tense judgment. The hour of God’s judgment is here.

John declares in no uncertain terms in Revelation 14:7 that “the hour of His judgment has come.” Here is an urgent, present-truth message for the entire world. Notice, our text does not say that “the hour of God’s judgment *will* come.” Instead, it emphatically announces that “the hour of His judgment *has* come,” in the present tense.

This is only logical. When Jesus comes, according to Matthew 16:27, “the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Exiled on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John, writing in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, declares, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12).

Follow me closely now. If Christ is coming to give out the rewards, there must, of necessity, be a judgment before He comes to determine

who receives what reward. This leads us to these logical questions: Could we be living in the judgment hour now? Is time running out? Are we on the knife-edge of eternity? If the hour of God's judgment has come, when did this judgment begin?

We can find the answer in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation, which are companion volumes pointing us to the unfolding events in the last days of earth's history. The book of Revelation announces that the hour of God's judgment has come. The book of Daniel reveals when the judgment began. In this study, we introduce the connection between Daniel's and Revelation's prophecies on the judgment. In the next chapter on the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, we will study more deeply the exact timing of the beginning of the judgment.

A MAGNIFICENT SCENE IN HEAVEN

Let's travel back over the centuries and catch a glimpse with Daniel of this magnificent heavenly scene of the final judgment. In Daniel, chapter 7, God reveals the future of the world to the prophet. Nations rise and fall. Persecuting powers oppress the people of God. After describing Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, the break-up of the Roman Empire, and the union of church and state throughout the centuries, God focuses Daniel's mind on a glorious celestial event that will set all things right. Let's read about what God showed Daniel in vision. We discover this remarkable judgment scene in Daniel 7:9–10:

“I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head like pure wool,
His throne was a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.

THREE COSMIC MESSAGES

A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened.”

The destiny of all humanity is decided in heaven’s courtroom. The oppressive powers that persecuted God’s people are judged. Right prevails. Truth triumphs. Justice reigns.

But this heavenly scene continues in Daniel 7:13:

“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days
And they brought Him near before Him.

This is one of the most amazing, marvelous, and spectacular scenes in all of Scripture.

Jesus approaches His heavenly Father in the presence of the entire universe. Heavenly beings crowd in around the throne of God. The entire universe of unfallen beings stands in awe of this judgment scene. The long conflict that has waged for millennia is soon to be over. The battle for the throne of the universe will be fully, completely decided. In one divine blaze of glory, Daniel states in verse 14:

“Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed.”

Jesus is worthy to receive the kingdom. Love has conquered. Grace is greater than sin. Right triumphs over wrong. Let us study this point even more deeply.

3. The judgment reveals the saving righteousness of Jesus and His triumph over the principalities and powers of hell.

In your Bible, turn to Revelation, chapter 4, verse 1:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’”

Jesus invites us to look through the open door in heaven’s sanctuary to view eternal scenes in the great controversy between good and evil. He gives us a glimpse of the eternal plan of salvation as it plays out in heaven.

What do we see when we look through heaven’s open door? What do we hear as we bend our ears heavenward? What issues are being decided in heaven’s celestial court?

We notice in Revelation 4:4 that twenty-four elders surround God’s throne. Who are these twenty-four elders? In ancient Israel, there were twenty-four courses in the Levitical priesthood. These priests represented the people before God. In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle declares that New Testament believers are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood.” These twenty-four elders represent all the redeemed that one day will rejoice around the throne of God. They are people of all ages past who were resurrected at the time of Christ’s resurrection and who ascended to heaven with Him (see Matthew 27:52).

This is good news. There are some of the redeemed from the earth around the throne of God. They have faced temptations just as we face

them. They have experienced the same challenges in life that we face and have been confronted with similar problems. In every generation there have been those who, by God's grace, have overcome through the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. They are clothed in "white robes," signifying the righteousness of Christ that covers and cleanses their sins. They have golden crowns upon their heads, signifying that they are victorious in the battle with evil and part of heaven's royal line of faith-filled believers.

Who are the four living creatures in Revelation 4, verses 6 and 7? Remember that Israel marched in the wilderness under four banners—a lion, a calf, the face of a man, and a flying eagle. These banners indicated God's continual protection and everlasting guidance and illustrated the roles Jesus would play in our rescue.

Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, left the glories of heaven and in becoming a man accepted the role of a sacrificial animal—the calf—but was resurrected and ascended to His Father's throne flying through the heavens like a soaring eagle. These four living creatures offer praise to Jesus through all eternity for His sacrificial love.

We see a throne set in heaven with God sitting upon it. There are divine beings around the throne, and soon all of heaven begins to sing, and the crescendo of praise swells higher and still higher:

"You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For you created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created"
(Revelation 4:11).

All of heaven gives praise to Jesus, our all-powerful Creator, but in Revelation 5 the scene dramatically changes. Initially, the scene is no longer one of praise. Notice in Revelation 5, verse 1, that there

is the throne once again and a scroll is introduced, written on both sides. It is sealed with the divine seal, and no one in heaven or earth can open the scroll.

In verse 2, the question is raised, “Who is worthy to open the scroll...?” Heavenly beings tremble. The issue is serious. If no one in heaven can open the judgment scroll, all humanity will be lost. No angelic being can represent humanity in earth’s final judgment. The Apostle John, viewing the scene, recognizes its terrible significance.

In Revelation 5:3 John states:

“And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.”

But wait! There is One who can open the scroll. There is One who is worthy to redeem humanity. There is One who bore the condemnation, the shame, the guilt, the curse of sin.

John beholds the ultimate answer to the sin problem in Revelation 5:5–6. Here, the aged prophet is shown the only way anyone can pass the final judgment at the throne of God.

“But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (Revelation 5:5–6).

Jesus, the Lamb of God, who has sacrificed His life for the salvation of all humanity, takes the scroll of judgment and opens it. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous praise. His victory over Satan’s

temptations, His death on Calvary's cross, His resurrection, His high-priestly ministry provides salvation for all who choose by faith to respond to His grace.

Justice demands that the penalty for the broken law must be paid. The Scripture is plain. Romans 3:23 states that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and Romans 6:23 adds that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is impossible for us to save ourselves. There is no way we can pass the judgment on our own. In the light of the judgment bar of God, the debt we owe is much too high to pay. Here is a powerful story that illustrates this point.

THE JUDGE WHO PAID THE PRISONER'S FINE

Two men who had been friends and companions in their youth met in the police court, the one on the magistrate's bench, the other in the prisoner's dock. The case was tried, and the prisoner was found guilty.

Would the judge, in consideration of their friendship years before, forbear to pass judgment? No, he must fulfill his duty. Justice must be done; the law of the land must be obeyed. He gave out the sentence—fourteen days hard labor or a fine of \$500.

The condemned man had nothing to pay, so the prison cell was before him. But as soon as he had pronounced the sentence, the judge rose from the bench, threw aside his magistrate's robes, and stepping down to the dock, stood beside the prisoner, paid his fine for him, and then said, "Now, John, you are coming home with me to supper."

It is just so with the sinner. God cannot overlook sin. Justice must be done and the sentence pronounced; but Christ Himself pays the debt, and the sinner is free. In the final judgment, Jesus stands before the whole universe and declares that our debt is paid.

4. The judgment is incredibly good news for the people of God. It signals the end of sin's reign and the deliverance of God's people.

The judgment scene in Daniel, chapter 7, that we introduced earlier is complementary to the judgment scenes in Revelation 5 and 14. In Daniel 7, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome rise and fall. The little horn arises out of Rome as a religio-political power that counterfeits the truth of God and persecutes the people of God.

Daniel's attention is then drawn from earth to heaven where God sits in judgment. As we read previously in Daniel 7, verses 9 and 10, all of heaven waits with eager anticipation for the final verdict in heaven's judgment. Heavenly beings burst into rapturous song and rejoice as the kingdom is given to Jesus. But then, marvel of all marvels, wonder of all wonders, see what happens next. We read about it in Daniel 7:22, 27:

“[T]he Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints....

Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

Jesus receives the kingdom and gives it to His faithful followers. In highest praise, we fall at His feet and worship Him through the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Can anything be more encouraging? Jesus stands for us in the judgment. His perfect righteous life covers our imperfections. His righteousness works within us to make us new. His grace pardons us, transforms us, and empowers us to live godly lives.

We need not fear. Jesus stands for us in the judgment, and the powers of hell are defeated. Judgment is passed in favor of the people

of God. The purpose of the judgment is not to find out how bad we are, but to reveal how good God is.

Therefore, all heaven sings praise and glory and honor to Jesus, our Lord and Redeemer.

“And they sang a new song, saying:

‘You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For you were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth’” (Revelation 5:9–10).

Through the ceaseless ages of eternity, we will sing the praises and glory of Jesus. He redeemed us. He shed His blood for us. He sacrificed His life for us. He is our Savior, our Redeemer, our slain Lamb, our interceding High Priest, our living Christ, and our coming King. Christ is all we need and everything our heart desires.

Many years ago, an old farmer visited London for the first time in his life. He wandered into one of the city’s great art galleries to look around. In one of the galleries, he came to a wonderful painting of the Lord Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross. He stopped before it, and as he gazed at the picture, a great love for the One who hung there flooded his heart. “Bless Him!” he said, aloud. “I love Him! I love Him!”

Others in the gallery heard the old man’s words, and—seeing the tears trickling down his old furrowed cheeks as he stood beside the picture, hat in hand and forgetful of all else—the observers were touched and stopped before the picture, too. Soon a stranger drew near to the old countryman and, grasping his hand, said, “I love Him, too, brother.”

Seeing what had taken place, a third stepped forward, saying, “So do I.” Then a fourth joined them, and a fifth, until there stood before the picture of the Savior a little knot of men, perfect strangers to one another, but drawn together by the love of the Lord Jesus.

Without Christ, Revelation’s judgment is a terrifying event, but when we really see, *truly see*, a clear picture of Jesus standing in our behalf in the judgment, we too with this old man in London say, “Oh! How I love Him.” Has the realization gripped you yet that according to the message of the three angels we are living in the judgment hour?

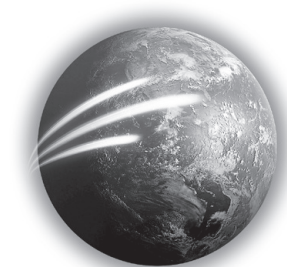
This is no time to be playing games with religion. This is no time for some superficial faith in name only. This is a time for a full commitment to the Christ who loves us with an eternal love and gave His life to redeem us. If you have never made that commitment before, will you make it now? And if you have made that commitment previously, will you renew your commitment to Him just now?

YOU MIGHT CALL IT GOD'S HISTORY OF THE FUTURE.

In school, maybe you were a standout in your math classes. Or maybe you barely passed. At any rate, you don't have to be a math whiz to understand the numbers in the Bible's longest prophecy—the great 2300-year prophecy in the book of Daniel.

On display here is the pinpoint precision that results when a prophecy is made by Someone who knows the future better than any of us know our immediate past.

When it comes to taking in the entire sweep of the great controversy—the pivotal events in the war behind all wars—God has gone out of His way to be sure we know what is coming up and when.



CHAPTER FIVE

God's Prophetic Timetable

Over two centuries ago, a band of weary settlers were slowly making their way across the central plains to a distant place that had been opened by the United States government for homesteading. These adventurous pioneers traveled in covered wagons drawn by oxen, and progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to note a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie. Soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely, and the wind was blowing it directly at them.

They had crossed a river the day before, but it would be impossible to go back to the river before the flames would be upon them. Only one man seemed to understand what needed to be done. He gave the command to set a controlled fire in the grass behind them. Then when the space was burned over and the fire burned out, the whole company moved back upon it.

As the prairie fire's flames roared from the west toward this frightened band of pioneers, a little girl cried out in terror, "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?"

The leader replied, “My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!”

What a picture of the believer, who is safe in Christ!

“On Him Almighty vengeance fell,
Which would have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus becomes our Hiding Place.”
(Jehoida Brewer, *Sovereign Love*, October 1776)

The fires of God’s judgment burned themselves out on Him, and all who are in Christ are safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been. In heaven’s final judgment, the infinite love of God is revealed. Christ was judged as a condemned sinner so we could be judged as righteous citizens of the heavenly kingdom. He was judged as a criminal so we could be set free from the fiery flames of eternal loss. He died the death that was ours so we could live the life that was His.

NOTHING TO FEAR

Revelation’s end-time judgment does not terrify us, because we stand within the circle of His love, the burned-over place, where the flames of eternal destruction can no longer touch us. We stand, not trembling in fear, but rejoicing in His grace. Revelation’s gospel has delivered us from condemnation in Revelation’s end-time judgment.

Let’s return for a moment to Revelation 14:7. Our text says:

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come;”

As we pointed out in the last chapter, there must be a judgment *before* Christ comes to determine who will receive what reward *when*

He comes. The angel announces in a loud voice that the hour of God's judgment has come. It is no more "business as usual." We are living in the judgment hour. This is no time for dabbling around the edges of faith. This is no time for playing religious games. The hour of God's judgment has come, and the destinies of all humanity are being decided. Daniel, the companion book to Revelation, describes precisely when this last-day judgment began.

AN ANGEL'S EXPLANATION

In Daniel, chapters 8 and 9, we discover the divine timetable for the beginning of this heavenly judgment. Miraculously, in His infinite wisdom, Jesus links this end-time judgment with specific milestones in the life of Jesus.

These historically verifiable earthly events on the timeline of history confirm the reliability of prophecy and the date for the beginning of the judgment. Daniel 8:14 gives us our first clue. The angel says to Daniel:

"For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

Each Jew clearly understood the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary. It occurred at the end of the Jewish year and was a day of judgment. Although Daniel understood the concept of the cleansing of the sanctuary and the judgment, he was confused about these 2300 days. At the end of chapter 8, we find Daniel exclaiming,

"I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it" (Daniel 8:27).

You will recall that we discussed in a previous presentation the fact that one prophetic day equals one literal year. In Bible prophecy, when we have symbolic images, we also have symbolic time prophecies.

The next chapter, Daniel 9, records Daniel's earnest prayer to understand the vision. As he prays, the angel Gabriel comes in answer to his prayer. In Daniel 9:21–22, we read:

“[Y]es, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.’”

Gabriel amazes Daniel, as he reveals an answer to his prayer much broader than he could ever imagine. The angel Gabriel takes Daniel down the stream of time and reveals the truth about the coming Messiah, giving the exact dates of the beginning of His ministry and His cruel death. He then takes him centuries into the future and reveals the opening of God's judgment in heaven. This amazing prophecy chronicles the minute details of the future that only God could know.

The angel Gabriel then declares, “Understand, son of man that the vision refers to the time of the end” (Daniel 8:17). What vision is Gabriel talking about? There is no vision given to Daniel in chapter 9. At the end of chapter 8, Daniel faints while Gabriel explains the portion of the vision related to time; therefore, Gabriel's explanation in this chapter must be regarding the portion of the prophecy Daniel did not understand in chapter 8. The vision of the 2300 days in Daniel 8:14 and the cleansing of the sanctuary, according to the angel Gabriel, applies to the time of the end.

There are those who believe that the 2300 days are literal days. They believe that this little horn of Daniel, chapter 8, applies to the Roman military leader Antiochus Epiphanes, who attacked Jerusalem and defiled the Jewish temple. But what does the Bible teach? God's Word makes it plain. Gabriel says that “the vision refers to the time of

the end,” and Antiochus certainly did not live at the time of the end. I would rather accept what Gabriel says than any human opinion.

In Daniel 8, Gabriel begins his explanation of the 2300-day prophecy. He describes the ram as representing Media-Persia and the male goat as representing Greece. He goes on to explain the little horn, pagan Rome. He then describes a religio-political power arising out of Rome that will establish an earthly priesthood and change God’s law. And then, as he prepares to explain the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary, something happens to Daniel. He is overwhelmed and confused by what Gabriel has shown him—so much so that he faints. At the end of chapter 8, we clearly see that Daniel does not understand this vision and needs divine guidance.

THE VISION EXPLAINED

Gabriel appears and reassures the aged prophet, “Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.” He continues in Daniel 9:23:

“At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision.”

What encouragement this must have brought to Daniel. Gabriel calls Daniel “greatly beloved” (Daniel 9:23). Have you ever longed for a place of belonging? Have you ever longed for a place close to God’s heart that you could call home? Have you sensed deep down in the pit of your stomach that, in this world, you’re not at home? On our knees as we pray, God whispers to us, as he whispered to Daniel, “You are greatly beloved. You have a place in my heart.”

As to the vision, Gabriel continues, “therefore, consider the matter, and understand the vision” (Daniel 9:23). What matter—and what vision? The matter that he was discussing in chapter 8—when Daniel fainted and didn’t understand—was the cleansing of the

sanctuary. The vision is the one of the 2300 days. Since there is no vision recorded in chapter 9, Gabriel must be speaking of the portion of the vision in Daniel 8 that the prophet did not understand.

Gabriel continues in verse 24:

“Seventy weeks are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.”

A DIVINE TIMETABLE

He continues explaining this remarkable timetable of prophecy in verse 25:

“Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.”

With divine insight, the prophecy reveals specific dates on the Messianic timeline. The first portion of this prophecy relates to God’s people, the Jews.

“Seventy weeks are determined / For your people”—the Jewish people. In Bible prophecy, one prophetic day equals one literal year (see Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34). Now, please don’t misunderstand. In the Bible, when a day is spoken of, it’s generally a literal day.

For example, in the book of Genesis, it says the evening and the morning were the first day. That's a day—a 24-hour period.

But when we study the symbols of prophecy, things are not always as they seem. Have you ever walked down the street and seen a lion with eagle's wings or a leopard with four heads and wings? When it is obvious that the symbols are symbolic, then the time periods are symbolic. In Daniel and Revelation, where you have a symbolic time period and symbolic imagery, then in prophecy a day equals a year.

Seventy weeks are composed of 490 days. Since one prophetic day equals one literal year, 490 prophetic days are 490 literal years.

Seventy weeks, or 490 days (years), apply specifically to the Jewish nation and the coming of the Messiah. They are determined for Daniel's people, the Jews. What does the word *determined* mean? The Old Testament book of Daniel was written in Aramaic and Hebrew, and an interesting Hebrew word, *chathak* (khawthak'), has been translated "determined." A literal translation of this word means "to cut off or separate from."

Gabriel tells Daniel that 490 years are cut off, or separated from, the 2300 years. These 490 years, the first portion of the 2300 years, apply to the Jews. Gabriel continues his explanation by telling Daniel what would happen during that first 490-year period. This is a most thrilling prophecy that accurately shows that God does things on time.

Gabriel continues to explain the prophecy to Daniel by showing him when this period starts. He says in verse 25:

"Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
The street shall be built again, and the wall,
Even in troublesome times."

Gabriel knows Daniel's concerns for his captive people, so he starts with an event that's extremely important to Daniel—the command to restore and build Jerusalem. In other words, Daniel is told that when he hears the decree from the Persians to restore or reestablish worship in Jerusalem, the clock starts. The angel's explanation is plain. The time period is specific. When the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem is issued and the Jews are allowed to return from captivity, there will be 69 prophetic weeks until the coming of the Messiah.

How much time is 69 prophetic weeks? Again, we saw from Ezekiel that one prophetic day equals a literal year. So, 69 weeks times the 7 days in each week amounts to 483 days, or 483 years. From the decree to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be exactly 483 years. When did this decree go forth to restore and build Jerusalem?

We discover the answer in Ezra, chapter 7. Here we find three decrees passed. The third one was passed by Artaxerxes and was very significant because it allowed the Jews not only to return to their homeland but also to establish sanctuary worship with a priesthood, enabling them once again to establish themselves as a religious community. King Artaxerxes said:

“I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you” (Ezra 7:13).

This detailed decree continues for several verses, until we find Ezra's response in verse 27:

“Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.”

According to Ezra, the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was issued by Artaxerxes in the autumn of 457 B.C. From this decree in 457 B.C. until the Messiah would be 69 weeks, or 483 years.

Imagine that we are walking on a timeline. If we start with the decree in 457 B.C., and we take one step for each year, and we proceed 457 years forward, we would arrive at the year zero. But of course, there was never a zero year in history. The timeline of history does not include the year zero. It goes from 1 B.C. to A.D. 1. So, we take 457 steps, and when we get to 1 B.C., we do not get to year zero, but to A.D. 1. We still have 26 years left, which takes us to A.D. 27.

The Bible says, “Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince,” there will be a span of 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 years. In other words, according to the Bible, the Messiah would appear in A.D. 27.

The word *messiah* means “the anointed one.” And do you know what happened precisely in A.D. 27? In that exact year, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was baptized. Daniel predicted hundreds of years in advance the exact date for the baptism of Christ. As Luke’s gospel teaches us, Jesus was baptized in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, or A.D. 27. Jesus worked with Joseph in the carpenter shop of Nazareth until He was 30 years old. At age 30, He was baptized. Then He began His role as the Messiah and commenced His ministry, which continued for three-and-a-half years. The Bible prophecy in Daniel 9 predicted this hundreds of years in advance. Prophecy does not guess. It knows. Events in God’s timetable happen as they have been predicted.

THE CRUCIFIXION PREDICTED

There is much more to come in this amazing prophecy. “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself” (Daniel 9:26).

Cut off? What does this mean? It means that He will be crucified. The verse adds “but not for Himself.” In other words, the death of Christ on Calvary’s cross was for us. He died for us. He died the death that was ours so we could have the life that was His. He died for sins in which He had no share so we could freely receive the gift of grace in His sinless life. The text also says this:

“And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations
are determined” (Daniel 9:26).

This refers to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the earthly sanctuary by Titus in A.D. 70.

Let’s continue studying Gabriel’s message from Daniel 9:27:

“Then he”—that is, Jesus—
“shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.”

Daniel is told that 70 weeks were determined for the Jews, and now he knew—and we now know—that by A.D. 27, 69 of those weeks, or 483 years, would be used up. There would be one week left. One prophetic week from A.D. 27—7 years beyond A.D. 27—takes us to A.D. 34. The Bible says that, sometime in the middle of this week, the midst of this last seven years, the Messiah would be crucified. The middle point of seven years, or half of seven, is three-and-a-half. Gabriel tells Daniel that the Messiah would be crucified three-and-a-half years from A.D. 27.

We know from Ezra that the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem went forth in the fall of 457. And 483 years on our timeline takes us to the fall of A.D. 27, the exact year of Christ's baptism. Now, if we were to proceed an additional three-and-a-half years from the fall of A.D. 27, where would that take us? Exactly to the spring of A.D. 31. In the middle of this 70th week, in A.D. 31, Christ confirmed the covenant with His blood by dying on the cross. These prophecies reveal that Christ, the Messiah, would be crucified and cause all the sacrifices to cease in the spring of A.D. 31. And these predictions were fulfilled in every detail. Daniel, the prophet, predicted that on the day of the Passover, when the high priest was offering the Passover lamb up before God, Christ would be sacrificed for us. Daniel precisely predicted the timing of Christ's death!

Do you sense that Jesus is more than a good man? He is more than an ethical philosopher. Jesus is more than merely a religious teacher. He is the divine Son of God. God's Lamb was slain for us exactly on time, as Bible prophecy predicted. We can have confidence in this Christ, and we can have confidence in His Word, the Bible. Jesus died on time. He's the Messiah, God's Lamb, who came at the right time to die for your sins and for mine—the Savior of humanity.

According to the prophecies of Daniel, God's covenant with the Jews would cease in A.D. 34. Now remember, the Bible said 70 weeks or 490 years are determined on your people, the Jews. At the end of 490 years, in A.D. 34, the Jews would seal their destiny as God's people. Individual Jews, of course, could be saved after that time; in fact, any individual—Muslim, Hindu, Jew, Buddhist, or Christian—is only saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. But the Jews would no longer be God's chosen nation after A.D. 34.

The Bible reveals in the book of Acts that, in A.D. 34, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned, and at this same time, the gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles, fulfilling a part of this amazing prophecy.

THE TIME OF THE END

Remember, this is just the first portion of the larger 2300-year prophecy. You see, Gabriel not only explained to Daniel the 490 years that related to his people, the Jews, but also the rest of the 2300 years that applies to you and me. The first 490 years of the 2300-year prophecy were designated for the Jewish nation. This first portion of the prophecy ran out in A.D. 34.

The last part of the 2300 years has to do with God's people today—with you and me, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, and the second coming of Christ. Prophecy ties an event we can see, the first coming of Christ, with an event we cannot see, the second coming of Christ. And if the events came true with amazing accuracy during the first part of the prophecy, the predicted events obviously will come true during the second part of this prophecy. Let's read Daniel 8:14 again:

“And he said to me, ‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.’”

Since one prophetic day equals one literal year, the 2300 years must take us down to the time of the end, just as the angel Gabriel revealed.

We know that the first 490 years apply to the Jews and ended in A.D. 34. Subtracting 490 years from 2300 years leaves us with 1810 years. These second 1810 years apply to God's people at the end time. If we begin at A.D. 34, and we add 1810 years, we come to A.D. 1844. To explain it another way, if you start at 457 B.C. and go forward 2300 years, it takes you to A.D. 1844.

This is no common time. This is no ordinary time. “For 2300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” At the end of the 2300 days (years), the truth about Jesus as our dying Lamb and living High Priest would be restored. In the light of heaven's end-time judgment, God would make His final appeal to all humanity everywhere to respond to His love, accept His grace, and live godly, obedient lives. At the end of these 2300 literal days of prophetic years, God's judgment hour would begin.

Soon, the great controversy between good and evil will be finished. Soon the wicked powers will be judged and found guilty. Then God's people will be declared righteous through the grace of Christ.

We're living in the judgment hour. Since the year 1844, God has been restoring the truth of Scripture to the world—truth that had been lost sight of down through the centuries and that had been obscured by human tradition.

Since 1844, God has been restoring the truth that if we love Him, we will allow Him to change our hearts and write His law in our hearts and in our minds. He wants to write His law in our hearts so that we will love it. And He wants to write His law in our minds so we will know it.

You may have been surprised to discover that we've been living in the time of the end since 1844. That's a long, long time. Let us remember Noah, who was told by God that the world would be destroyed by a flood. Noah preached for 120 years before the flood came, but the world was under judgment that entire time because the flood was coming.

Since 1844, God's message has been circling the globe. Time is running out. Bible prophecy indicates we are getting close to the coming of Jesus. Soon, our Lord will return. And Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, appeals to you and me. Just as Daniel's prophecy reveals, Jesus was baptized in A.D. 27. He was crucified in A.D. 31. The gospel went to the Gentiles in A.D. 34.

There was not one mistake in the prophecy. Since 1844, time has been running out. In the last days of earth's history, the call of the judgment hour is a call to faithfulness to Scripture. The call of the judgment hour is the call of faithfulness to Christ. The call of the judgment hour is the call back to the obedience that God asks for in His Word.

Time is running out. Is there anything in your life that's not in harmony with His will—anything in your life that separates you from Him? Do you spend time with His Word? Do you long to know Him from His Word? Do you hunger for the truth in His Word? Are you willing to lay aside all human traditions and man-made doctrines to obey this Christ?

Why not join me in saying "yes" to Him before turning the page?

TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE COVER OF THIS BOOK.

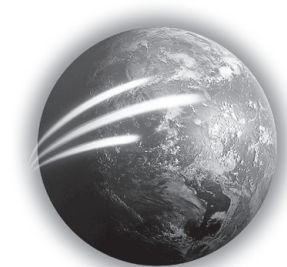
Notice those three shafts of light encircling the world—speeding around planet earth. What are they? Dangerous missiles in orbit? Satellites racing by overhead? (There have been close to 10,000 of those since the launch of Sputnik in 1957, according to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)). Are they three UFOs in formation?

No, those three beams of light represent three very real **angels!**

Those angels—described in Revelation, chapter 14—are the focus of this book. Each angel depicted there shouts an urgent message to everyone on earth just prior to the return of Jesus to this planet we call home.

The first angel has the message of the everlasting gospel to share with the world. It tells us to fear God and give Him glory. And it announces that the hour of God's judgment has come.

Gospel. Judgment. Fearing God. Let's look together now at the first angel's message.



CHAPTER SIX

An Urgent Call to Action

Let's suppose you are spending a relaxing evening in the packed

Carnegie Hall in New York City listening to the famed London Philharmonic Orchestra play a guest concert in one of their only appearances in the United States. The music is outstanding. The audience is totally enraptured in the magnificent performance. Suddenly in the middle of the concert a man stands up and yells, "Fire! Fire!" The audience is stunned. They are confused and wonder what to do.

At this point you have a decision to make. You can sit there and think this guy is a lunatic and wait until security arrests him. You can get up and run for the exit, only to discover it's a false alarm and be upset because your evening is spoiled. You can lament over the fact that you had some of the best seats in the concert hall and paid top dollar for them, and now the concert is canceled. Or possibly, you can get up and run for the exit to discover the guy was not a lunatic at all and there *was* a fire and the man saved hundreds of lives.

To yell “Fire!” when there is no fire is a very serious thing. People can be severely injured or trampled in the crush of the crowd as they run for the exits in a false alarm. Crying “Fire!” when there is no fire endangers public safety and is punishable with heavy consequences. But if there is indeed an emergency and you know it, not to warn those affected by it is gross negligence.

Warnings are valid only if the crisis is real. They have no value in a fake crisis. The three angels’ messages are God’s final warning given in love to a world on the verge of a stupendous crisis. In this study, we have discovered that, in the light of God’s final judgment, the gospel is to be proclaimed “in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14) to prepare our world for the coming of Jesus.

These messages are just as important in our day as Noah’s message was in his day. Was anybody saved who did not enter the ark? No. Was it God’s intent for only eight people to get in the boat? Certainly not. God would have been delighted if the entire sea were filled with arks. He sent Noah to prepare the world for the flood. Sin had reached its limit. The antediluvian world, the society of Noah’s day, had filled up the cup of their iniquity. The Bible’s first book, Genesis, helps us to understand the Bible’s last book, Revelation. The crisis that the world faced in Noah’s day is similar to the crisis the world will face in the last days.

Turn please to Genesis 6, verse 3:

“And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.’”

There would come a day when heaven’s final appeal would be made. There would come a day when the Holy Spirit would make His last call to human hearts. There would come a day when the judgments of God would fall upon the land.

Now let’s consider the state of society in Noah’s day as described in Genesis 6:5:

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Noah preached for 120 years. Heaven did all it could do. The cancer of sin must be rooted out of our world, and God would start over again with righteous Noah and his family.

Once again, God sends His final warning message to the world. Once again, heaven is making its final appeal. Once again, Jesus is giving this world its last warning in the messages of three angels to prepare it for His soon return. In Noah's day, the world was destroyed by water. In the last days, the cynics skeptically ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” According to the Apostle Peter: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

REVELATION'S PURPOSE

The purpose of the book of Revelation is to prepare a people to be ready for Jesus' soon return, a people who will unite with Him in giving His last-day message to the world. The aged Apostle John, a prisoner on Patmos, continues his urgent end-time appeal in Revelation 14, verse 7, by declaring that the angel says:

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Since the time in which we are now living is the final period of this earth's history, the everlasting gospel of Christ's redeeming grace leads us to make a total commitment of our lives to the One who gave His

all for us. Let's meditate for a few moments on the expression, "Fear God and give glory to Him."

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR GOD?

The Greek New Testament word for "fear" in verse 7 is *phobeo*. It is used here not merely in the sense of being afraid of God, but in the sense of reverence, awe, and respect. It conveys the thought of absolute loyalty to God and full surrender to His will. It is an attitude of mind that is God-centered rather than self-centered. To recognize the immense love of God, His underlying, endless love revealed in the everlasting gospel on the cross of Calvary, we willingly respond in loving obedience.

Listen to this insightful statement in *The Desire of Ages*, page 22:

"The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love, and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan."

God's character of love is the opposite of Lucifer's attitude, as shown in Isaiah 14:13–14, when he says in his heart,

"I will ascend into heaven.
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High."

The essence of the great controversy revolves around submission to God. Lucifer was self-centered. He refused to submit to any authority

except his own. Rather than submit to the One upon the throne, Lucifer desired to rule from the throne.

We discover the depth of the meaning of the expression, “Fear God,” by observing its usage in other parts of the Bible. In Scripture, the fear—or reverence—of God leads to loving obedience to His commands. Let’s consider three passages that make this point crystal clear.

Speaking to Israel, God instructs them to “fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you” (Deuteronomy 6:2).

In one of his psalms, David adds:

“Your hands have made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
Those who fear You will be glad when they see me,
Because I have hoped in your word” (Psalm 119:73, 74).

Ecclesiastes puts it too plainly to be misunderstood:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man’s all.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether good or evil”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14).

In the light of the judgment hour, heaven’s urgent appeal is for those saved by grace to live godly lives. Grace does not free us from obeying the commands of God. When we come in humble repentance, confessing our sins, His grace pardons us when we fail. That’s why the Apostle Paul states so emphatically in Romans 8:1:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

The gospel not only delivers us from the guilt of our past. It also empowers us to live godly, obedient lives in the present. The Apostle Paul declares that, as believers, “we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations” (Romans 1:5).

There are some people who have the strange idea that salvation by grace somehow negates the law of God. They believe that any talk about obedience is legalism. They have declared, “All I want is Jesus.” The question is, “Which Jesus?” A Jesus of your own making, or the Jesus of Scripture? The Christ of Scripture never leads us to downplay His law, which is the transcript of His character. The Christ of Scripture never leads us to minimize the doctrines of the Bible, which reveal more clearly who He is and what His plan is for this world. The Christ of Scripture never leads us to reduce His teaching to pious platitudes that are nonessential.

Ellen White sets the record straight with these though-provoking statements:

“Those who are truly converted to Christ [must] keep on constant guard lest they accept error in the place of truth. Those who think it matters not what they believe in doctrine, so long as they believe in Jesus Christ, are on dangerous ground” (Ellen White, *Christ Triumphant*, p. 235).

This is a striking statement. It clarifies the issue. You cannot separate Jesus from doctrine. Christ is the embodiment of all doctrinal truth. Jesus is truth incarnated. He is doctrine lived out.

Revelation’s final appeal calls us through faith in Jesus to accept the fullness of everything He offers. It calls us to “fear God,” or by faith in His redeeming power to live godly, obedient lives. As religious philosopher Thomas à Kempis said:

“Instant obedience is the only kind of obedience there is; delayed obedience is disobedience. Whoever strives to withdraw from obedience, withdraws from grace.”

This is a remarkable statement, and one which is totally aligned with the Bible’s teaching. Grace always leads us to obey the commands of God. The issue is really one of allegiance and authority. Andrew Bonar, a noted Scottish theologian, puts it succinctly:

“It is not the importance of the thing, but the majesty of the Lawgiver, that is to be the standard of obedience...Some, indeed, might reckon such minute and arbitrary rules as these as trifling. But the principle involved in obedience or disobedience was none other than the same principle which was tried in Eden at the foot of the forbidden tree. It is really this: Is the Lord to be obeyed in all things whatsoever He commands? Is He a holy Lawgiver? Are His creatures bound to give implicit assent to His will?” (Andrew Bonar, quoted in J. Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, p. 23).

The first angel’s message is an urgent appeal in the light of heaven’s judgment hour to make God the center of our lives. In an age of materialism and consumerism, when secular values have made self the center, heaven’s appeal is to turn from the tyranny of self-centeredness and the bondage of self-inflated importance to place God at the center of our lives. For some, money is the center of their lives; for others, it is pleasure or power. For some, it may be sports, music, or entertainment. Revelation’s message is a clarion call to fear, respect, and honor God as life’s true center.

In His masterful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus asks: What are your priorities? Who has your allegiance? Where is your heart?

Paul echoes this earnest appeal with these words, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

The final battle in the great controversy between good and evil is for our minds. Our actions reveal what our thinking process is. To fear God is to make Him first in our lives.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE GLORY TO GOD?

Notice this contrast: fearing God speaks of an attitude of God-centered obedience. Giving glory to God speaks of our actions or how we live. Fearing God has to do with what we think. Giving glory to God has to do with what we do. Fearing God deals with the inner commitment to make God the center of our lives. Giving glory to God deals with how our inner convictions translate into a lifestyle that honors God in everything we do.

A lot of people have the idea that their treatment of their bodies is unrelated to their faith. They believe that their bodies are theirs to do with as they please. The Apostle Paul implores:

“I beseech [urge] you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

The New Testament Greek word for bodies is *sumata*, which is better translated as the collective sum of who you are: body, mind, and emotions. The Phillips translation of the Bible renders “reasonable service” as “an intelligent act of worship.” In other words, when you make a total commitment to “fear God” and “glorify Him” in all you do, giving your mind, body, and emotions to Him, you are performing an act of intelligent worship.

According to the Apostle Paul, our bodies are a sanctuary, the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, a temple made holy by the presence of God. And He is emphatic:

“If any one defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:17).

Scripture gives us a clarion call to glorify God in every aspect of our lives. At a time when multitudes are abusing their bodies and damaging their brains with drugs, alcohol, and other destructive habits, God says, “I’m calling you back to a life of faithful obedience. Place your body on the altar as a living sacrifice. Open your heart and mind to my Spirit, so that I can live in you. Then your body will truly be my temple.”

When God is the center of our lives, our one desire is to give glory to Him in every aspect of our lives, whether that has to do with our diet and the things we eat, our dress and the things we wear, our entertainment and the things we view, or our music and the things we listen to. We give glory to God as we reveal His character of love to the world through lives committed to doing His will. This is even more important in the light of earth’s end-time judgment.

Any life focused primarily on self, narrowed down in the claustrophobic confines of its own littleness, is a very small life. The Apostle Paul calls us to the largeness, the sublime greatness, of a life committed to service and dedicated to blessing others. He calls us to look beyond our own hurts, grief, and pain to touch someone else with God’s grace. He calls us out of the pettiness of our small self-made worlds to the largeness of the world He came to redeem. Just as the drink offering was poured out as a sacrifice on the ground in the Old Testament sanctuary service, so Paul’s life was poured out as a sacrifice in the service of Christ.

There are some things in life that we may want to do that are legitimate in themselves, but we choose not to do them so that we can have

more time to advance the cause of God. There are some pleasures we will not pursue, for Christ's sake. There are some places we could have gone to but will no longer visit because of our commitment to Christ's service. There are things we could purchase, but we sacrificially choose not to buy them in order to advance the cause of Christ.

When you pour your life out for Christ's sake, it is not being wasted; it is being invested. We all pour out our lives for something.

Some people pour out their lives in their *work*...

Some people pour out their lives in *sports*....

Some people pour out their lives in *pleasure and entertainment*...

Some people pour out their lives in *time-consuming, all-absorbing, mind-numbing digital devices*.

Time is fleeting. We are living in Revelation's judgment hour. We are all pouring out our lives for something. One day fades into the next. One week quickly passes into next month and next year, and soon the decades pass. Are you pouring your life out for something that counts? The Apostle Paul poured his life out for Christ and the advancement of His kingdom.

REVELATION'S OVERCOMERS

Revelation's message is one of victory, not defeat. It speaks of a people who, through His grace and by His power, overcome. The word "overcome" in one form or another is used eleven times in Revelation. In the vision of the seven churches representing the Christian church from the first century to our time, there are believers in every generation who, John says, "overcome." In the end time, those who overcome "shall inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7). This is not legalism. It is victory through Jesus Christ. It is faith in action. It is transforming, life-changing, miraculous grace in the life of the believer.

Jesus' last-day message is an urgent appeal to live godly lives. It is a clarion call to holiness. One day, God will have a group of people of whom it is written:

“[H]ere are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

The only way anyone can keep the commandments of God is through the faith of Jesus. Notice that our text does not say “faith *in* Jesus,” although that is extremely important. Rather, it says they have the “faith *of* Jesus,” which is something more. It is the quality of faith that enabled Christ to be victorious over Satan’s fiercest temptations.

Faith is a gift given to each believer. When we exercise faith, the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts faith that grows. We overcome, not by our willpower, but by the power of the living Christ working through us. We overcome, not because of who *we* are, but because of who *He* is.

We can overcome because He overcame. We can be victorious because He was victorious. We can triumph over temptation because He triumphed over temptation. Hebrews 4:14–16 states it powerfully:

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus, the divine Son of God, has overcome the wiles of the devil. He faced temptation trusting in the promises of God, surrendering His will to the Father’s will, and dependent on the Father’s power. Trusting Him, looking to Him, believing in Him, we too can be victorious. Jesus is our all in all, and the three angels’ messages are all about Him.

One religious writer put it this way...

“Without His *teaching*, His *life*, and His *example*, we would have no conception of the highest moral ideal.

“Without His *death*, we would have no pardon for our sins, no forgiveness for our failures, and no freedom from the condemnation of a guilty conscience.

“Without His *resurrection*, we would have no hope of life beyond the grave.

“Without His *intercession* in the heavenly sanctuary, we would have no hope of victory over the shackles of sin or deliverance from its bondage.

“Without His *mediation*, we could not enjoy the favor of God.

“Without His *love*, we would not feel the mightiest motive that can move the heart to duty and action.

“Without His *Spirit*, we are left alone to battle with evil and cannot experience the mightiest power to deliver our feeble souls from the palsy of sin.

“Without His *promises*, we are left to struggle alone against the trials, tribulations, and perplexities of life.

“Without the *assurance* of His soon return, we would be left on a barren, desolate earth, hopeless.”

In Jesus, through Jesus, because of Jesus, we have all we need. Why should we neglect the joy of His presence? Why rush through life as if spending time with Him does not matter? Why trifle with eternity? Why not abide... why not remain... why not stay in His presence and let His grace wash over us and cleanse us? Why not feast on His Word and let His promises transform us? Why not meditate upon His goodness and behold His character until we are changed, profoundly changed, into His likeness? Why not respond in total dedication to His love? Why not let that boundless love and amazing grace radically transform our lives—today!

GOD IS NOT AN ABSENTEE LANDLORD.

He didn't create earth and our original parents, then wander off to some far corner of His universe, leaving us to fend for ourselves.

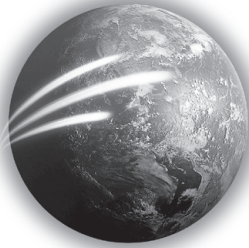
Today, some descendants of the first man and woman don't even believe God exists. Others say that God **exists**—but that since creation He simply doesn't **care**. We're on our own.

Nothing could be so far from the truth.

God does care. He cares not just a little. He cares so much that, about 2,000 years ago, He gave His very life for us that we might live. And THAT is unspeakably good news! That is the everlasting gospel the first angel shouts as he descends to earth.

Can the good news be even better? Yes, it can! This good news of the gospel is gloriously good news to everyone on earth. But even better is coming to realize that God's infinite love is not just for everyone on earth.

God love is also just for you. You, alone!



CHAPTER SEVEN

Creation Speaks

In the 1840s, social, political, scientific, and religious revolutions changed the world as we know it. In 1844, Charles Darwin published an essay espousing an early version of his theory of evolution. Also in 1844, Karl Marx began fleshing out communist ideals in *The Paris Manuscripts*, a precursor to *The Communist Manifesto*, which would eventually be published in various languages throughout the world. That same year, Samuel Morse sent his first telegraph message from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore, Maryland.

In 1859, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published, setting forth a more developed version of evolutionary theory. Addressing the longstanding influence of that book, one prominent writer stated that it "remains one of history's most influential and talked about scientific papers. It introduced the theory that populations evolve over the course of generations through a process of natural selection, a theory that became the backbone of modern biology" ("First Draft of Darwin's *Origin of Species* Goes Online," CBC News. April 17, 2008).

The impact of evolutionary thought on science, philosophy, psychology, and religion is incalculable. If we evolved, if we are products of fortuitous chance and nothing more than a genetic collection of genes

and chromosomes, life has little meaning. The essence of life becomes self-gratification. Personal happiness becomes life's reckless pursuit. Life has lost its true meaning if human beings are merely enlarged protein molecules. If we are some aberration of nature, some random collection of chemical components or some chance arrangement of cells, we become little more than advanced animals.

Extreme socialism, combined with Marx's oft-quoted statement that "Religion is the opiate of the people," coupled with the centralization of all power to a select few who considered workers or the proletariat as building blocks in the wall of the state, further led to the dehumanization of human beings. These two movements developing simultaneously—evolution and communism—placed an extremely low value on all human life by dismissing the concept of a personal God who is the Creator of the universe.

A MESSAGE FOR THE HOUR

God would not allow the world to be without a witness. In the 1840s, God raised up a divine movement of destiny to proclaim His last-day message to a world longing to discover meaning, purpose, and identity. A group of Bible-believing Christians from multiple faith backgrounds began studying the age-old prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. It was there that they discovered a message tailor-made for the times—a message suited to answer the great questions of a generation anticipating the soon return of Christ.

In this book, we have been studying the heart of that message in Revelation 14:6–12. Jesus visited John, the last of the living apostles, on the Island of Patmos with an urgent heaven-sent message for our time.

Today, Patmos is an idyllic Greek island set as a jewel in the emerald blue waters of the Aegean Sea off the west coast of Turkey. The island is nine miles long, with a population of about 3,000. In the first century, it was markedly different. It was not a tourist attraction; it was a Roman

penal colony. It was there on that remote island that the Roman government attempted to silence John's prophetic voice.

While in his mid-90's, John was exiled on Patmos by the ruthless Roman emperor, Domitian. Revelation 1, verse 9, states:

"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Separated from the support of his family, friends, and the Christian community, John was not left alone. His ministry was not over. His witness was not complete. An angelic visitor of dazzling brightness visited him on that lonely isle and brought him a message directly from the throne of God. This message from Jesus was to echo down the corridors of time through the centuries. It was a message of hope for every generation, but especially a message to prepare God's last-day people for the coming of Jesus. It is a serious message of warning, as well as an end-time message of encouragement.

If you were to enter the cave where it is purported that John was visited by the heavenly angel with Revelation's prophetic vision, you would immediately notice these words placed on a plaque at its entrance, summarizing the entire book of Revelation:

"Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7).

The central issue in the book of Revelation is worship. We are created as worshipping beings. Every one of us worships something or someone. True worship, the worship of the Creator, enables us to discover life's true purpose. It gives us a reason for living. It gives us

not only something to die for, but even more significantly, something to live for.

The great English statesman Winston Churchill once declared, “It’s not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something.” Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky stated it well: “The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.” Revelation’s message provides just such a purpose.

WORSHIP THE CREATOR

In the last few chapters, we discovered that the expression “fear God and give glory to Him” speaks of making God, not ourselves, the center of our lives. This inner commitment of absolute loyalty to God results in living lives of obedience to His will and pleasing Him in all we do. The decision to dedicate our lives completely to God is made more urgent in the blazing light of eternity. In Revelation 14:7, the angel announces a present-tense judgment. He cries with a loud voice, “the hour of God’s judgment has come.” We also discovered that since 1844 we have been living in the judgment hour. It is no longer business as usual. Heaven’s urgent appeal is to get ready for the coming of Jesus.

Revelation 14:7 ends with an appeal to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

These words perfectly mirror those found in the Sabbath commandment in Exodus, chapter 20. This is a clarion call to worship the Creator at a time when most of the scientific and religious world has accepted the theory of Darwinian evolution. Revelation’s final appeal is rooted in the Bible’s first book, Genesis. We will never fully understand the issues in this cosmic battle over worship unless we understand the significance of creation.

WHY CREATION MATTERS

Let’s return to the beginning of the Bible that we might better understand the end of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

This verse is the foundation for all of Scripture. “In the beginning, God created.” The Hebrew word for “create” in this passage is *bara*. It refers to something God did. This Hebrew verb is linked to God’s creative activity. God has the ability, the awesome power, to create something out of nothing. God speaks, and the earth comes into existence. He speaks, and the earth is carpeted with living green. He speaks, and trees and flowers appear. He speaks, and sun, moon, and stars instantly appear in the sky. Let’s pause for a moment and consider how amazing this is.

To get just a small idea of how unlimited God’s power is, let’s consider just one object in the heavens: the sun. Did God create the sun? Certainly. Genesis 1:14–16 tells the story of God creating two lights to rule the heavens: the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. Remember, we are considering only one facet of God’s creation in the heavens, the sun. We exist on one of nine planets that revolve around the sun. The sun produces more energy in one second than humanity has produced in all its history. Take all the electrical power, all the energy produced by solar or coal or gas since the beginning of time, and the sun produces more in one second.

The sun has a diameter of approximately 860,000 miles and could hold one million planets the size of earth. But the sun is just one of 100 billion stars in our galaxy, the Milky Way. One star, called the Pistol Star, gives off ten million times the power generated by our sun. One million stars the size of our sun can easily fit within the sphere of the Pistol Star. Some scientists estimate that there are ten billion trillion stars in the universe. Someone has said that that is about the same number of stars as there are grains of sand on the seashore.

The prophet Isaiah beckons us to meditate on God’s creative power in these words:

“Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these things,

Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of His might
And the strength of His power;
Not one is missing”
(Isaiah 40:26).

Creation reveals a God of awesome might and unlimited power. His creative power not only brought the heavens and earth into existence; it has worked on behalf of His people through the centuries. It was God’s creative power that delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and parted the Red Sea. The Red Sea is not some small puddle of water in the Middle East; it is a vast expanse of ocean. Some Jewish scholars believe that the Israelites crossed the Red Sea at the point of the Gulf of Suez. Its maximum width is twenty miles, and its average depth is 130 feet. The power of God to part those waters to deliver His people must be enormous.

His eternal power still parts the troubled waters of our lives. He still opens the way where there is no way. He is still the God who delivers us from the hand of the oppressor. For those who trust Him, His power is still exercised on behalf of His people in remarkable ways.

It was also God’s creative power that formed the manna that fed Israel for forty years in the desert. It was His creative power that provided for their needs in their wilderness wanderings. He is still the God of creation who provides, still the God who cares, still the God whose creative power meets our needs.

It was God’s creative power that covered Israel with the cloud by day to protect them from the scorching heat of the desert and provided the pillar of fire to warm them from the chill of the night. He is still the God of creation who guides our lives.

Throughout the centuries He has been and still is the God of creation who has not forgotten His creation. He is the God of beginnings who is

with us to the end of time. He is the God who began this world, is ever present in this world, and will never forsake His people of this world.

He is the God who delivers, the God who provides, and the God who guides. The God of creation is the God of unlimited power. He is the God of the impossible.

A WHOLE BARREL OF APPLES

A young boy traveling by airplane to visit his grandparents sat beside a man who happened to be a seminary professor. The boy was reading a Sunday school children's lesson, and the professor thought he would have some fun with the lad. "Young man," said the professor, "if you can tell me something God can do, I will give you a big, shiny apple." The boy thought for a moment and then replied, "Mister, if you can tell me something God can't do, I'll give you a whole barrel of apples!"

The God of creation, the God who brought the sun, moon, and stars into existence, the God whose awesome power created this planet and filled it with living things, the God who delivered His people from Egyptian bondage, guided them in their wilderness wanderings, rained manna out of heaven, caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, defeated Israel's enemies—this God is interested in you and me and unleashes creation power to defeat the enemy who battles for our souls, and this makes all the difference.

Every single one of us faces battles with temptation every day. Here is the incredibly good news: the same God who unleashed His infinite power to create the world unleashes that infinite power to defeat the forces of hell that wage the battles for our souls. Jesus has something much more to offer than frustrated defeat. He has something much more to offer than repeated failure. He has something much more to offer than stumbling on the same point again and again. Who is it that we serve? He is the all-powerful Creator with unlimited, infinite power

that is ours when we grasp it by faith. We are transformed, changed, made new by the power of the Creator.

There is an amazing truth in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Let’s make this very practical. This week, ask God to help you more deeply and completely understand how His creative power can change your life. Here is a simple prayer to pray:

“Dear Lord, you are the Creator of this world and everything in it. You are the God of awesome power. By faith, I believe that you can make of my life a new creation. I surrender to you anything not in harmony with your will and ask you to recreate your image in me.”

Creation speaks of God’s infinite power available in the battle between good and evil in each of our lives; that’s why creation matters. Creation speaks of an all-powerful God who can recreate our hearts in His image. Creation speaks of a God who in the last days gives us the strength to overcome Satan’s fiercest temptations, his most cunning enticements, and his most subtle deceptions. Revelation’s call to worship the Creator is a call to live praise-filled lives that rejoice in the strength that He gives us to face each day.

There is another aspect of worshiping the Creator that really matters: creation speaks of a God of intricate design and careful planning, who is the originator of life.

The book of beginnings, Genesis, tells us the story of God’s creation. The planets orbit the sun in an orderly, predictable pattern. The tides rise and fall in an orderly, predictable pattern. Fruit trees predictably

produce fruit after their kind. Orange trees produce oranges, and apple trees produce apples.

Everywhere we turn in nature, we clearly see intelligent design. Whether it is these amazing human bodies of ours in their intricate complexity, or the natural world around us in things as simple as the beauty of flowers, the flight of birds, or the majesty of a sunrise—all of nature indicates order and symmetry, not randomness and chance.

Creation speaks of a divine plan. Since He created us, we are valuable in His sight. Whatever the circumstances of our lives, we are special to God. If we allow Him to, day by day, He will work out His plan for our lives. The One who created us will never forget us. The Psalmist shares these amazing thoughts.

“For this is God,
Our God forever and ever;
He will be our guide
Even to death”
(Psalm 48:14).

Did you catch the significance of this divine truth? Our Creator is ever-present with us to guide our lives. He is the all-powerful, all knowing, ever-present God. The Psalmist further declares:

“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.
My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth”
(Psalm 139:14, 15).

Did you grasp the significance of David's words? God thinks about us more times each day than there are grains of sand at the seaside. In other words, there is never a time when we are not in God's mind.

God has a purpose for your life. The Creator has a divine plan even when things do not seem to go right. Have the following thoughts ever flooded into your mind? "I have committed my life to Christ. I am attempting to live for God and serve Him, so why are there so many obstacles? Why does the devil seem to attack me and my family? I just don't understand."

Through the circumstances of life, our loving Creator is working out His divine plans, even if we do not recognize or understand it. He is worthy of our worship, because He has given us life. He sustains our lives, and He always works through all the circumstances of life, good or bad, to draw us closer to Him.

CREATION IS THE BASIS OF OUR WORSHIP

The very basis of all worship is that God created us. As the Psalmist says, we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

John adds, in Revelation 4:11:

"You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things
And by Your will they exist and were created."

Human beings exist, but not by some process of evolutionary randomness. John states it clearly, "For you created all things, / And by Your will they exist and were created." Before we were ever conceived in the womb of our mothers, we were conceived in the mind of God. Life is a precious gift given by God. True worship always

acknowledges the “God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9).

Our existence is not the result of blind chance or accidental happenstance. It is the purposeful act of God. This is precisely why David could state, “He fashions their hearts individually” (Psalm 33:15).

The Lord Himself speaks this almost incomprehensible truth to the prophet Jeremiah:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations”
(Jeremiah 1:5).

In our search for the meaning of our lives, we really have only one of two choices: either life is the result of pure biological chance, or life is a gift of God with purpose and meaning. Since we are living in a world of brokenness and sin, we often experience less-than-ideal circumstances. In this world there are physical and mental deformities.

Still, all life is precious to God. Those who are less fortunate are not less valuable to God. Human beings are not defined by their intellectual capacities or their physical abilities. Human life has worth because a divine Creator brought us into existence and has a purpose for each individual.

Since life is the purposeful act of God, all life is sacred, whether that is the life of the unborn or the life of the aged. When we worship God as the Creator, we acknowledge the sanctity of life. Since every human being is unique, to lightly regard life is a sin against the Creator of all life. The call to worship the Creator is the call to understand the value of every human being.

CREATION SPEAKS OF A GOD LONGING FOR PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Creation speaks of our value in God's sight. It speaks of our worth to Him. We are not alone in the universe—some speck of cosmic dust. He created us. He fashioned us. He made us. We did not evolve. We are not a genetic accident. Jesus is worthy of our worship, because He not only created us, but He also redeemed us. Creation and redemption are at the heart of all true worship. This is why the Sabbath is so significant. The Sabbath speaks of a Creator's care and a Redeemer's love.

At the conclusion of creation week, Genesis 2:1–3 declares:

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

God rested not because He was tired. He rested refreshed in the beauty and majesty of the world He had made. He rested as an example to us. The Sabbath is a weekly pause to praise the One who made us. As we worship on the Sabbath, we open our hearts to receive the special blessing He placed on that day that was placed on no other day.

Einstein's famous formula $E=mc^2$ reveals that time and matter are related. Having created matter and fashioned it into a living world, the Lord took time and fashioned it into a temple, to exist as long as creation existed.

The Sabbath reminds us that we are not cosmic orphans on some spinning globe of rock. It points us to a Creator who created us with a

purpose and loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from that purpose. The Sabbath reminds us of the One who has provided all the good things of life for us.

Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in Him. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (see Ezekiel 20:12, 20). Rather than an arbitrary legalistic requirement, it reveals that true rest from righteousness by works is found in Him. The Sabbath speaks of a God who has achieved so we can rest in His achievements. As Ellen White so eloquently puts it, the three angels' messages are righteousness by faith in all its fullness and beauty.

“The exceeding great and precious promises given us in the Holy Scriptures have been lost sight of to a great extent, just as the enemy of all righteousness designed that they should be. He has cast his own dark shadow between us and our God, that we may not see the true character of God. The Lord has proclaimed Himself to be ‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.’ Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message, in verity’” (*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890).

True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us. Remember that unique phrase in Genesis 2:3: “in it [the Sabbath] He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

The Sabbath is God’s rest. He rested on the seventh day in a divine acknowledgment that His work was completed. Hebrews 4:9–10 likens God’s rest at the end of creation week—when He ceased from His works—to our Sabbath rest today. Hebrews puts it this way:

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His” (Hebrews 4:9–10).

According to Scripture, our Sabbath rest is an act of supreme worship in which we rest totally in Him for our salvation. The message of Revelation 14, God’s end-time message, calls us to rest in His love and care each Sabbath. It calls us to remember the One who created us and to give Him glory. Sabbath is a symbol of rest, not works; of grace, not legalism; of assurance, not condemnation; of depending upon Him, and not ourselves. Each Sabbath, we rejoice in His goodness and praise Him for the salvation that can be found only in Christ.

The Sabbath is also the eternal link between the perfection of Eden in the past and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth in the future. One day the splendors of Eden will be restored. One day God will create a new heaven and a new earth. One day sickness and suffering and sorrow will be no more. One day disease and disaster and death will be over. One day joy and gladness and peace will reign forever and ever and ever.

Until that day, as we worship Him with all our hearts as the Creator of heavens and earth, we rest in His everlasting love, praise Him for His grace, and long for the day that He will soon return and make all things right.

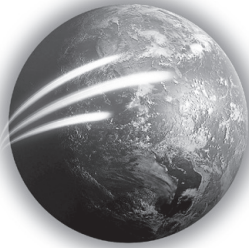
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU MAKE A STUNNING DISCOVERY ABOUT YOUR CHURCH—THE ONE YOU’VE GROWN UP IN?

What if you find that the truth you’ve believed with all your heart isn’t true at all—that it’s false and filled with error?

What do you do when you find that, like a boat that has pulled loose from its moorings, the church you’ve always called your spiritual home has drifted away from truth without you even realizing it?

God knew that at the very end of the great battle against His enemy, in the war behind all wars, Satan would stir up so much confusion in the churches that many would despair of ever really knowing where to find the truth.

Because of His great love for you, in His Word—right there in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14—He tells you where to find the truth. Then He sounds the alarm, warning you to come out of the foggy confusion of error and stand with Him under the banner of truth.



CHAPTER EIGHT

A Refuge in a World of Confusion

The casualties on both sides were high. The shelling was intense.

Heavy bombardment from the artillery lasted all day. The ground shook violently from the incessant pounding of the German aircraft. The Allied forces responded with a firefight of their own. Rival armies faced each other across the trenches.

Joe, an 18-year-old Allied soldier, leaned back against the earthen wall of his freshly-dug trench, exhausted. The sun was setting. Another day had passed, and he was still alive. It was Christmas Eve, 1914.

Thoughts of home flooded into his mind: Mom, Dad, his brother Tom, his sister Alice. Freshly-baked apple pie, homemade raisin cookies, roast turkey, mashed potatoes. Colorfully-wrapped presents, the Christmas tree. Smiles, hugs, logs burning in the fireplace. Hot chocolate...peace.

But in this nightmare called war, death stared him in the face. "Peace on earth and good will toward men" were only figments of his imagination. The battlefield was quiet now. The air was crisp and clear. The stars twinkled in a moonlit sky. It was the eve of the famous Christmas truce.

Then he heard it. Could it really be singing? Were his ears deceiving him this Christmas Eve? Was this a subtle trap? Was it some sinister plot?

The sounds of a familiar Christmas carol gladdened the night air. Although the words were being sung in German, the tune was unmistakable: “Silent night, holy night...All is calm, all is bright... ‘Round yon virgin Mother and Child...”

German soldiers sang Christmas carols a few hundred yards away, in full view. Slowly, cautiously at first, Joe pulled himself out of his foxhole. His heart was touched. His emotions were stirred. Suddenly, he couldn’t restrain himself any longer. Spontaneously, he began singing “Silent night, holy night.” His American colleagues joined in the singing. “Silent night, holy night...All is calm, all is bright.”

Soon, voices which a few hours before had shouted the curses of war now echoed a chorus of praise. The two opposing sides approached each other. They embraced. They laughed. They sang. For one night, they were brothers. They shared a common humanity. The fighting stopped. The bombing ceased. The mortars were silent. On that Christmas Eve, for just a moment, enemies became friends.

In a sense, they recognized a profound truth found in Acts 17:24, 26:

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.... And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

CREATED BY THE SAME GOD

The essence of humanity’s dignity is a common creation. The fact that we are uniquely created by God places value on every human being. The unborn still in the mother’s womb, the quadriplegic teenager, the Down’s syndrome young adult, and the Alzheimer’s-afflicted

grandmother all have immense value to God. God is their Father. Every human being has priceless value and God-given dignity. They are His sons and daughters.

Ours is a shared heritage with them. We belong to the same family. We are brothers and sisters—fashioned, shaped, molded by the same God.

Creation provides a true sense of self-worth. The Creator of the universe created us. Each of us is special. When the genes and chromosomes came together to form the unique biological structure of your personality, God threw away the pattern. There is no one else like you in all the universe. You are unique—a one-of-a-kind creation. This is the hope-inspiring message of the three angels that appeals to us to worship our Creator. If we truly worship him as the Creator, we will value life as He values life. We will be concerned about others as He is concerned about others. We will be sensitive to the needs of the marginalized and the poor, because they are His children, too.

EVOLUTION IS DEHUMANIZING

Evolution is dehumanizing. If I am an enlarged protein molecule, if I am simply the product of fortuitous chance, if I am only an advanced form of the animal creation, life has little meaning. I am merely one of seven billion people clawing at one another for living space on a planet called earth.

By contrast, creation provides a moral imperative for living. I have been created by God, and I am accountable to Him for my actions. The One who made me holds me responsible. He has established absolutes in a world of moral relativism.

The Revelation 14 message of the three angels we've been studying is that "the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7). Since we were created by God with the capacity to make moral choices, we are responsible for the decisions we make. If we were merely a random

collection of cells, largely products of our heredity and environment, our actions would largely be determined by forces over which we have no control. Judgment implies moral responsibility. In this crisis hour of earth's history, the judgment hour, God calls us to make decisions in the light of eternity.

Evolution provides no moral ethic for living. Since it proclaims that humans are advanced animals, for the evolutionist the highest standard is the human mind. Morality is determined from within. There is no absolute, eternal standard to govern behavior. Creation, by contrast, provides us with a sense of direction and purpose. The God who created us provides, in His Word, guidelines for living. His commands are always for our best good. We are not left alone to battle with life's forces. He not only has revealed what is right in His Word, but He also gives us the power to do what is right through His Holy Spirit.

Evolution looks within to find strength for life's trials. Creation looks without. It looks to a loving, powerful, all-knowing God. Creation provides a sense of destiny. The God who loves me, who created me, who cares for me, has prepared a place in heaven for me. Death is not a long night without a morning. The grave is not some dark hole in the ground. God has a glorious new tomorrow planned.

For the evolutionist, death is the end. There is no tomorrow. Creation speaks of a bright tomorrow. One day, suffering will be over, and the God who created the world in the beginning will create a "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13).

Evolution echoes uncertainty about the future. Creation speaks of a certain future. Evolution offers no hope of eternal life. Creation answers the eternal questions of life. Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Evolution provides a distorted view of life's origin, fails to address the question of life's purpose, and leaves the soul barren regarding life's ultimate destiny.

Creation unites us with God. It establishes our self-worth. It forges ties with all humanity. It creates a common ancestry. It inspires confidence in a God who cares. It links us to God's inexhaustible power, and it encourages us with the hope of life after death.

CREATION AND THE SABBATH

It is because our world so desperately needs the reassuring message of creation that God gave us the Sabbath. In the mid-1800s when evolutionary theory was taking the intellectual world by storm, God sent a message of incredible hope. We have been studying this message found in Revelation 14. Let's read verses 6 and 7 again:

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’”

What do we call the One who made heaven, earth, and sea? The Creator. The Bible instructs us to worship the Creator. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is a call to worship Jesus as the Creator. We understand this more clearly when we notice Ephesians 3, verse 9:

“[A]nd to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.”

Satan has made every attempt to distort the idea of creation because he hates Jesus and does not want Him to receive the worship due Him as our Creator and Redeemer. The Sabbath is at the center of the great

controversy over Christ's worthiness to receive worship as our Creator. God's last-day message is one that calls all humanity back to worshiping Christ as the Creator of heaven and earth. The basis of all worship is the fact that He created us. Accept evolution, and you destroy the very basis for worship. John the Revelator succinctly states it in these words:

"You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created"
(Revelation 4:11).

He is worthy precisely because He has created. If God has not created us, if we merely evolved and life is a cosmic accident based on chance and random selection, there is absolutely no reason to worship. In an age of evolution, God has given the Sabbath as an eternal symbol of His creative power and authority. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we are not our own. He created us. Life cannot exist apart from Him "for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

THE SABBATH, A LINK TO OUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN

The Sabbath calls us back to our roots. It's a link to our family of origin. The Sabbath has been observed continuously since time began. It is an unbroken connection back through time to our Creator. The Sabbath tells us that we are not just a product of time plus chance. It keeps us focused on the glorious truth that we are children of God. It calls us to an intimate, close relationship with Him.

I'M STARTING TO FORGET

When Schia was four years old, her baby brother was born. Little Schia began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby.

They were concerned about leaving a four-year-old with the new baby, so they simply said, “Schia, when you are a little older, but not now.”

Over time, though, since Schia was so loving toward the new little one, they changed their minds and decided to let Schia have her private conference with “Baby.” Elated, Schia went into the baby’s room and shut the door, but it opened a crack, enough for her curious parents to peek in and listen. They saw little Schia walk quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his and say, “Baby, tell me what God feels like. I am starting to forget.”

The truth is, we all tend to forget. The frantic pace of the week, the struggle to survive, the hectic nature of twenty-first-century living combine at times to make us lose focus and forget the real purpose of life. That’s why God says, “Remember.” The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of what God is like. It calls us to a new relationship with Him.

A NOT-SO-SUBTLE DECEPTION

In an attempt to destroy the uniqueness of our creation, the devil has introduced a not-so-subtle counterfeit. This counterfeit, which is accepted by even some among us, goes something like this: God is the prime cause of creation, but He took long ages to bring the world into existence. Evolution was the process He used.

This approach attempts to harmonize so-called “scientific data” with the Genesis account. It asserts that the days of creation are long, indefinite periods of time. It accepts the evolutionary viewpoint that the earth is tens of millions of years old. This synchronistic viewpoint creates far more problems than it solves. It completely disregards the Psalmist’s statement:

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth....
For He spoke, and it was done;

He commanded, and it stood fast”
(Psalm 33:6, 9).

It overlooks the clear declaration of Hebrews 11:3:

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

The biblical account is plainly stated: God created the world in six literal days of twenty-four hours and rested the seventh. The linguistic structure of Genesis 1 and 2 does not permit anything else. The Hebrew word for “one” is *yom*. Throughout the Bible, every time a number precedes the word *yom* as an adjective, it limits the time period to twenty-four hours. There is not a single instance in the Bible when a numeral precedes the noun *yom* where *yom* indicates an indefinite period. Without exception, it is always a twenty-four-hour period.

To accept the false idea of long, indefinite periods of creation is to challenge the linguistic structure of Scripture. It is to superimpose our personal opinions upon the grammatical structure of God’s Word. Furthermore, if God did not create the world in six literal days, what significance does the seventh-day Sabbath have? He wouldn’t have commanded:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.... For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8,11).

It would make absolutely no sense at all to leave the Sabbath as an eternal legacy of a six-day creation week if a six-day creation week never

existed. To accept long ages of creation is to challenge the very need for the seventh-day Sabbath. It is to challenge the authority of the Bible. It is to raise serious questions regarding the integrity of Scripture. It is to ultimately undermine the reason for the existence of the Sabbath.

Satan is challenging the very heart of God's authority by attacking the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not merely good advice. It is a command from the very throne of God.

The great controversy that began in heaven millennia ago was over the question of God's authority. Satan claimed that God was unfair and unjust. He rebelled against the eternal laws of the universe given by a loving God to maintain heaven's peace and joy. In the garden of Eden, Satan used the same tactics with Eve. He insinuated doubt and suggested that it was totally unnecessary for her to obey God. He presented God's commands as arbitrary.

Accepting the lies of the evil one, Eve, along with her husband, Adam, disobeyed God's command and plunged the entire human race into the world of sin and death. Obedience to God's commands that flow out of a heart that loves God is extremely important. The Sabbath is not some arbitrary command. It is at the very heart of worship. It is part of God's last-day message to the world. It is a perpetual reminder of the fact that He is the Creator and we are His creatures. Notice carefully the significance of the Sabbath in Revelation 14, verses 7, 9, 10, and 12. Revelation 14:7 is a call to worship the Creator.

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Revelation 14:9–10 is a solemn appeal not to worship the beast:

“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark

on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God.”

Revelation 14:12 describes the people who worship the Creator and do not worship the beast in these words: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

These passages make it clear that the central issue in the conflict between good and evil, Christ and Satan, in the last days is worship. Two worships are contrasted in these verses—worshiping the Creator and worshiping the beast. We have already discovered that the Sabbath is God’s eternal sign of worshiping Him as the Creator. Revelation 14:12 reveals that those who have the “faith of Jesus” are loyal to God in earth’s final crisis and keep His commandments in the face of ridicule, opposition, persecution, and death. The heart of the Sabbath is relationship—the acknowledgment that God is worthy of our most supreme devotion, our deepest allegiance, and our total loyalty.

THE SABBATH, A PALACE IN TIME

There is another sense in which the Sabbath speaks courage to our weary hearts. The Sabbath is a place of refuge in a careworn world. Each week we leave the cares of this world and enter God’s retreat center—the Sabbath. The famed Jewish author Abraham Heschel calls the Sabbath a palace in time. Each seventh day, the God’s heavenly palace descends from heaven to earth, and Jesus invites us into the glory of His presence for this twenty-four-hour period to spend a time of intimate fellowship with Him.

In his book on the beauty and solemnity of the Sabbath, Heschel writes of the significance of the Sabbath in these words:

“The Sabbath is a metaphor for paradise and a testimony to God’s presence; in our prayers, we anticipate a messianic era that will be a Sabbath, and each Shabbat prepares us for that experience:

‘Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath...one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come’” (*The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, p. xv).

Heschel’s father once told him that “it was on the seventh day that God gave the world a soul, and ‘[the world’s] survival depends upon the holiness of the seventh day’” (*Ibid.*). The task, he writes, becomes how to convert time into eternity, how to fill our time with spirit:

“Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else” (*Ibid.*).

At creation, the Carpenter from Nazareth built a special dwelling for us. We can find refuge there. We can be safe there. His work is complete. It is finished. We can know that in Christ we are accepted by our loving heavenly Father. When we rest on the Sabbath, we are resting in His loving care. We are resting in His righteousness. We are resting in anticipation of our eternal rest in the new heavens and the new earth that is soon to come.

Sabbath rest is a symbol of a faith experience in Jesus. It is a graphic illustration of our trust in Him. All week we work, but on the seventh day we rest. We turn from our works to a total rest in Christ. In Jesus, we have someplace to belong. We need not stressfully work out our own salvation. Our lives need not be filled with guilt and fear and anxiety. Salvation comes only through Jesus. We cannot earn it, and we do not deserve it.

When Jesus breathed His last and cried, “It is finished,” He closed His eyes and died. The work of redemption was complete. He rested on the Sabbath, symbolizing a completed or finished work.

At the end of creation week, God rested, symbolizing a finished work. Each Sabbath as we rest on the seventh day of the week, we, too,

declare, “God, I am resting in the completed work of Christ on the cross. ‘Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.’”

There is still more that rounds out the picture. We also rest in the assurance that the Christ who has begun His work in us will finish it. The prophet Ezekiel declares:

“Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 20:12).

Here’s another reason why God gave us the Sabbath. It shows that the Lord is the One who sanctifies us. How is that? Well, that’s what God did to the seventh day. It was an ordinary slice of time just like any other at the end of creation week, but God set this particular day apart. He sanctified it. And through the Sabbath, God tells us, “That’s what I want to do for you, too. I want to set you apart as my special child. I want to pour Myself into you. I want to sanctify you. I want to share my holiness with you.”

The end-time message of Revelation of worshiping the Creator is a message of the One who recreates. He can give us victory over those health-destroying habits, those un-Christlike attitudes, and those addictive behaviors. If we worship Christ as the Creator, we will desire to care for His creation. Of all that He has created, the human body is the most sacred. The Sabbath reminds us of Jesus’ creative power and appeals to us to trust Him to remake us in His image.

The Sabbath reminds us of where we develop character—in relationship with our heavenly Father and with Jesus Christ. The Sabbath is a continual living promise of God’s ability to help us grow through all the ups and downs, tragedies and triumphs, of our lives. We need that distinctive time with the heavenly Father.

We need Sabbath quality time with the God who sanctifies us, the God who helps us keep growing. The Sabbath has continued in the weekly cycle from the dawn of creation until now. It began in the garden

of Eden, and the Sabbath will be celebrated when this earth is renewed after Christ's second coming. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the time when God will make the "new heavens and the new earth." He says:

"And it shall come to pass
That from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship
before me,' says the Lord"
(Isaiah 66:23).

A FOREVER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Sabbath beautifully represents a forever relationship with God. It stretches from the garden of Eden at creation to the garden that God will make of this planet at the end of time. It stretches from paradise lost to paradise restored. We need that kind of forever in our lives. We need a place that reassures us that we are in an eternal relationship with the heavenly Father.

We need a palace in time where that assurance can sink in deep—a place that says our heavenly Father will always be there for us. In the Sabbath, we can find a sense of contented rest. We can get in touch with our roots as His children there. We can grow and mature there. Yes, we need that kind of forever place that ties the whole of our lives to an eternal relationship with God.

The message of three angels flying through the heavens, appealing for us to worship the Creator, is heaven's answer to the hopeless despair of many in the twenty-first century. It is the answer to the dehumanizing philosophy of atheistic evolution. It is the answer to worry, tension, and fear. It is the answer to a lack of power and a lack of purpose. It is the answer to the hopelessness of our society, because it points us to assurance in Jesus today, tomorrow, and forever.

TWO SIDES IN THE GREAT WAR BEHIND ALL WARS.

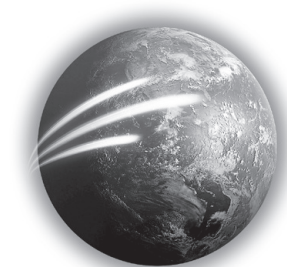
Two opposite principles are contested: infinite love and prideful selfishness. Two women symbolize two systems of worship. Two women in Revelation represent two churches.

One of those women is the bride of Jesus—His church on earth. Her pure white garments symbolize His perfection—and also her perfect faithfulness to Him.

The other woman does the bidding of Christ's enemy. She is adorned in purple and scarlet. She sits astride a fearsome beast. She holds a wineglass in her hand. She wears a tattoo of her name across her forehead. "Mystery," it says. "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots."

Babylon. Confusion. Lies. The war reaches a stage of urgent intensity. Jesus invites—Satan demands—your loyalty.

What is your decision?



CHAPTER 9

A City Called Confusion

The book of Revelation describes two systems of religion.

It presents us with one of two choices—it really does not leave us with any middle ground. The book contains a strong appeal to men and women in the last days of earth’s history—an urgent call to commitment. This appeal is summarized in the symbolism of the two women in Revelation.

The woman in white is described in Revelation 12. Throughout the book of Revelation, a pure woman symbolizes the bride of Jesus, or the true church. In Jeremiah 6:2 the prophet says:

“I have likened the daughter of Zion
To a lovely and delicate woman.”

The daughter of Zion is a phrase describing God’s people. Here, God compares His people to a pure, beautiful woman. In Ephesians 5, He likens Jesus to a faithful husband and His church to the bride.

In Revelation 12, there is the striking symbol of a woman dressed in white. She is faithful to her true lover, Jesus. She is undefiled with the corruption of false doctrine. She is described as Christ's bride, or His church, on earth. Throughout the centuries, Satan has persecuted and attempted to destroy the people of God. Revelation 12:17 describes his vicious attack and identifies God's people who resist the onslaught of the evil one:

“And the dragon [Satan] was enraged with the woman [the church], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The bride of Christ, His church, is faithful to Him in every generation. The New Testament church is radiant with the Son of Righteousness, Jesus Christ. Her affections are fixed upon Him. Her total love and complete loyalty are His alone. What a glorious picture of the followers of Christ!

Down through the centuries, God has always had a people who are faithful to Him. His Word has been the guide of their lives. Motivated by love, empowered by the Spirit, these grace-filled believers live lives of godly obedience and shine as lights in this world of darkness. The purpose of heaven's last-day message in Revelation 12 and 14 is to produce a people so filled with the Holy Spirit and so committed to Christ that they share the “everlasting gospel” with the world. Revelation 14 is also a warning against the confusion of popular religion in the last days of human history.

APOSTASY ARISES

Revelation 14 describes two religious streams flowing from entirely different fountains: the fountain of truth and the fountain of error. Revelation's everlasting gospel presents the powerful truths of God's Word to a world desperately seeking for answers. The devil's

counterfeit system, termed Babylon, is a distortion of truth and originates with the father of lies (see John 8:44). Revelation 14:8 makes a solemn announcement:

“And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’”

John wrote the book of Revelation at the end of the first century. By that time, Babylon was a dust heap on the landscape of history. (The Babylonian Empire ruled from 606 to 539 B.C.) In 539 B.C., the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon. The city was attacked on multiple occasions and ultimately laid waste. Therefore, Revelation’s prediction of the fall of Babylon cannot possibly be referring to the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon on the Euphrates River in modern-day Iraq. When John wrote down his messages in the book of Revelation, the literal city of Babylon had been destroyed for more than 500 years. We find, instead, that Revelation is a book of vivid symbolism. In the prophecies of Revelation, Babylon represents a false religious system. John describes this more extensively in Revelation 17.

In that chapter, a woman dressed in purple and scarlet strides across the landscape of time. This woman rides upon a scarlet-colored beast. The Bible calls her a harlot. She has left her true lover, Jesus Christ. Here the Apostle John gives us a graphic portrayal of an apostate system of religion. In this study, we will especially explore what the Bible teaches about the harlot riding upon this scarlet-colored beast. We will see very clearly the sharp contrast between Christ’s truth and Satan’s falsehoods.

Revelation 17:1–2 introduces us to this mysterious woman:

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom

the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”

This harlot has departed from the faith of Jesus. Here is a picture, not of the true church, but of the fallen church. This apostate religious system has compromised the truths of Scripture.

The Bible says “she sits on many waters.” Revelation 17:15 explains this symbolism: “Then he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.’” The fallen church system has an international reach, influencing people around the world with her deceptions.

A UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Revelation 17:2 continues its explanation of the mystery of Babylon the Great by declaring that she has “committed fornication” with the kings of the earth. What is fornication? It’s an illicit union. In the fallen church system, the church unites with the state. In the true church system, the church is united with Jesus Christ. The fallen church looks to the political leaders of the earth for power and authority. It seeks for the state to enforce its decrees. When the church leaves its true lover, Jesus Christ, and looks to the government for power, it loses its spiritual authority.

The founders of the United States clearly understood that if a church draws its authority and power from the state, intolerance and persecution often follow for those who do not conform to the church’s mandates. These early American leaders had experienced the tyranny of the state-church union in Europe. One of the reasons they left the Old World for the New was because of religious intolerance. Therefore, they wrote into the First Amendment of the American Constitution these memorable words: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

George Washington, America's first president and a deeply religious man, stated:

"I beg you be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution" (*The Writings of George Washington*: pt. v., *Speeches and Messages to Congress, Proclamations, and Addresses*, p. 155).

Thomas Jefferson coined the expression, "separation of church and state." By this, Jefferson meant that the religious convictions of all peoples must be respected, and that the government did not have the authority or right either to establish a state religion or to dictate the beliefs or non-beliefs of its citizens.

Revelation 17 predicts that this is precisely what will happen in the future under the auspices of spiritual Babylon. Verse 2 continues its dramatic portrayal: "and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

The fallen church—the woman—dressed in purple and scarlet, sits upon a scarlet-colored beast and influences the state to support her falsehoods. She passes around her wine cup of erroneous doctrine. The world becomes intoxicated with these false religious ideas. Millions drink of the "wine of Babylon" and are deceived. The Bible describes it this way in Revelation 17:3:

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."

As we have discovered, the harlot of Revelation 17 represents a false system of religion. Remember that in the Bible a beast represents a king or a kingdom.

Politicians eager to retain their positions yield to the influence of the majority who have drunk of the wine of Babylon's false doctrines. The church's decrees will eventually be supported and enforced by the state. She derives power from the state, but she also influences the state. What a powerful symbol of an illicit union between church and state! One religious writer puts it this way:

“The church has gained outward recognition by leaning on the world-power, which in its turn uses the church for its own objects; such is the picture here of Christendom ripe for judgment” (Robert Jamieson, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, p. 612).

When a nation turns its back on the principles of God's kingdom, it becomes beastlike. When the church leaves her true lover and looks to the state for power and support, it compromises biblical principles and becomes the harlot.

Revelation 17:4 continues this intriguing drama: “The woman [remember, this is the harlot, the fallen church] was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls.”

What are the colors that God uses to describe this fallen system of religion that appeals to the state for its power? The colors are purple and scarlet. Do you know of a religious system whose religious leaders wear purple and scarlet vestments? Verse 4 continues: “having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.” In his book on the life of Constantine, church historian Eusebius states:

“In order to attach to Christianity great attraction in the eyes of the nobility, the [Catholic] priests adopted the outer garments and adornments which were used in pagan cults” (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, cited in *Altai-Nimalaya*, p. 94).

In other words, in the hand of this fallen system of religion, whose colors are purple and scarlet, is a wine cup, and all the world drinks and becomes confused by these false doctrines. Now, where is the headquarters of this apostate religious system?

“Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits” (Revelation 17:9).

The woman represents a system of human traditions and error rather than biblical truth. Her colors are purple and scarlet, and she is located on a seven-hilled city.

Is there any city in Europe which is the capital of a politico-religious power that has influenced political leaders of Europe for centuries, is built on seven hills, and whose prime colors of its religious prelates' vestments are purple and scarlet? There is only one city in the world that meets this description: Rome.

Theologian and professor Ernest Martin makes this fascinating observation: “The fact that Rome was designated ‘The Seven-Hilled City’ was significant enough to render it as a sacred and holy city that was designed to have world power and authority. This is one of the reasons the ancient people of the world always respected the city of Rome, whether they were its arch defenders and supporters or its enemies and were alien to its political and religious concepts” (*The Seven Hills of Jerusalem*, 2000).

Let's be clear: there are other cities in the world built on seven hills, but there is only one—Rome—that meets all the identifying features in Revelation 17.

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT

Now, what name is on her forehead? Revelation 17:5 says, “And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

Let's analyze this passage carefully. The fallen system of religion outlined in Revelation 17 is called "Mystery, Babylon the Great." To understand the falsehoods and errors that Satan has introduced into the Christian church, it will be necessary to review the teachings of ancient spiritual Babylon.

Philosopher George Santayana made this insightful statement: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In ancient Babylon, the world was commanded to bow in worship to a god of gold. Disobedience to the commands of pagan religion was enforced with a death decree. The union of church and state in ancient Babylon in the sixth century B.C.—and its propagation of religious falsehoods which influenced all areas of life—reveals how the devil will deceive multitudes in the future.

The second thing we notice: this mother church has multiple daughters who have retained many of her false teachings and unbiblical doctrines. Revelation reveals the past so we can understand the future.

Now, if we can solve the mystery of Babylon the Great, we will understand the crucial significance of the symbolism of Revelation 17.

What does the Bible mean when it says, "Mystery, Babylon the Great"? As we have already noted, by the first century, literal Babylon, the mighty empire that had dominated the Middle East, had already been destroyed. Once the Persian armies under Cyrus attacked and defeated Belshazzar, Babylon never rose to prominence again. Our passage cannot possibly be talking about *literal* Babylon, which had been destroyed for more than 500 years by the time John wrote Revelation.

Revelation 17 is talking about *spiritual* Babylon—an apostate religious system that would depart from the pure teaching of God's Word and reintroduce into Christianity many of the teachings of Old Testament Babylon. This may sound amazing, but it is true. Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. This prophecy is talking about a departure from

the faith of Scripture. False doctrines would enter the church through this false religious system identified as Babylon the Great.

BABYLON'S FALSEHOODS

Let's go back to the book of Genesis and learn something about Old Testament Babylon so we can understand why God in Revelation called the false woman "Mystery, Babylon the Great." If you understand the mystery of Babylon the Great, you can understand what God is calling us *from* as well as what God is calling us *to*.

In the Old Testament, shortly after the flood, a group of men and women rebelled against God by doubting His Word. God had promised that there would never again be a worldwide flood. Disbelieving His Word, they built a tower to reach into the heavens to protect themselves in the eventuality of another global catastrophe.

The central issue here is believing or disbelieving God's Word. It is whether or not God can be trusted. Does He mean what He says?

The Tower of Babel was built in direct defiance of the Word of God. The Babel builders substituted human ideas and man-made theories for the clear instructions from heaven. As they were building this monument for their own glory, God confused their languages. The Genesis account puts it this way:

"Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth" (Genesis 11:9).

Lacking faith, refusing to hear what God said, they flagrantly violated the command of God. They turned from God's promise of protection to a human plan to protect themselves.

BABYLON: CONFUSED VALUES

At this point, God confused their language. The city of Babylon was built on the site of the Tower of Babel. When you think of Babylon,

think “confusion.” What are the first four letters in the word Babylon? B-A-B-Y. That spells *baby*. Why do we call a baby a baby? We call a baby a baby because it babbles. A baby has confused speech, so it is a babbler. In the religious world, when religion becomes confused, truth becomes distorted, and human opinions are elevated above God’s Word; it is nothing more than babbling, or Babylon.

It’s babbling man’s ideas. It’s babbling man’s tradition. It’s babbling man’s opinions. And when a church babbles in confusion, it distorts truth.

Truth stands in stark contrast to error. When God’s truth is clearly preached, it is not babbling; it is proclaiming. There is a major difference between proclaiming truth and babbling falsehood.

The book of Daniel is a companion book to Revelation. Describing the fundamental attitude of Babylonian philosophy, the prophet records the king’s arrogance in these words:

“The king spoke, saying, ‘Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?’” (Daniel 4:30).

Nebuchadnezzar proudly boasted of his grand achievements in building the world-class city of Babylon. Catch the significance of this. Babylon is a man-made system. Spiritual Babylon represents a religion based on human teachings, established on human ideas, and supported by human traditions. There is a form of man-made religion that is built by brilliant human religious leaders, which stands in opposition to the power of the gospel and the truth of God’s Word.

JESUS AND HIS CHURCH

Jesus Himself said, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The message of Revelation portrays two systems of religion; one man-made and the other

God-made. I have talked to some people who have said, “I believe that all religion is man-made, and I don’t want to have anything to do with organized churches.” This thinking clearly contradicts Jesus’ clear statement: “I have built my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). This church has a solid foundation: Jesus Christ. It is built on the teachings of the Word of God and is guided by the Holy Spirit.

On the contrary, Babylon is a man-made system of religion. Jesus is calling us from all human systems of religion. He’s calling us back to faithfulness to His Word. The church of Jesus Christ is not a man-made institution. The church of Jesus Christ was built by the Savior Himself. In fact, Colossians 1:18 states:

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Jesus Christ is the only head of the church. The true church of God is the only organization so big that its body is upon earth, but its head is in heaven. Although Jesus guides His church through human leaders, their authority comes from His Word, not their human religious teachings. Any religious leader who substitutes human opinions or traditions in the place of or above the revealed will of God in the Scriptures is simply fostering Babylonian confusion.

A HUMAN LEADER—OR A DIVINE HEAD?

In the days of ancient Babylon, church and state united. When King Nebuchadnezzar sat in his temple on his royal throne, he spoke as a god. His commands were, supposedly, the voice of a god. On one occasion, as an act of defiance of the true God, the Babylonian king passed a universal decree enforcing worship and commanding all his subjects to bow to his

decree. The decree is recorded in Daniel 3:4–5: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages” to “fall down and worship.”

Once again in the last days of earth’s history, a church-state system would arise called spiritual Babylon, and it would have a spiritual leader claiming to speak as God. It would declare that its word was the very Word of God.

Throughout the centuries, the Roman pontiffs have declared that they stand in the place of God on earth. In his Encyclical Letter of June 20, 1894, Pope Leo XIII stated, “We hold upon this earth the place of Almighty God.”

Consider this remarkable statement by a Jesuit cardinal in 1628:

“All names which in the Scriptures are applied to Christ, by virtue of which is established that He is over the church, all the same names are applied to the Pope” (Robert Bellarmine, *On the Authority of Councils*, Book 2, chapter 17).

Ferrari’s Ecclesiastical Dictionary adds, “The Pope is of so great dignity, and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, and the vicar of God.” Pope Pius IX (1848–78) was the first to introduce the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, which states:

“In virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church.”

Infallibility is, according to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, “more than a simple, de facto absence of error. It is a positive perfection, ruling out the possibility of error.” These are remarkable statements. The pope is claimed to be “shepherd and teacher of all Christians.” It

is claimed that he has supreme authority and defines doctrines for the “whole church,” and that when he does, it “rules out the possibility of error.” The parallels between Old Testament Babylon and modern-day Rome are striking.

Spiritual Babylon, the church of Rome, has taken on many of the characteristics of ancient Babylon. And this assertion of infallibility does not tell us who was infallible when rival popes fought for supremacy and excommunicated each other.

The Apostle Paul adds these words exposing this power as one “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

The Westminster Confession, originally published in 1647, states:

“There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: Nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God” (*The Confession of Faith*, 1647, p. 92).

The first identifying feature of spiritual Babylon is that it has an earthly head who speaks for God and in place of God. Spiritual Babylon's leader claims that his word has the authority of the very God of heaven. According to Revelation's prophecies, through this power church and state eventually unite, the conscientious convictions of God's faithful people are trampled upon, and persecution eventually follows.

Understanding the features of Old Testament Babylon unlocks the mystery of Babylon the Great. We have discovered that spiritual Babylon is an apostate religious system that substitutes human teaching for the divine revelation recorded in the sacred Scripture. There is a crucial lesson for God's end-time people here. If Christ is secondary

and some religious leader occupies first place in our thinking, we are on the road to Babylon. If we place the opinion of others above the Word of God, we are headed for Babylon. If we are influenced by our religious leaders or anyone else to disregard the commands of God for the sake of popularity, we are on the road to Babylon.

BABYLON WAS THE CENTER OF IDOLATRY

Babylon was also the center of image worship. Idolatry was at the heart of Babylonian worship. The Babylonians believed that carved wooden or stone images were representations of their deities. Spiritual Babylon is a system of religion that places emphasis on worshipping Christ, Mary, the apostles, and varied so-called saints through images. It ascribes holiness and sacredness to these human creations.

Images limit the ability of the Holy Spirit to impress upon our minds the things of eternity. They are often given the sacredness and homage that belongs to God alone. We do not need to come to Jesus through the image of a saint. Jesus is our Intercessor. He is our Priest.

Our Savior and Redeemer invites us to worship Him directly, not through the medium of a wooden image or one carved of stone.

The Ten Commandments make this plain:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:4–5).

David adds this insight in Psalm 115:4–8:

“Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of human hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.”

Babylon used images prolifically in its worship services, and many of those images found their way from paganism to Rome and into the Christian church. Dr. Edwin Goodenough, professor of religion, made this observation:

“The Church did everything it could to stamp out such ‘pagan’ rites, but had to capitulate and allow the rites to continue with only the name of the local deity changed to some Christian saint’s name” (Edwin Goodenough, *Religious Tradition and Myth*, Harvard University, pp. 56, 57).

These images are still considered sacred today. Many represent the so-called “saints” who supposedly intercede for us before God. The worship of images was one of the major discussion points in the Protestant Reformation.

The Catholic prelates argued that, “the honor which is shown them [images] is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the saints

whose likeness they bear” (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Dec. 3–4, 1563).

Here is a forthright acknowledgement by the Roman hierarchy that the church has instituted image worship. Their justification is that it is not the images that are worshiped but what they represent. This is very similar to the thinking of the Babylonian system. The images of Babylon simply represented the Babylonian gods and were the vehicle through which to worship those gods. Tragically, millions of Christians revere images of so-called “saints” as objects of worship. This is one of Satan’s deceptions to cloud their minds from the truth of God’s Word.

In 1 Timothy 2:5, the Apostle Paul states that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” There is salvation in no other. Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). We come to God through our mighty Intercessor, Jesus Christ.

In Acts 4, the Apostle Peter was brought before the religious rulers in Jerusalem. He was condemned as a heretic, cast into prison and the next day brought to trial. The Jewish leaders clothed salvation in the garb of legalism. Just as in building the ancient tower of Babylon, their good works became the means of their standing before God. Their acceptance with God was based on their behavior. Religion consisted of ritual, formalities, and duty.

Standing before the religious leaders of his day, Peter eloquently spoke of the salvation so freely provided in Christ in Acts 4:12:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

There is only one way of salvation—and that is through the grace of Christ. Salvation does not come through man-made creeds. Salvation does not come through human religious institutions. Salvation

does not come through religious pageantry, candles, incense, images, or ritual. Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

There is only One whose hands bear the prints of the nails. There is only One whose head wore the crown of thorns and whose back was lacerated with a Roman whip. There is only One who bled and died on a Roman cross for our salvation. There is only One who was placed in a freshly-hewn rock tomb and was raised from the dead. There is only One who appears before the throne of God as our Intercessor. There is only One who is coming again in the clouds of heaven to take us home. His name is Jesus. Only Jesus can get us through the perilous times of the last days. Only Jesus can keep us from the deceptions of the evil one. Only Jesus can take us from here to eternity.

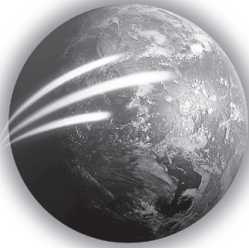
OUT OF HIS GREAT HEART OF LOVE, GOD PROVIDED A WARNING.

He told Adam and Eve that they should never eat the fruit of a certain tree in their garden home. Should they do that, they would die. So when Eve repeated God's warning to the enemy, posing as a snake in the branches of the tree, he laughed it off. "You will not surely die!" But Adam and Eve would learn the hard way just how right God was.

Sin is the cause. Death is the effect. Death is the inevitable consequence of sin. If Jesus proved anything at the cross, He proved exactly that.

Satan is desperate to keep us from connecting sin with death. So he produces a long line of psychics, best-selling authors, and even terribly mistaken preachers to echo the devil's first great lie: "No one ever dies."

But the truth is far more satisfying. Read on.



CHAPTER 10

Satan's Final Deceptions

It was one of those gorgeous September mornings in Chicago as the sun rose over Lake Michigan. As commuters battled heavy traffic on the Kennedy and Eisenhower Expressways and children made their way to school, a chilling story began to emerge that struck fear into the hearts of Chicagoans throughout the city. People were becoming tragically sick, and some were even dying, just a few hours after taking Tylenol capsules.

A 2009 *Time Magazine* report by Dan Fletcher, twenty-seven years after the horrible events of that September day, chronicled the awful details. “[T]he parents of Mary Kellerman gave the 12-year-old a painkiller when she woke up complaining of a cold. She died hours later. Postal worker Adam Janus died in another Chicago suburb later that morning. Janus’ brother and his brother’s wife, complaining of headaches while mourning Adam, died too. In a few days the death toll grew—the only link being that each victim had taken Extra-Strength Tylenol.

Upon testing, each of the capsules proved to be laced with potassium cyanide at a level toxic enough to provide thousands of fatal doses. Police were baffled. The pills came from different production plants

and were sold in different drug stores around the Chicago area. Their conclusion was that someone was most likely tampering with the drug on the store shelves. The deaths set off a nationwide panic, as stores rushed to remove Tylenol from their shelves and worried consumers overwhelmed hospitals and poison control hotlines. Chicago police went through the streets with loudspeakers, warning residents of the dangers of taking Tylenol. Johnson & Johnson, the drug's manufacturer, spent millions of dollars recalling the pills from stores.

Scores of people became sick, and seven died that day. It is ironic that a medication people used to seek relief made them sick and even led to death. It reminds us of a Bible passage in Proverbs 16:25:

“There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.”

People in Chicago and around the country trusted a very well-known painkiller. They did not suspect that it was laced with cyanide poison.

According to the book of Revelation, millions of people will not suspect a final, fatal, last-day delusion. They will be led astray by a popular religious power that appeals to the majority with its falsehoods. They will be deceived and will not recognize it until it is too late.

But here is the incredibly good news. Jesus has sent a message in the book of Revelation pictured as three angels flying in mid-heaven. We have been carefully studying this message for the last several chapters. It is the message of the everlasting gospel of God's goodness and grace, which is to be gloriously proclaimed to every nation and language group to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. The first of these three angels calls us to live godly lives in the light of the judgment hour. In an age of evolution, heaven's end-time message is an appeal to worship the Creator.

Previously, we studied the second angel's message found in Revelation 14:8:

“And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’”

We discovered that the term “Babylon” represents an apostate religious system that distorts truth and substitutes man-made theories for the teachings of the gospel. We also noted, based on Revelation 17, that the woman (the apostate church) rides on a scarlet-colored beast. According to Daniel 7, verses 17 and 23, the beast represents state powers. In the last days of earth’s history, the devil will attempt to forge a union of churches with state powers to propagate his falsehoods and oppress God’s people.

There are two central pillars of Satan’s strategy to unite all religions to ultimately form the mark of the beast. In this chapter, we will study the devil’s grandest illusion. Remember, we are studying “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT” (Revelation 17:5). Babylon represents religious confusion. Note the parallels between Old Testament Babylon and Revelation’s spiritual Babylon. One of those parallels is spiritualism. Revelation 18:2 repeats the message of the fall of Babylon echoed earlier in Revelation 14:8. In Revelation 18, a mighty angel descends from heaven and cries mightily with a loud voice,

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!” (Revelation 18:2).

BABYLON AND IMMORTALITY

Belief in the supposed spirits of the dead played a major part in the thinking of the ancient Babylonians. . In fact, they believed that at death the disembodied spirit descended into the nether world. Babylon was central to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The idea that

when you die there is an immortal soul that continues eternally did not come from Christianity. The concept of the immortality of the soul flows through the philosophies of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Greece. The Greeks popularized the concept of the immortal soul in the writings of Plato and Socrates. In Greek thought, the body was the prison house of the soul, and death liberated the soul from the body and allowed it to wing its way into the spirit world. This is the complete antithesis of the biblical view of death.

Now, here is one of the most incredible texts in the Bible, showing what can happen when God's people depart from the clear teachings of His Word.

“And He said to me, ‘Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing.’ So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD’s house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz” (Ezekiel 8:13–14).

Now, who was Tammuz? Tammuz was the god of vegetation. The Babylonians believed that when winter darkened the sky and there were long nights, Tammuz had died. But in the spring, there would be a resurrection. Some of God's people, the Jews, accepted this false idea from Babylon, straight out of paganism.

That's why Ezekiel describes them as “worshiping Tammuz.” They are worshiping the dead.

This false idea that the dead live on and the soul is immortal slipped into Old Testament doctrine directly from paganism. Here's what the Bible has to say about the truth of death:

“For the living know that they will die;
But the dead know nothing,
And they have no more reward,
For the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. The Bible teaching on death could not be any clearer. The doctrine of the immortal soul is not in the Bible. This whole idea of the immortal soul comes from paganism.

Here is an excerpt from a sermon by biblical preacher Amos Phelps, who wrote these powerful words over 100 years ago, in his sermon, "Is Man, by Nature, Immortal?" He discusses the question of the immortality of the soul and concludes:

"This doctrine can be traced through the muddy channels of a corrupted Christianity, a perverted Judaism, a pagan philosophy, a superstitious idolatry, to the great instigator of mischief in the garden of Eden. The Protestants borrowed it from the Catholics, the Catholics from the Pharisees, the Pharisees from the pagans, and the pagans from the old serpent who first preached the doctrine amid the lowly bowels of paradise to an audience all too willing to hear and heed the new and fascinating theology ... 'You shall not surely die.'"

What did Satan say to Eve in the garden of Eden? He essentially said, "Eve, you are immortal." The first great deception in the garden of Eden was closely aligned with his appeal for her to disobey an express command of God.

Just as Satan deceived Eve through his spiritualistic manifestation of using the serpent as a medium, He will work through his evil spirits to deceive multitudes today. Just before the coming of Jesus, Satan will work with all of his power to deceive. Revelation 16:14 describes his final deception this way:

"For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

Satan brings about the final union of church and state through spiritualistic deceptions.

The idea of the immortality of the soul, of worshiping the dead, of bowing before images supposedly representing the dead—that idea of the immortality of the soul gave way to the pagan doctrine of bringing offerings for the dead. It gave way to the Christian doctrine of saints (supposedly departed loved ones) who are said to be hovering around us, desiring to communicate with us. It will also pave the way for the last deception of Satan in his attempt to control this planet.

The three angels' messages warn us against this last-day deception by revealing the truth about death. Revelation 14:13 declares,

“Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD from now on.’ ‘Yes’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”

In Scripture, death is a rest, a sleep until the return of our Lord.

You see, the idea of the immortality of the soul greatly diminishes the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. It eats at the very heart of the church. If you believe in the immortality of the soul, you believe that when you die, you will immediately go to heaven. So why then would Jesus come to resurrect the dead if they were already in heaven? This false teaching undercuts the second coming of Christ.

It was God's intent that the church in every age would long for the second coming of Christ. The Apostle Paul plainly states in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

According to the Bible, our loved ones rest in Jesus until the second coming of Christ. When Jesus returns, together with them we will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air.

Why is it today that so many churches are spiritually dead? Why do so many churches lack spiritual power? It is because they have lost the urgency of the second coming of Christ. It is because they have lost their passion for Jesus' return. I thank God that the Bible leads us to the realization that Jesus Christ is coming, and He is coming soon.

And our hearts can beat with the eager anticipation that our dead loved ones who died longing for the return of their Lord will be resurrected to meet Christ in the sky.

The first great Babylonian deception is a false understanding of death that opens the way for the deceptive influence of spiritualism. The second great deception focuses specifically on worship.

BABYLON WAS ALSO THE CENTER OF SUN WORSHIP

Sun worship was prominent in Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and certainly Babylon. In his book, *The Worship of Nature*, Dr. James G. Frazer makes this observation: "In ancient Babylonia the sun was worshiped from immemorial antiquity" (vol. 1, p. 529). Babylonian sun worship made an impact on the people of God. Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, wrote about the influence of Babylonian sun worship on some worshipers in Judea.

"So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east" (Ezekiel 8:16).

Here is a fascinating bit of history which helps us understand the origin of Sunday worship. In every generation, Satan has attempted

to exalt the creation above the Creator. He is the master deceiver. His attempt is to get people worshiping the objects of creation rather than the One who created those objects. He has attempted to counterfeit the truth of Scripture with falsehoods.

As we have discovered, some Jews accepted the Babylonian idea that the soul was immortal, so they were praying to Tammuz. But they were doing something else in the inner court of the Lord's house. What was it?

Here it is: there "were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east."

When these worshipers came to the temple, they did not turn their backs to the east, as was customary, but faced the east to worship the sun. This of course was a pagan practice directly from Babylon.

In Revelation 14 and 17, John describes a time when the principles of Babylon, including sun worship, would slip into the Christian church during an age of compromise. Author John Eadie gives us this insight: "Sunday was a name given by the heathen to the first day of the week, because it was the day on which they worshiped the sun" (*Eadie's Biblical Cyclopaedia*, 1872 ed., p. 561). The day of the sun was a popular pagan holiday.

The casual conversion of Constantine in the early part of the fourth century caused great joy in the Roman Empire; but under a religious guise, the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Constantine had a strong affinity for sun worship. Renowned historian Edward Gibbon wrote: "The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1887, vol. 3, p. 4).

In A.D. 321, in an attempt to unite his empire at a time of social upheaval, Constantine passed the first Sunday law. He issued an edict stating, "On the venerable day of the Sun let the Magistrates and the people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed" (*Edict of Constantine*, A.D. 321).

The significance of this law cannot be overstated. It was not a law enforcing Sunday observance for all of Constantine's subjects, but it did strengthen the observance of Sunday in the minds of the entire Roman population.

In succeeding decades, emperors and popes continued, through state decrees and church councils, to establish Sunday as the day of worship. Here is a quote from *New Catholic World* on the same subject:

"The Sun was a foremost god with heathendom.... Hence the church in these countries would seem to have said, 'Keep that old, pagan name. It shall remain consecrated, sanctified.' And thus, the pagan Sunday, dedicated to Balder, became the Christian Sunday, sacred to Jesus" (vol. 58, p. 809).

In his book, *The Two Babylons*, Dr. Alexander Hislop helps us understand what happened in the early centuries of the church:

"To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals [of Sunday] amalgamated [united], and... to get Paganism and Christianity—now far sunk in idolatry—in this as in so many other things, to shake hands" (p. 105).

So, Christianity and paganism "shook hands." Sunday became a vehicle to unite the two religions—paganism and Christianity.

Now, here is a remarkable statement by Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of the *The Hiscox Standard Baptist Manual*. In 1893, he addressed a group of hundreds of Baptist ministers and shocked them as he explained how Sunday came into the Christian church.

"What a pity that it [Sunday] comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, then

adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!" (Dr. Edward Hiscox, before a New York ministers' conference, Nov. 13, 1893, as reported in the *New York Examiner*, Nov. 16, 1893).

A Baptist theologian declared to Baptist pastors what a pity it was that Sunday came through the muddy waters of paganism, then was adopted into Catholicism, and given as a "sacred legacy to Protestantism."

Ezekiel the prophet would also say, "What a pity!" Because God gave us the seventh-day Sabbath as a sign:

"Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them" (Ezekiel 20:12).

Even for the casual observer of church history, it is obvious that pagan practices have crept into the Christian church. Teachings from ancient Babylon have influenced most Christian churches. When the Protestant churches protested some of these practices, they did not protest enough. They left the mother church of Rome, but they did not go far enough.

During the Protestant Reformation, God raised up great men and women of faith, but unfortunately they retained some of the errors from the mother church. The immortality of the soul and Sunday worship are just two examples of the falsehoods the great deceiver has led multitudes to accept. The messages of Revelation 14 and 17 are a warning for all committed believers to recognize that falsehoods will enter the Christian church again. They are an appeal from Jesus Himself so that we will understand the momentous events that are soon to burst upon this world as an overwhelming surprise.

The good news is that God has millions of honest-hearted men and woman who love Him and long to know His truth. As they study

God's Word and learn new truths, their hearts respond. All they want is what God wants. They are amazed that more religious leaders are not teaching the fullness of God's truth from His Word.

In the days of Ezekiel, when error slipped in among the people of God, he cried out,

“Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them” (Ezekiel 22:26).

It is likely that, if the prophet Ezekiel were alive today, he would still be saying the same thing. John the Revelator echoes these same thoughts in Revelation, chapters 14, 17, and 18. He makes an urgent appeal for honest-hearted people in Babylon—in apostate churches teaching contrary to biblical teachings—to “Come out of her my people” (Revelation 18:4). If the Apostle John were alive today, he would cry out for people to flee from the errors that have become part of a fallen church system called spiritual Babylon.

Soon this world will be confronted with Satan's greatest deception. Through the twin errors of Sunday sacredness and the immortality of the soul, he will attempt to unite the religious world. Once again, church and state will unite, and religious intolerance will follow. Speaking with penetrating insight, Ellen White states:

“Through the two great errors, *the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness*, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of Spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach

over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience” (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 588, emphasis supplied).

The message of the second angel in Revelation 14:8 is, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen.” In Revelation 17, the woman identified as spiritual Babylon, dressed in purple and scarlet, rides upon a scarlet-colored beast passing around her wine cup and getting the world drunk with error. Church and state unite. Falsehood prevails. Demons work their miracles to deceive. The world catapults into its final conflict. The people of God are maligned, ridiculed, oppressed, and persecuted, but in Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit they are steadfast in their commitment.

All the powers of hell and the forces of evil cannot break their loyalty to Christ. They are secure in Him. He is their “refuge and strength”—a “very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

THREE ANGELS FLYING IN MID-HEAVEN SOUND THE WARNING.

Three angels flying in mid-heaven announce Christ’s last-day message to the world. Three angels flying in mid-heaven call us to faithfulness. In these messages:

- ▶ God is leading us today back to His Word.
- ▶ God is leading us back to His truth.
- ▶ God is leading us to a fuller, deeper, more complete understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- ▶ God is calling an end-time people back to faithfulness to His Word. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The truth of God’s Word, not human opinion or tradition, is the north star to guide us in this critical hour of earth’s history.

God's appeal is to a group of people who believe that you can come directly to Jesus without a lifeless image as an intermediary. He is looking for a group of people whose hearts long for the Christ who came once to come again the second time and take them home. They do not accept the unbiblical idea of the immortal soul. They long to see their saved loved ones again on that glorious resurrection morning. Jesus Christ's bride, the church, will adore Him as the Creator of heaven and earth and worship Him on the Bible Sabbath.

The woman in scarlet and purple, riding on the scarlet-covered beast, has passed around her wine cup, and the world is drunk with Babylon's false doctrines. These erroneous teachings have impacted millions. As a result, God is giving His people, still entrenched in error, a final last-day appeal.

“And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen....’ And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’ (Revelation 18:2, 4).

WHERE ARE MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE?

Many of God's people are in religious organizations that have compromised biblical truth. They do not understand the truths of Scripture. Most of God's people today, loving Christians of every religious persuasion, are in churches that God calls Babylon. God's loving appeal is straightforward, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). What is sin? It is the transgression of God's law; it is breaking God's Commandments (see 1 John 3:4). Heaven's appeal is to come out of every church that does not teach obedience to the law of God.

In the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, the authors make this remarkable statement:

“So also in every apostate or world-conforming Church there are some of God’s invisible and true Church, who, if they would be safe, must come out (p. 593)”

With tones of mercy and tender love, Jesus appeals to honest-hearted people still immersed in Babylon’s falsehoods, “Come out of her, my people!”

You may be thinking, “I have been looking for truth. I am a truth-seeker. I haven’t been satisfied. Something within me longs for more.” Possibly you once walked with God’s people but have drifted away and have never really been fulfilled. There’s an emptiness inside. You desire inner peace and a solid foundation for your faith.

I believe that God has looked down upon you. He is guiding you to the truth of His Word.

You may be the only one in your family or your community who now understands God’s last-day message and responds to His final appeal. God is calling you. In the strongest appeal possible, He says to you personally, “Come out of her my people.”

WE WATCH THE DAILY NETWORK OR CABLE NEWS.

Or perhaps we read about it online and, by turns, we're horrified, sickened, or heartbroken.

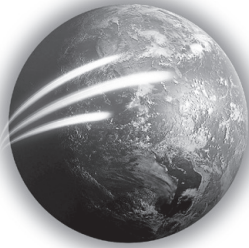
Too much misery. Too much pain. Too much sorrow here. The conviction deepens: **This can't possibly be the way life was meant to be.**

God says that things will get better—but first, they will get much worse.

Revelation's three angels say that, just before Jesus returns to this earth, the whole world will divide into two groups. Those loyal to Jesus will receive His seal. Those loyal to His enemy will receive the enemy's mark—the mark of the beast.

The seal. The mark. What are they?

Could it be, as Revelation says, that each of them has to do with something as simple as a day on the calendar?



CHAPTER 11

The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast

PART 1

There is a relatively new medical device called a VeriChip.

It is a biochip about the size of a grain of rice. A medical specialist can implant this radio frequency identification device beneath the skin through an injection during an outpatient procedure. The VeriChip contains information about the patient's medical history that can be obtained by passing an external scanner across the area of skin where the VeriChip has been inserted.

The VeriChip lies dormant under the skin until the scanner passes radio frequency energy to it, energizing the chip, which then emits a radio frequency signal containing the identification number of the chip. This identification number is transmitted to a secure, FDA-compliant data storage site via telephone or Internet, and life-saving medical information is then provided to aid the medical professional treating the patient.

Currently, the chip only holds a small amount of data. However, the developer, Applied Digital Solutions, is planning to add sensors

that will read patients' vital signs and a satellite receiver that can track where they are, much like a digital angel.

Some Christians regard this as part of a conspiracy to enforce the mark of the beast. Others believe the mark of the beast is tied to bar codes on the food we buy or to a mysterious number that supposedly adds up to 666 on dollar bills. For some, it has to do with the Masonic order, the Illuminati, or black helicopters from the United Nations.

For one lady, it had to do with a tie I wore while I was the speaker for the It Is Written international broadcast network. As she watched one of my programs, she imagined she saw a strange pattern on my favorite tie that supposedly, when viewed from the right perspective, added up to 666. She wrote me a letter urging me to forsake that tie forever, lest I deceive people into receiving the mark of the beast.

MORE THAN STRANGE SYMBOLS

The message of the book of Revelation is much more than cryptic symbols, strange beasts, odd images, bar codes, and mysterious biochips. It speaks of eternal truths written by a loving God to an end-time generation.

The central issue in earth's final conflict has to do with worship. The conflict between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship. It will come to its final climax over worship.

Let's briefly review three passages of Scripture in Revelation 14 to clearly establish this point. The messages we have been studying are so important that they are pictured as being carried by three angels flying swiftly through the sky.

In Revelation 14:7, the first angel cries with a loud voice:

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Heaven's appeal is to give our supreme allegiance and heartfelt worship to the Creator in light of heaven's cosmic judgment.

In Revelation 14:8, a second angel declares:

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

As we have studied in the previous two chapters, Babylon represents an apostate religious system that has substituted falsehood for truth. She has rejected the message of the first angel, so the second angel's message announces that she has fallen from God's favor.

In Revelation 14:9–10, the third angel warns against worshipping the beast. The angel declares in trumpet tones:

"If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark in his forehead or his hand, he himself shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

Revelation 14:12 summarizes the issues this way:

"Here is the patience [endurance] of the saints [believers]; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in the history of the world. Lovingly and loyally, they will live God-centered, grace-filled, obedient lives. Worshiping the Creator stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast and finds its expression in keeping the commandments of God. The Sabbath, of course, is the sign of Christ's creative authority. This final conflict over allegiance to Christ versus allegiance to the beast power centers on worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is the Sabbath.

These committed followers of the Savior not only will have faith in Jesus, but they will also have the faith *of* Jesus. Jesus' quality of end-time faith will be theirs. Hanging on the cross, enshrouded in darkness, bearing the guilt, shame, and condemnation of the sins of the world, seemingly shut off from His Father's love, Jesus depended on the relationship He had shared with the Father throughout His life. To depend on His emotions would have been an absolute spiritual disaster. The Savior trusted, even when He could not discern the future. He believed when there was little evidence for belief. He trusted when all around Him the circumstances cried out for Him to doubt. In the book *The Desire of Ages*, there is this remarkable statement:

“Amid the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God, Christ had drained the last dregs in the cup of human woe. In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him. He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor” (Ellen White, p. 756).

The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed that all the demons in hell and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot understand, hopes when it cannot comprehend, and hangs on when there is little to hang onto. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift that we receive by faith and that will carry us through the crisis ahead. In this final crisis, when the faithful followers of Christ face an economic boycott, are unable to buy or sell, and are threatened with persecution, the faith of Jesus will carry them through the trials and tribulation of earth's final hours.

A COSMIC STRUGGLE

The real significance of the mark of the beast in Bible prophecy is the larger context of a cosmic struggle between good and evil and a battle over the issue of worship. The overarching theme of Revelation is Christ's triumph over the principalities and powers of hell, with a central focus on worshipping the Creator. Revelation 4:11 makes this point clear:

“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.”

Throughout Revelation, worship and creation are indissolubly linked. Revelation 14:7 calls us to worship the Lord of all creation. The essence of this controversy between good and evil and the issues surrounding the mark of the beast revolve around whether God is worthy to be worshiped. The focus is on the God of all creation, in contrast to Lucifer, who desired to usurp Christ's authority as Creator.

Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ, as a co-equal, co-eternal member of the Godhead, was the active agent in creation (see Ephesians 3:9). Revelation's final issue of worship centers on Jesus and His creative authority and power. The concept of Christ as Creator is at the very heart of Sabbath worship. Jesus consistently underlines the significance of the day of which He calls Himself “the Lord.” We see the Sabbath, then, in the context of a refuge in time that God has created through Jesus Christ to constantly remind us of our origins and His undying care. It is an oasis in the desert of this world. Against the backdrop of an evolutionary hypothesis that has taken the world by storm in the last two centuries, the Sabbath leads us to our roots. The Sabbath is an eternal reminder of our identity. It reminds us of who we are as humans. It places worth on every human being. It constantly reinforces

the idea that we are created beings and that our Creator is worthy of our allegiance and worship. This is why the devil hates the Sabbath so much. It is the golden link that unites us with our Creator.

The prophecy regarding the mark of the beast is about religious intolerance and persecution, but it is also a message of encouragement. We learn from this prophecy that, even in the worst of times, God will have a people who are not afraid to stand up and witness for Him.

TROUBLE AHEAD!

The mark of the beast prophecy in Revelation 13 tells us about the very worst, the absolute fever pitch, of Satan's war against God. Ever since Jesus died on the cross, the enemy has known that he has been defeated, but he is determined to take as many as possible down with him. His first strategy in this campaign is deception—to get people to believe a lie. In this he has achieved a huge success. But still there are some holdouts. The mark of the beast prophecy tells about a time in the future when he will resort to force.

He will use human agents, as he always has, and will convince them to publish a decree stating that anyone who refuses to worship the beast or receive his mark will suffer the consequences.

Religious persecution, of course, is not new. It has been around ever since Cain killed Abel for worshiping the way God told them to. Jesus said it would even happen among believers. “[T]he time is coming,” He warned, “that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2; see also Matthew 10:22 and 1 Peter 4:12).

This prophecy has been fulfilled many times. In the fifteenth century, for example, seven valleys located high in the Piedmont Alps of northern Italy were home to a people called the Waldenses, who made the Bible their rule of faith and practice. They copied it and sent out their young men as colporteurs to spread the good news that salvation is a gift of God's love.

Because of this, and because they rejected the doctrines and the dictatorship of the official church, the fires of persecution blazed against them again and again. In 1488, the Waldenses in the Valley of Loyse hid in a large cave to escape the soldiers who had been sent to slaughter them. It seemed like a safe place, but their enemies laid an enormous pile of wood at the mouth of the cave and set it ablaze. Three thousand men, women, and children died that day from smoke and suffocation.

Another wave of persecution came in the seventeenth century when the Duke of Savoy sent an army of eight thousand into their territory and demanded that the local populace quarter his troops in their homes. They did as he requested, but this was a strategy to give the soldiers easy access to their victims. On April 24, 1655, at 4:00 a.m., a signal was given for the massacre to begin. Men and women, children and elderly were targeted. Parents were forced to watch as their children were sexually violated and then murdered before they themselves were put to death. That time the death toll was more than four thousand.

The mark of the beast prophecy is about the final link in this ungodly chain. Like the persecutions of the past, it is designed to force everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and an approved system of worship.

The prophecy says the persecution will start with economic sanctions: “no one may buy or sell” unless they have “the mark.” When this happens, the great majority will capitulate. Anyone who refuses will be placed under a death decree (see Revelation 13:15, 17). Ellen White makes this observation regarding those who yield their conscientious convictions and ultimately receive the mark of the beast:

“The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The mark of the beast will be urged upon us. Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly

customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 5, p. 81).

The devil is preparing even professed Christians, by compromises in their lives, to receive the mark of the beast when the final test comes upon us in the future. God’s love for each of us will not let us be unprepared. This is why He has sent three angels directly from His throne, flying in mid-heaven to warn us regarding what is coming.

A MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The mark of the beast prophecy is intended not to terrify us but to encourage us. When the persecution is at its maximum point, when it appears that the whole world is following the beast in wondering admiration (see Revelation 13:3), suddenly the scene changes, and the prophetic camera turns to focus on God’s people. Revelation 14:12 gives us this picture: “[H]ere are those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.”

What are they doing? They are clinging to Jesus in the face of an economic boycott and international decree. They are living lives of godly obedience. They are God’s honor convoy. They reveal the power of grace in a hostile world. They shine as lights amidst the moral darkness. They stand firm when all around them everything is shaking.

“And all the world marveled and followed the beast” (Revelation 13:3). While the world is following the beast in wondering admiration, God’s faithful people “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4). In Christ and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they triumph over the powers of hell arrayed against them. Revelation 15:3 pictures God’s people singing,

“Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty.”

WHO IS THE BEAST? WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

The book of Revelation reveals the plans of God and unmask the plans of Satan. It tells us in advance what the devil's strategy is.

Let's zero in on this final conflict and let Bible prophecy and history identify the beast and his mark. As we understand who the beast of Bible prophecy is and what the mark of the beast is, we will better understand the opposite sign: the seal of God. Revelation gives us some clear identifying clues to recognize the beast.

Notice Revelation 13, which begins as follows:

"Then I [John] stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority" (Revelation 13:1-2).

The beast power of Revelation 13 receives his power from the dragon. Who is the dragon? Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon plainly:

"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

The dragon is clearly identified in these verses. In simple language stripped of all symbolism, God's Word tells us that the dragon is the devil, or Satan. The archenemy of God and man is behind the human instrumentality called the beast power.

But the devil works through *human* agents. Just as God works through His church, the devil works through fallen religious institutions that have rejected God's truth and turned their back on His law. Although

the dragon is Satan, Revelation 12:3–5 says this dragon—the devil—attempted to destroy, as soon as it was born, the male child who was later caught up to God and to His throne. This, of course, refers to Christ. Satan used pagan Rome in this attempt, for Matthew 2:1–20 tells us that King Herod, Rome’s agent, tried to destroy the Babe.

Later, Satan used pagan Rome to crucify Christ. A Roman governor, Pilate, condemned Christ to die. A Roman executioner nailed Him to the cruel cross. A Roman soldier pierced His heart with a spear. A Roman seal was affixed to His tomb, and a Roman squad of soldiers guarded the tomb.

Whoever this beast power is, Revelation 13:2 says, “The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.” This prophecy was precisely fulfilled when the Roman emperor Constantine decided to move the capital from Rome to what came to be called Constantinople, in modern-day Turkey (today called Istanbul), leaving a power vacuum at the former throne or seat of the Caesars, the Imperial city of Rome. Careful Bible students through the centuries have identified Rome as the citadel of the beast power.

It was the dragon, or the devil, working through pagan Rome, who tried to destroy Christ. And it was that same power, pagan Rome, that gave the beast its seat, or capital city. Nations don’t do that very often!

To whom did pagan Rome give its seat of government? How did this transition take place?

Historian A. C. Flick explains that, “Out of the ruins of political Rome, arose the great moral empire in the giant form of the Roman church” (*The Rise of the Medieval Church*, 1900, p. 150).

English philosopher and historian Thomas Hobbes wrote that “the papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof (*Leviathan*, W. Molesworth, ed., *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, London, 1839, p. 697–8).

The papal system of religion is the one mentioned in Revelation 13. We must remember here that we are talking about a system, not

about individual members of that system. The beast is not a person; it is a religious organization that has compromised the truth of God's Word for human tradition.

John the Revelator continues his description:

“And I saw one of his [the beast's] heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months” (Revelation 13:3–5).

According to a careful analysis of Revelation's identifying features, the beast of Revelation 13 and 14 is an apostate religious power that would rise out of Rome and grow to become a worldwide system of worship. The central issue in this age-long conflict is worship.

Millennia ago, a created being, an angel of dazzling brightness, challenged the government of God in heaven. God gave each of His creatures free will. Our God is a God of freedom. The beast uses force and coercion, and at times bribes and rewards. Love is the great motivating force of the kingdom of God. This age-long drama, this cosmic conflict, will one day come to its conclusion, and the universe will be secure forever when every person on planet earth has had the opportunity to respond to God's love and give their total allegiance to Him.

The cross of Calvary revealed the horrible nature of sin and the magnificence of God's love. Rather than worshiping the beast, God's people find their greatest joy and highest delight in worshiping Him. They are willing to do whatever He asks, because they know that He would never do them harm. Obedience springs from their heart of love. They are committed to Him, because they know how committed He is to them.

THREE COSMIC MESSAGES

There is only one thing that will keep any of us from receiving the mark of the beast at the end time, and that is a love for Jesus that is so deep that nothing can break our hold upon Him. Will you commit your life to this Christ today? Will you ask Him to give you a love for Him that is so deep that all the demons of hell cannot cause you to yield your conscientious convictions? Will you open your heart to His grace and power to enable you to stand in earth's last days?

A DAY IS COMING WHEN EVERYONE WILL HAVE TO CHOOSE.

This is the second chapter describing how, before Jesus returns, the world will be divided between those loyal to their Creator and those loyal to Satan.

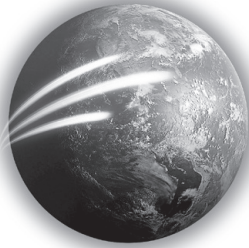
We continue now to explore how Revelation tells about this time—when the followers of Jesus will receive His seal, and everyone else will receive the mark of the beast.

That hasn't happened yet, but it will. A time is coming when—as difficult as it may be to believe—our land of freedom will turn into a land of force and oppression for those who stand with God in the great conflict between good and evil, between Jesus and Satan, between love and selfishness.

And when that time comes, those loyal to the King of the Universe will be intimidated, threatened, and persecuted.

But God will be their Protector. And His followers will show the entire universe that love wins. God IS love! He loves everyone. He has died for all of us.

And that includes you!



CHAPTER 12

The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast

PART 2

As we journey through Revelation's three cosmic messages, this twelfth chapter continues our investigation of the mark of the beast and the seal of God. Let's briefly summarize what we discovered in the last chapter. In it, we discovered that the final conflict in the age-long controversy between good and evil is over worship. A rebel angel has challenged the government of God. This being of dazzling brightness, created with free will, has declared that God is unjust. He claims that God's commands are arbitrary and cannot be obeyed. In every generation, the evil one has led men and women to disobey God.

In the last days, God will demonstrate that His gracious commands are for our best good. Saved by grace and redeemed by love, Christ's faithful followers willingly serve Him because they know that His ways are the ways of lasting joy. Finally, Satan will attempt to pull off his

greatest delusion of all time in a religious counterfeit called the beast power. We noted previously that this power would arise in Rome and become a worldwide system of worship. Let's continue with further clues to the identity of this power and discover essential truths about the coming conflict in the last days of earth's history.

Throughout the book of Revelation, the apostate church is described as a blasphemous power. We find in Revelation 13:1 the expression, "on his heads a blasphemous name." Verse 6 states:

"Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven."

And again, in Revelation 17, verse 3:

"So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns."

Since blasphemy is mentioned numerous times as one of the identifying features of the beast power, it must be significant. Let's discover how this term is used in other places in the New Testament. On more than one occasion, Jesus was called a blasphemer. In John 10:33, the Jewish leaders charge Him with blasphemy.

"The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God'" (John 10:33).

Notice carefully that the religious leaders of Jesus' day claimed He was a blasphemer because He claimed to be God. Was Jesus a blasphemer? Certainly not! Why not? Simply because His claims were true. This passage helps us to understand the biblical meaning of blasphemy.

When a mortal human being claims the privileges and prerogatives of God as an equal, that is blasphemy. But there is another incident in Jesus' life that casts light on what blasphemy is. Shortly after Jesus forgave the sins of a desperate paralytic, "the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" (Luke 5:21).

These are two occasions when the Lord Jesus was unjustly accused of blasphemy. They give us two examples from the Bible showing what blasphemy is: (1) If any man pretends to be or claims to be God, and (2) if any man claims the power to forgive sins. In Jesus' case the accusations were unjust because He truly was and is God and holds all the powers and prerogatives of God—including the right to forgive us our sins.

Now that we understand specifically what the Word of God calls blasphemy, let's discover how blasphemy was revealed in the apostate church of the Middle Ages. The Roman Catholic Church has two distinctive doctrines identified in the Bible as blasphemy. One is its claim to have the power to forgive sins. The other is attributing to the pope the office of God on earth. We'll examine each of these in turn.

The Roman church claims that the power of forgiveness or absolution is vested in her priests by Christ Himself. Here is a very pointed statement from a prominent Catholic author:

"Seek where you will, throughout heaven and earth, and you will find but one created being who can forgive the sinner, who can free him from the chains of hell: and that extraordinary being is the priest, the Catholic priest. 'Who can forgive sins except God?' was the question which the Pharisees sneeringly asked. 'Who can forgive sins?' is the question which the Pharisees of the present day also ask, and I answer: There is a man on earth that can forgive sins, and that man is the Catholic priest" (Michael Müller, *God the Teacher of Mankind*, 1882, p. 332).

In 1 Timothy 2:5, the Bible teaches that there is but one Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. The Roman church teaches that the priest is the mediator between God and sinful humanity. But since the priest himself is a sinful human being, he cannot be our mediator, because he also needs a mediator.

The official teaching of the Roman church is that God dispenses the grace of forgiveness through the priest. Proof of the church's teaching of this doctrine is seen in a rather recent news item under the headline: "No Forgiveness 'Directly from God, 'Pope Says" (*Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 12, 1984, p. 11). This is a shocking statement in light of the clear Bible truth that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all righteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was full and complete. The atonement He provided on the cross, however, is applied to individual lives through His intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. We need a sacrifice—Jesus. We need a priest—Jesus. Earthly priests can never substitute for the divine Priest. The earthly sacrifice of the mass can never substitute for the atonement provided by Christ.

By faith we see the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministers. Our eyes aren't focused on an earthly sanctuary with its incense, its candles, its priests, and its sacrifice of the mass, because we're focused on heaven's sanctuary. It is there in heaven, before the throne of God, that Jesus intercedes for us before the entire universe. All of this is the vital background to understanding Revelation 13.

Now, turning to our second biblical example concerning the claim of any man to be God or to stand in the place of God, here are just a few statements from authoritative Catholic sources:

"The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were God, the vicar of God.... Hence the Pope is crowned with a triple crown, as king of heaven and of earth and of the lower regions.... The Pope is as it were God on earth, sole

sovereign of the faithful of Christ, chief king of kings...to whom has been entrusted by the omnipotent God direction not only of the earthly but also of the heavenly kingdom” (Lucii Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca Canonica Juridica Moralis Theologica*, vol. 4, p. 48).

Pope Leo XIII urged “complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself” (Pope Leo XIII, *Chief Duties*, p. 193). The same proud pontiff also boasted:

“We [the popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty” (Pope Leo XIII, *Great Encyclical Letters*, 1903, p. 304).

Much more evidence could be given, but these two are enough to establish the claims of the Roman church that the pope stands in the place of God Himself. The Apostle Paul warns us in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [Christ’s second coming] will not come unless the falling away [from the truth] comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

Although the Bible was written by multiple authors, it is a unified whole. It employs a variety of symbols, all pointing to the same conclusion: the Roman church is identified as the beast power of Revelation 13 and 14.

The Bible teaches that, if any mere human being claims to be God, that person has committed an act of blasphemy. We also find that an earthly religious leader who claims the ability to forgive our sins has committed blasphemy. Such a leader usurps the authority that belongs to God alone.

We have discovered so far in our study that the beast power of Revelation 13 and 14 is a worldwide system of worship that receives the seat of its government and its throne from pagan Rome. Its leader claims the authority of God, and its priests claim the divine right to forgive sins.

There is another crucial identifying sign of the mark of the beast power in Revelation 13:5:

“And he [the beast power] was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.”

The beast would continue for a period of specific duration. Keep in mind an important scriptural principle as we study this clue. In symbolic time prophecies, a prophetic day equals a literal year.

In Numbers 14:34 we read: “for each day you shall bear your guilt one year”—applying the Bible principle of counting a day for a year. Again, God says, “I have laid on you a day for each year” (Ezekiel 4:6).

This principle has repeatedly proven itself in actual practice. Calculating the actual time period mentioned in Revelation 13:5 of 42 months, with 30 days in a month, we come up with 1260 prophetic days, or literal years. And ancient calendars—of the Egyptians, Hindus, Assyrians, and Hebrews—all had 360 days per year.

The Roman church was gaining in power in the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ. The Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the empire. When he moved his capital in A.D. 330 to what became known as Constantinople to unite the eastern and western parts of his empire, it left a leadership vacuum in Rome. The pope then filled this void and became not only a powerful religious leader but also a political force to be reckoned with in Europe. In A.D. 538, Justinian, the pagan Roman emperor, officially granted the Roman bishop the role of defender of the empire, definer

of heretics, defender of the faith. The papacy exercised great influence from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. Napoleon's General Berthier took the pope captive in 1798—*exactly* 1260 years later.

This act of General Berthier taking the pope captive fulfilled Revelation's prophecy: "He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity" (Revelation 13:10). Berthier and his army captured Pope Pius VI and unceremoniously removed him from the papal throne. The aged pontiff was hurried from prison to prison in France and at length confined in a fortress at the top of the Alps. He was later removed to Valence, France, where in 1799 he died—alone and in exile. The blow to the papacy was extremely serious but not fatal. According to the prediction in Revelation 13:12, the deadly wound would be healed. The stature of the papacy would increase, and its influence would once again be felt worldwide.

Today, the Roman papacy is gaining in authority, power, and influence around the world. World leaders welcome the pope as he travels around the world as an ambassador of the church of Rome.

For example, the pope was warmly welcomed at the United Nations in 2015 when he toured the United States. He was invited to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress in a move that many political observers considered unprecedented. Kings, political leaders, and presidents visit him regularly at the Vatican and treat him as royalty when he visits their countries. By all external appearances, the papacy seems to be softening its image to accommodate the spirit of our age. At a time when the world is looking for moral leadership, the pope's star is rising rapidly.

And those yearning for such leadership are right. Moral leadership *is* in short supply. The latest research on moral leadership finds that employees, managers, and executives believe that the need for moral leadership is more urgent than ever. This is also true for the average person. Surveys reveal a deep lack of trust in institutions and governments. So, millions of people wonder, "Where is someone who is morally fit to lead the world? Who has the ethical respect to emerge

as the world's leader?" And if you want to bring the world together today—in a world fragmented by ethnic tensions and racism, with governments and even allies that don't trust one another—where is a moral voice capable of bringing people together?

In a world of instability and uncertainty, a world of rising hunger and increasing poverty, a world of environmental disaster and a growing threat from nuclear weaponry, the scene is being set to identify the Roman pontiff as the putative moral leader for the world. It would be easy—very easy if there were an economic collapse, if unprecedented natural disasters struck, if there were a limited nuclear strike—for the pontiff to be the one the world invites to bring everyone together.

Have you ever wondered what vehicle the devil might suggest to unify society? History often repeats itself. Let's return momentarily to the days of Constantine. The Roman Empire was falling apart. The Germanic invasions from the north were ravaging Western Europe. The barbarian tribes were overthrowing cities and towns throughout the Roman Empire. In an attempt to save his empire, Constantine turned to religion. The authority of the church, combined with the power of the state, became the very instrument Constantine was searching for.

Christians had a special reverence for Sunday, since Christ rose from the dead on that day. The pagans were often sun worshipers. The continual strengthening of the sanctity of Sunday in the fourth century was a calculated political and religious move to save the empire at a time of crisis. Constantine wanted his empire united, and the Roman church wanted it converted. This is precisely why Constantine passed the first Sunday law, and the church reinforced his decree in church councils by making Sunday the sacred day of worship. The renowned historian Arthur Weigall states it clearly:

"The church made a sacred day of Sunday.... largely because it was the weekly festival of the sun; for it was a definite Christian policy to take over the pagan festivals endeared to the people by

tradition and give them Christian significance” (*The Paganism in Our Christianity*, 1928, p. 145).

A common day of worship has the potential to unite a divided world. The issue of the mark of the beast revolves around worship. It focuses on the issue of authority. Since the change of the Bible Sabbath was instituted by a church-state union in the early centuries, worship on the first day of the week is the sign of papal authority. To change the law of God, someone or some group must have authority that is (falsely) assumed to be higher than God’s authority.

This is more than a matter of what day one worships on. It is a matter at the heart of the battle for the throne of the universe. It is part of the last-day deception of Satan. Its message is to accept the authority of Rome, and when it is enforced by church/state decrees—as in the early centuries and throughout the Middle Ages—it becomes a sign of the acceptance of the authority of the church of Rome. The church of Rome claims that Sunday is the mark of its ecclesiastical authority. Louis Gaston Segur, in his treatise on the authority of the Catholic Church, writes:

“Thus the observance of Sunday by the Protestants is a homage they pay, in spite of themselves, to the authority of the [Catholic] Church” (*Plain Talk About the Protestantism of To-Day*, p. 213).

This well- respected Catholic author identifies the issue regarding the change of the Sabbath as one of authority. Listen to this amazing statement that removes all doubt as to what the issues really are:

“Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act.... And the *act* is a *mark* of her ecclesiastical *authority* in religious matters” (Cardinal Gibbons, Letter, Nov. 11, 1895, emphasis supplied).

The Roman church claims that the mark of its ecclesiastical authority is its right to change the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. Though no one has the mark of the beast today, Revelation predicts that there will come a time of international crisis, and at that point the pope will emerge as the moral leader of the world. Nations will turn to him to unite a fragmented world. The vehicle that will be used to accomplish this goal of world unification will be Sunday worship, promoted as a world day of unity for the good of mankind.

The stage is being set for this universal decree even now. In 2012, the Catholic News Service reported Pope Benedict XVI as urgently stating that the “demands of work can’t bully people out of needed time off” (“Sundays must be a day of rest dedicated to God, family, pope says,” June 6, 2012). During his speech to more than 15,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square in Rome, he declared that “Sunday must be a *day of rest* for everyone, so people can be free to be with their families and with *God*” (*Ibid.*, emphasis supplied). He further stated, “By defending Sunday, one defends human freedom,” and that “Sunday is the day of the Lord and of man, a day which everyone must be able to be free—free for the family and free for God (*Ibid.*).

Make no mistake about it. The day is coming—and possibly sooner than we think—that laws will be passed restricting our religious liberty. Those who conscientiously follow the Word of God and keep the true Sabbath of the Lord will be labeled as opposing unity and the good of society. Ellen White clarifies these issues in the book *The Great Controversy*:

“Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt

of authority. They will be accused of disaffection toward the government” (p. 592).

“As the movement for Sunday enforcement becomes bolder and more decided, the law will be invoked against commandment-keepers. They will be threatened with fines and imprisonment, and some will be offered positions of influence, and other rewards and advantages, as inducements to renounce their faith” (p. 607).

SEALED FOR ETERNITY

In this time of crisis, God’s faithful people will, by His grace and through His power, stand firm in their convictions to follow Him. They heed Christ’s command in John 14:15: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” They have not yielded to the pressure and coercion of the beast power. They are sealed with the seal of the Holy Spirit and cannot be moved.

Seals were used in ancient times to notarize or attest to the authenticity of official documents. Everybody who was anybody had a seal. People designed their seals to be unique—a distinctive, individualized mark. After drawing up a contract or an agreement, they would drop a bit of sealing wax on the parchment and, before it cooled, they would press their seal onto it as evidence that the document was genuine. To be authentic, a seal needed at least three elements: the *name*, the *title* and the *territory* of the individual whose seal it was. Since the final conflict is over worship, and God’s authority as revealed in His law, we would expect God’s seal to be embedded in His law. Isaiah the prophet says:

“Bind up the testimony,
Seal the law among my disciples” (Isaiah 8:16).

The Sabbath commandment in the heart of God's law contains God's seal. Notice carefully the elements of the seal in that commandment in Exodus 20:8–9, and 11:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God.... For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Here we have the three elements of an authentic seal:

- ▶ The **Name** of the originator of the seal—“The LORD your God.”
- ▶ The **Title** of the sealer—“LORD [who] made,” or the Creator
- ▶ His **Territory**—“the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”

Revelation 7:1–2 depicts an angel descending from the east, having the seal of the living God. This angel cries with a loud voice, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads” (verse 3).

It is fascinating to observe that the seal of God is placed only upon the forehead—a symbol of the mind. Jesus respects our freedom to choose and invites us to let Him shape our minds with the things of eternity so we cannot be moved from the anchor of our faith in the Word of God. The mark of the beast is received in the forehead or in the hand, indicating that people are either intellectually convinced and by choice accept Satan's lies—or are forced against their will.

Satan's last deception, fueled by spiritualism at a time of international crisis, undermines the law of God. By a decree enforcing Sunday observance, the devil challenges the authority of Christ.

The Sabbath was a sign given at creation for all humankind. The year and the month were based on astronomical cycles, but the weekly Sabbath had no other significance than as a sign of God's relationship with His people.

Through Sabbath observance, we concede to God His position as Creator and accept ours as creatures. Our rest on the seventh day declares that we find assurance, and therefore peace, in God's love; it also strengthens this assurance. It affirms, and at the same time confirms, the relationship between the Creator and His people. Thus, in the deepest possible sense, Sabbath observance is the seal by which we ratify our acceptance of the terms of the covenant.

Most of the Ten Commandments are accepted even by secular people as common-sense principles that are good for society in general. But the Sabbath places us in a special position of worship and loyalty to the Creator. That is why it is singled out as the keystone commandment—the “sign” or seal of the covenant. By observing the Sabbath, God's last-day people are placing their seal, giving their assent and agreement to the covenant. It is their pledge of loyalty and obedience to the whole law—an acknowledgment of their position as subjects of the divine King.

GUARANTEED BY GOD

For an agreement to be valid, each of the parties has to sign it. The prophecy of Revelation 13 tells us that, in the last days, during the time of universal crisis, God's people step forward and place their stamp—their seal—on the covenant by keeping the Sabbath. When they do this, it will be God's turn. Then He will step forward and place His stamp—His seal of approval—on them. This is His guarantee, His ratification given in the sight of the universe, showing that these are, indeed, His true followers.

God wants the universe to behold in these people the triumph of His grace. He wants everyone to know that, even in the time of universal

apostasy and repudiation of the law, yes, even in the face of a death decree, He will have a people whose loyalty to him is unswerving. The sealing is God's shout of triumph—His victory banner that He will wave before the universe.

The mark of the beast at its very heart exalts the human above the divine. It places man's word above God's Word. It results in replacing the commandments of God with human decrees. It leads to giving glory to man rather than giving glory to God.

God's last-day message comes to a climax in Revelation 14:12, when the Apostle John in prophetic vision describes a group of grace-filled, end-time believers who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Saved by grace, their hearts are filled with the faith of Jesus. His faith motivates and changes them. It inspires and empowers them. It frees them from the guilt of the past, delivers them from the bondage of sin in the present, and fills their hearts with hope for the future. Saved by grace, they can do nothing else but through His power give Him their allegiance and serve and obey Him forever.

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

The great musician, George Frederick Handel, lost his health. His right side was paralyzed, his money was gone, and his creditors seized some of his prized possessions and threatened to imprison him. He was experiencing an unprecedented time of trouble in his life. Handel was so disheartened by his tragic experiences that he almost despaired for a brief time. Then He found new courage in three passages in Revelation:

"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"
(Revelation 11:15).

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’” (Revelation 19:6).

“KING OF KINGS AND
LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16).

Handel was so inspired by these passages that he composed the entire, now renowned, musical score for the *Messiah* in about twenty-one days in the summer of 1741. When he got to the “Hallelujah Chorus,” his assistant found him in tears, saying, “I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself seated on His throne, with His company of Angels” (The Tabernacle Choir Blog, “The History of ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus from Handel’s *Messiah*,” Feb. 22, 2016).

There is no greater joy...no greater hope...no greater assurance than to have the assurance that Jesus—King of kings and Lord of lords—has triumphed over the powers of hell and is victorious.

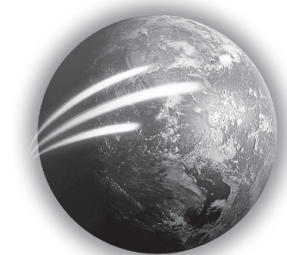
Although evil seems so strong, wickedness so great, and sin so powerful, the faithful and true Witness, the first-born from the dead, the resurrected Christ, the Ruler over all the kings of the earth, the true King of kings, is really, truly coming again. And we will live with Him forever and ever and ever and ever. Hallelujah!

**EACH OF US NEEDS TO ASK ONE ALL-IMPORTANT QUESTION:
“IS JESUS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN MY LIFE?”**

Is He for sure? Has your heart been broken as you have seen what He did for you at the cross? Has His love for you brought you to a place where you will do anything, anything at all, for Him?

And do you know that Jesus needs you? He needs you to become so filled with love for Him that your whole purpose in life is to share His love with as many others as possible. Do you have a passion to make Jesus look good? His enemy spends his entire time—24/7—doing all he can to make Jesus look bad. He tells ‘round-the-clock lies about Him. So what God needs, as this world is almost at an end, is for you and as many others as possible to tell the truth about His love—His love that will do anything at all for you. His love that has already done everything for you—that drove Him all the way to the cross.

Revelation’s angels say that, just before this world ends, God will have a people who are ablaze with His glory. Will that group include you?



CHAPTER 13

Ablaze with God's Glory

One of the more significant events of WWI was the sinking of the Cunard ocean liner RMS *Lusitania*, which occurred on Friday, May 7, 1915, as Germany waged submarine warfare against the United Kingdom. Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Royal Navy blockaded Germany. The ship was identified and torpedoed by a German U-boat. It sank in eighteen minutes. The vessel went down eleven miles off of Kinsale, Ireland, killing 1,198 people and leaving 761 survivors. The sinking turned public opinion in many countries against Germany, contributed to the American entry into World War I, and became an iconic symbol in military recruiting campaigns as to why the war was being fought.

A story associated with this disaster has relevance for Bible-believing Christians, and especially for Seventh-day Adventists living in the last days of human history. Lord Joseph Duveen was the head of a prestigious art firm in the United States. In 1915, he planned to send one of his experts to England to examine some ancient pottery.

He booked passage for his associate on the *Lusitania*. The German Embassy issued a warning that the ocean liner might be torpedoed. Lord Duveen wanted to call off the trip. "I can't take the risk of your being killed," he said to his young pottery expert.

"Don't worry," the young man replied, "I am a strong swimmer, and when I read what was happening in the Atlantic, I began hardening myself by spending time every day in a tub of ice. At first, I could stand it for only a few minutes, but this morning I stayed in that tub for nearly two hours."

Naturally, Lord Duveen laughed. It sounded preposterous. But the young man sailed, and the *Lusitania* was torpedoed. The amazing thing is that the young man was rescued after five hours in the chilly waters, still in excellent condition.

Just as this young man took the warnings seriously and prepared himself in advance for the tough times that were coming, so Jesus gives a message in advance to prepare us for His soon return. The message of the three angels flying in mid-air with the everlasting gospel to preach to every man, woman, and child on this planet is especially designed by Christ to prepare each of us for His second coming.

These end-time messages are heaven's last appeal to a dying planet. We ignore them at our own peril. They come to us from God's heart of divine love. To casually set them aside or treat them with careless indifference is to risk eternal loss.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4–6, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."

Christ has given us these special last-day messages so that, knowing what is coming, we can prepare for it. They are of little use if we

carelessly dismiss them. They are of little use if we ignore them. They are of little use if they do not radically change our lives.

Commenting on the nearness of Christ's return and of the importance of being prepared for the final events of this earth's history, Ellen White counsels us:

"The end is very near. 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*, vol. 8, p. 28).

DIVINE INSIGHT

Bible-believing Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventists, have divine insight into what is coming upon this world. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, combined with the modern gift of prophecy, give us inside information. The prophetic Word of God outlines salvation history in advance. It reveals the climactic events at the close of this earth's history. The three angels' messages in Revelation 14 are a solemn appeal, in the light of the judgment hour, to make a total commitment to Christ *now*. There is a prophetic urgency about these eternal messages of truth. All of heaven appeals to us to get ready for the coming of our Lord and to share with others the message of His second coming.

Commenting on the importance of these messages, Ellen White states:

"In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other

work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention” (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19).

Revelation 14 presents heaven’s final message to this planet in rebellion—in the symbolism of three angels flying mid-heaven. In Revelation 14:6–7, the first angel proclaims the everlasting gospel of God’s grace in the light of heaven’s final judgment, calling all people to obey God and worship the Creator.

The second angel announces in Revelation 14:8:

“Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

As we have discovered previously, Babylon is a symbol of religious confusion, false doctrine, and human traditions.

Babylon represents a man-made system of religion that focuses more on human teachings than on the divinely-revealed truth of God’s Word. It is a system that uses images or idols to represent its saints or revered ones. Rather than worshiping God directly, it places special significance on worshiping God through these images of the saints. It misunderstands the state of human beings in death and, like ancient Babylon, pays homage to the idea of the immortal soul, rather than on the glorious truth of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body when Christ comes. It revives ancient sun worship rather than accepting the Bible Sabbath. Without realizing the significance of worshiping the Creator, it unknowingly accepts the counterfeit sabbath, Sunday, that entered the church in the early centuries when paganism and Christianity shook hands. Failing to grasp the importance of the body as the Temple of God, it treats the body as a fun house rather than as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

God's final appeal to His people is to flee the errors of Babylon and walk in the glorious light of His eternal truth found in His Word. Jesus' statement echoes through the centuries: "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). He also says, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The message of the second angel does not leave us room for compromise. It appeals to us to decide for Christ, not falsehood; truth, not error; Scripture, not tradition; the teachings of God's Word, not the traditions of men; and the freedom of the Lamb, not the coercion of the beast.

The third angel's message, which follows the first two angels, presents a warning against the mark of the beast. Throughout the prophecies of the Bible, a beast represents a political or religious power. The beast of Revelation 13 and 14 arises out of Rome as a worldwide system of worship. Eventually, this Roman power, under the authority of the pope, extends its influence over the whole world. The papacy will lead out in a movement to unite church and state. The goal will be to achieve world unity at a time of economic upheaval, natural catastrophes, social turmoil, international political crises, and global conflict.

History repeats itself, and just as it was in the days of the ancient Roman Empire under Constantine, Sunday worship becomes the vehicle to unite church and state to achieve unity. Our shattered world provides a backdrop for Protestants and Catholics to unite in the common cause of bringing about world peace. The United States will eventually take the lead in this global confederation to save our planet. Ellen White's words are prophetic:

"Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of Spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants

of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of Spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 588).

One of the agencies that the devil uses to accomplish his ultimate goal of uniting the globe under his authority is false miracles. The Bible’s last book, Revelation, makes this abundantly clear. Revelation 13:13–14 powerfully states, “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast.”

Revelation 16:14 adds, “For they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”

Ellen White further casts light on these Bible passages:

“And as the spirits will profess faith in the Bible, and manifest respect for the institutions of the church, their work will be accepted as a manifestation of divine power” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 588).

At a time of global upheaval, natural disasters, and economic collapse, the devil will work with all power and lying wonders to deceive, if possible, the chosen people of God. The three angels’ messages are heaven’s safeguard against the deceptions of the enemy. These messages conclude with an urgent appeal for Christ’s faithful followers to keep the commandments of God through the living faith of Jesus dwelling in their hearts.

THE REFORMATION COMPLETED

God has raised up a last-day people to stand on the shoulders of the great reformers of the past, with the Bible as their only creed, Christ alone as their only 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. John pictures this group of Bible-believing Christians when he says, “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Truths long obscured by the darkness of error and tradition, including the true Bible Sabbath, will be proclaimed to the world just before the return of our Lord. God’s people are here identified as a body of Christ-centered believers, filled with the faith of Jesus, who lovingly keep His commandments, including the Bible Sabbath.

The Reformation continues today. It did not stop with the deaths of the reformers. God had more truth to be revealed. Just as he called men and women from the comfortable convenience of popular religion in the Middle Ages, He is calling all people everywhere today to make eternal decisions to follow His truth.

THE BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT

The three angels’ messages give birth to this last-day movement to complete the Reformation and participate with Christ in finishing His work on earth. The great prophecies of the Bible’s last book reveal a divine movement of destiny arising out of disappointment to proclaim God’s final message to the world. Revelation 14 describes a worldwide church, spanning the globe with the good news of the eternal gospel. It reveals a last-day message calling all men and women to:

“Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:7).

LIGHTED WITH GOD'S GLORY

The three angels of Revelation 14 are joined by a fourth angel in Revelation 18. This angel gives power to the proclamation of the three angels, so the earth is lighted with the glory of God. Revelation 18 focuses on the major events leading up to the climax of human history and the final, ultimate triumph of the gospel. Verses 1 to 6 describe what is coming in rather specific detail.

“After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory” (Revelation 18:1).

The angel comes down from the glorious presence of God in the throne room of the sanctuary, commissioned to proclaim God's last message of mercy and to warn the inhabitants of the earth of what is coming upon planet earth.

The text says that the angel comes with “great authority.” The New Testament Greek word for “authority” is *exousia*. Jesus uses this word in the Gospel of Matthew in connection with the sending out of His disciples. In Matthew 10:1, Jesus gives His disciples “authority” over the principalities and powers of hell. 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 earth to go and “make disciples of all nations.”

Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and going forth with the authority of the living Christ—who in His life and death triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell—the New Testament church lighted the earth with the glory of God. In a few short years, the disciples proclaimed the gospel in the then-known world (see Colossians 1:23). In the end time, the Holy Spirit will be poured out in unprecedented power, and the gospel will rapidly be spread to the ends of the earth. Thousands will be converted in a day, and God's grace and truth will impact the entire planet.

If this is true—and it is—is it not wise for us to open our hearts to receive this mighty outpouring of the Spirit to finish the work of God on earth?

Is it not wise to ask Jesus to take anything out of our lives that would hinder this mighty outpouring of the Spirit?

Is it not wise to seek God for the heart cleansing necessary to receive the latter rain of the Spirit in all His fullness?

Throughout Revelation, three important words are linked together: God's *glory*, God's *honor*, and God's *power*.

Revelation 4:11 says:

“You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power.”

Consider Revelation 5:12:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

Although there is a whole cluster of things here, notice again the association between *glory*, *honor*, and *power*.

We discover this again in Revelation 19:1: “Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!” And notice how Revelation closes: “And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it” (Revelation 21:26).

The great controversy between good and evil in the universe is about God's honor—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 is arbitrary, restricting our freedom and limiting our joy.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection exploded that myth. The One who created us plunged into this snake pit of a world to redeem us. On the cross He answered Satan's charges and demonstrated that God is both loving and just.

Charmed by His love, concerned about 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.

Remember when Moses asked God to show him His glory? God responded to Moses, “I will make all my goodness pass before you” (Exodus 33:19). God's goodness is His character.

The earth will be filled with the glory of God when we are so completely overwhelmed with His love—when we so totally comprehend its depth and so fully grasp how amazing that grace is—that our characters are changed by redeeming love.

As the Apostle John declares in 1 John 3:1–2:

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Revealing His love in our personal lives reveals His glory, His character, to the world. Ellen White puts it this way:

“The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 19).

Babylon and all false religion speaks of the glory of man. Genuine Christianity speaks of the glory of Christ.

Babylon and all false religion speaks of my reputation, my honor. Genuine Christianity speaks of Christ's reputation and Christ's honor.

Babylon and all false religion speak of human works—what I have done. Genuine Christianity speaks of what Christ has done.

Babylon and all false religion speaks of what I am doing for Christ. Genuine Christianity speaks of what Christ has done for me.

Babylon and all false religion is based on a distortion of biblical truth founded in human opinion. Genuine Christianity is based on the truth as it is in Jesus, anchored in God's Word.

It is this gratitude for all that Christ has done for us that motivates our behavior and leads us to commit the entirety of our lives to Him.

The last message to be proclaimed to a world engulfed in spiritual darkness, carried by three angels in the midst of heaven, is, "Fear God and give glory to Him" (Revelation 14:7). There is no glory in our works...no glory in our righteousness...no glory in our goodness. Ellen White states it plainly:

"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*, p. 456).

This is the opposite of the false teachings of Babylon, which are centered in human works and teachings, so the text proclaims in Revelation 18:2–3:

"And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons....

For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.”

Demonic forces control spiritual Babylon. All nations have drunk the wine of her fornication. Wine represents false doctrine. People become confused in their thinking and mistake error for truth and conclude truth is error.

Fornication is an illicit union. Notice carefully who unites in this end-time confederacy. It is Babylon.

A TOWER OF HUMAN WORKS

The origin of Babylon is the Tower of Babel, so let’s turn back to Genesis 11 and gain some amazing insights about the symbolism of Babylon. Notice Genesis 11, verse 4:

“And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves.’”

The emphasis on the pronoun *ourselves* suggests that they insist that they are on their own. This is their tower, built by their genius, with no need of God. The builders of Babel intended to create a secular civilization independent from God.

The Hebrew word for “tower” is *migdal*. It is related to the word *gadal* which means “great.” It suggests the idea of ambition and glory. In their pride, these builders had a spiritual ambition to replace God with their own supposed human genius. They pushed themselves upward, because they refused to believe in the God who comes down.

This very word *gadal*, which is associated with the Tower of Babel and spiritual Babylon, is also used to describe the little horn power of Daniel 7. The little horn also attempts to exalt itself to the heavens,

placing its authority above the authority of God—casting down the truth of God and changing His law.

Babylon unites with the “kings of the earth” and the “merchants of the earth.” Revelation 18 pictures a union of apostate or false religions, political powers or the “nations of the earth,” and financial institutions or economic powers. This threefold union unites in a confederacy of evil to eventually persecute the people of God.

Revelation 18 is God’s final appeal to all humanity.

“And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues’” (Revelation 18:4).

Where are most of God’s people? In Babylon. And what is God’s final call? “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins.”

What is sin? According to 1 John 3:4, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” God is calling His people to come out of every law-breaking church. Why is God making this final call now? Revelation 18:5 tells us: “For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

There comes a point when God says, “Enough.”

In the days of Noah, God said, “Enough.”

In the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, God said, “Enough.”

In the days of Babylon, God said, “Enough.”

In the last days of earth’s history, God will say, “Enough.”

Her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. The prophet of God puts it this way:

“With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to

repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf” (Ellen White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 364).

Where are we in the stream of time? Where are we in the panorama of last-day events? Where are we in the march of history? We are poised on the verge of a religious, political, and economic union. The accumulated figures of sin are rapidly reaching their limit in God’s record book.

God is preparing a people to proclaim the marvels of His grace, the greatness of His love, the goodness of His character, the righteousness of His law, and the beauty of His truth. Bathed in His righteousness, they are justified by His grace and sanctified through His power. They love His truth, live His truth, and proclaim His truth. They count all things but loss for Christ. He is their all in all. They care not for earthly fame or human accolades. Position, prestige, and earthly praise mean little to them.

With the Apostle Paul, they say, “For to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). Christ is their all in all. Empowered by His Spirit, they proclaim His love and share His grace. The earth is lighted with the glory—the character—of God. The Holy Spirit is poured out in latter rain power. Hearts are touched. Lives are changed. The world is reached, and Jesus comes again.

CHRIST’S RETURN MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Many years ago, Lord Cecil, a first cousin of the late Queen Victoria, was converted to Christ. His life was dramatically changed. He now had a burning passion to share the Christ who had done so much for him. His one desire was to preach the gospel. He traveled to North

America and spent much of his time in Canada. He shared the love of Christ everywhere he went—in large cities, in remote villages, among farmers, in the lumber camps, and in quiet seaside towns.

He told the story of one day passing the house of a man whom he knew was once a Christian but had seriously drifted away from Christ. He saw the man at his woodpile, industriously chopping wood for his cook stove. Knowing the man to be a backslider, one who had once been a faithful witness for his Savior but now was no longer attending church, Lord Cecil paused and shouted to him, “The Lord is coming, brother, the Lord is coming!” He said no more and continued walking.

The admonition “The Lord is coming!” burned its way into that man’s soul. The words reached the core of his being. Like a two-edged sword, they pierced his heart. His conscience smote him. They echoed again and again in his mind. “The Lord is coming!” It seemed he could not forget them. That urgent appeal from God’s servant that the coming of the Lord was near so impressed the man that he recommitted his life to Christ and returned to church. Living in the light of the second coming of Christ is powerful and changes your life.

AN APPEAL

In the fading light of human history, in these critical times, in this crisis hour, I invite you to say, “Jesus, take away all human pride. Help me to trust in Jesus and Jesus alone. Make me what You want me to be, and keep me faithful until You come again.”

In faith, you may proclaim, “Jesus, use me in this closing work to make a difference in our world. I don’t want to play religious games. I am not interested in a superficial, powerless faith. Lord, I want to know You deeply, love You supremely, and share the message of Your soon return with the people around me. Lord, I sense as never before that You have an end-time message to proclaim to the entire world, and I choose to cooperate with You in giving this final warning message of Your soon coming so You can return in Your glory. Amen!”

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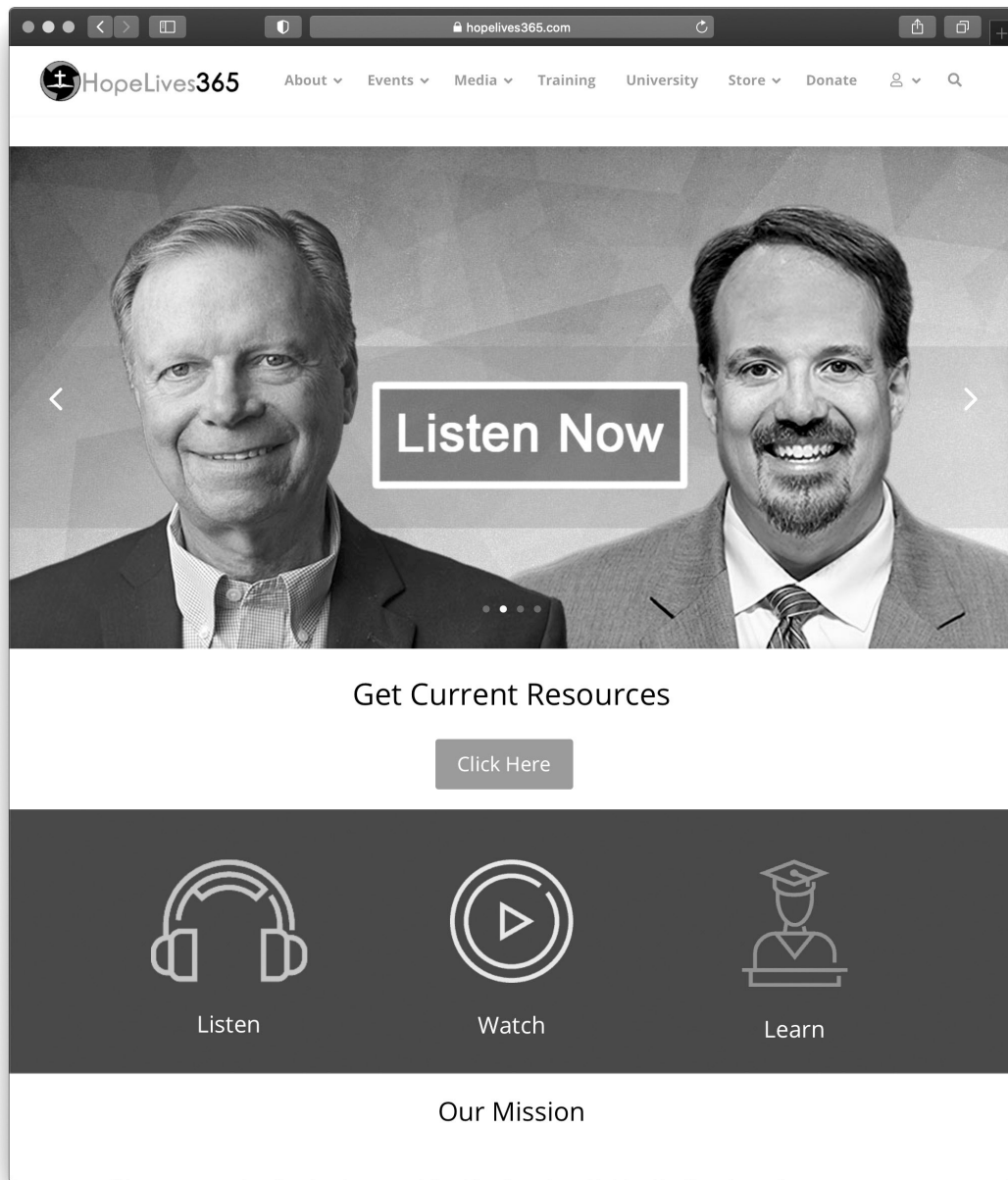
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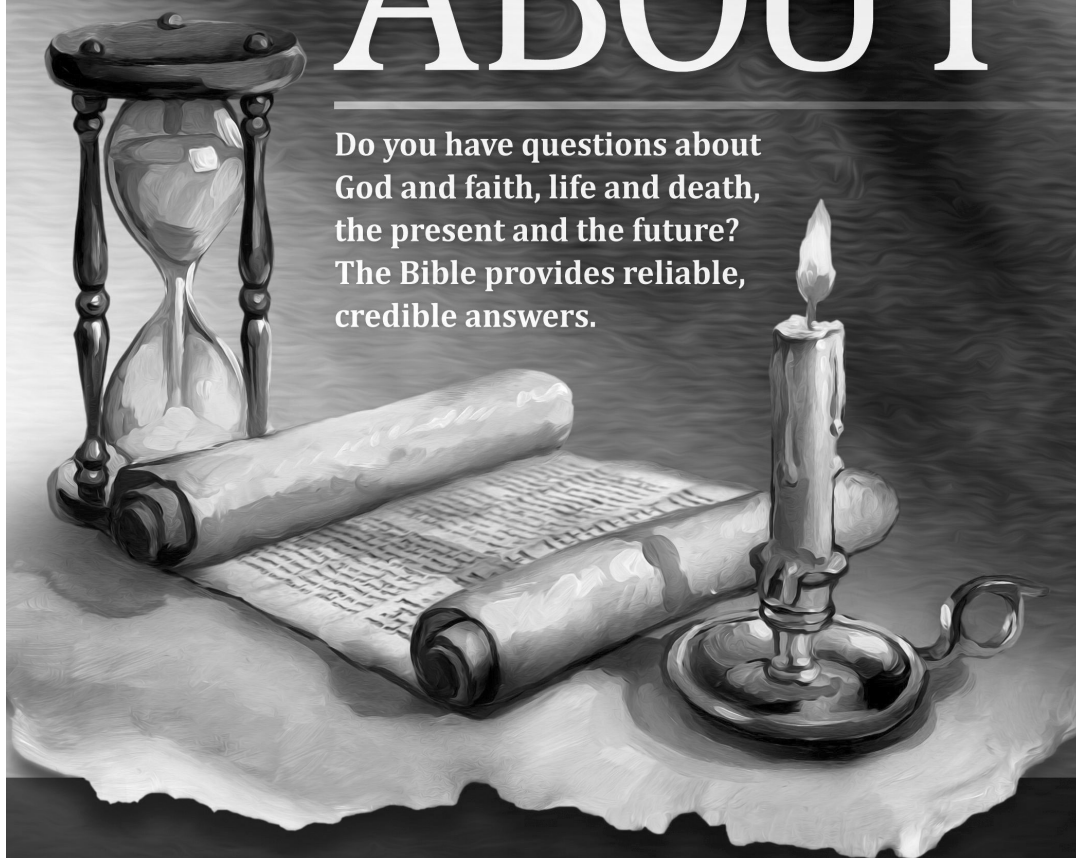
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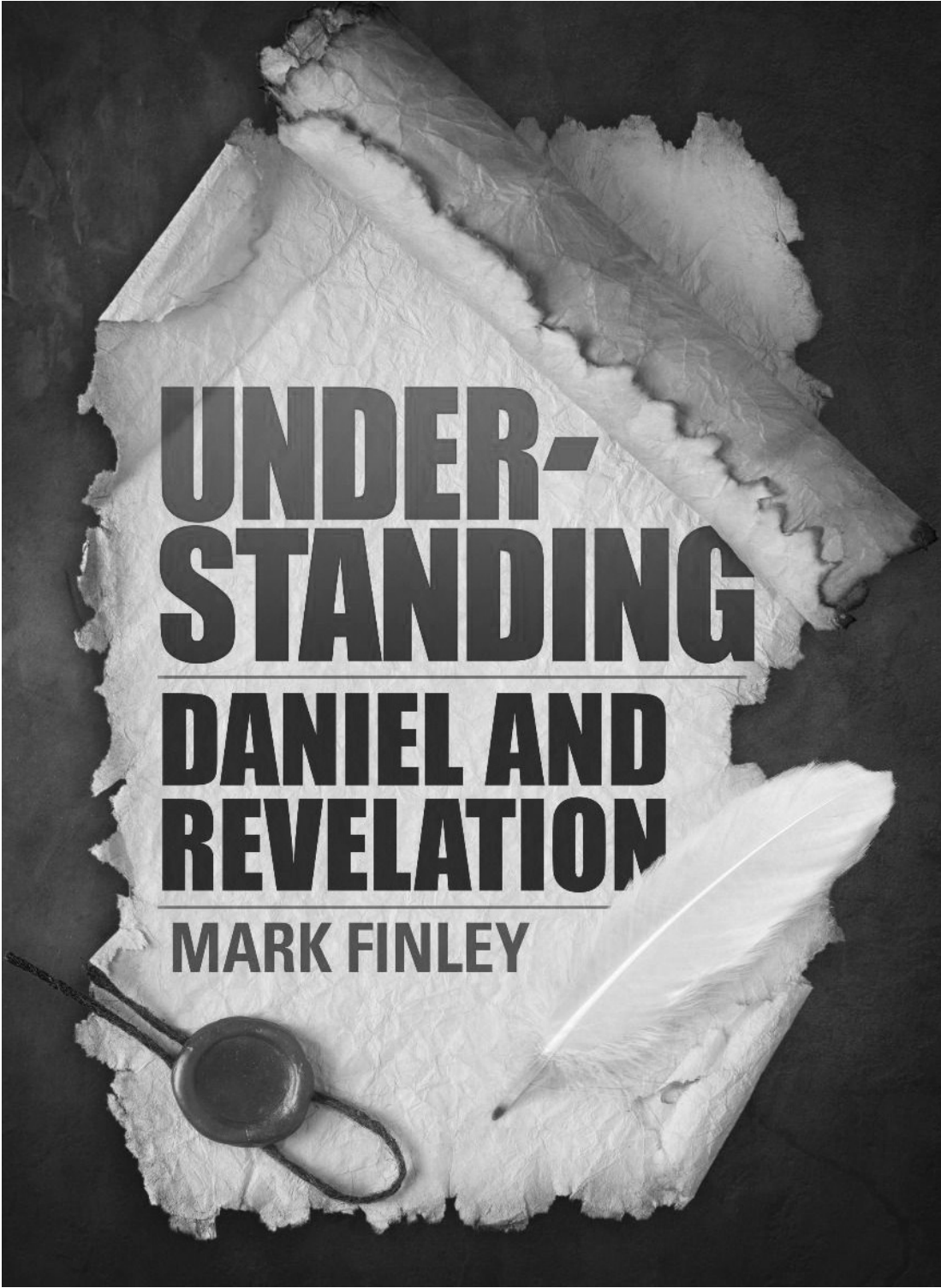


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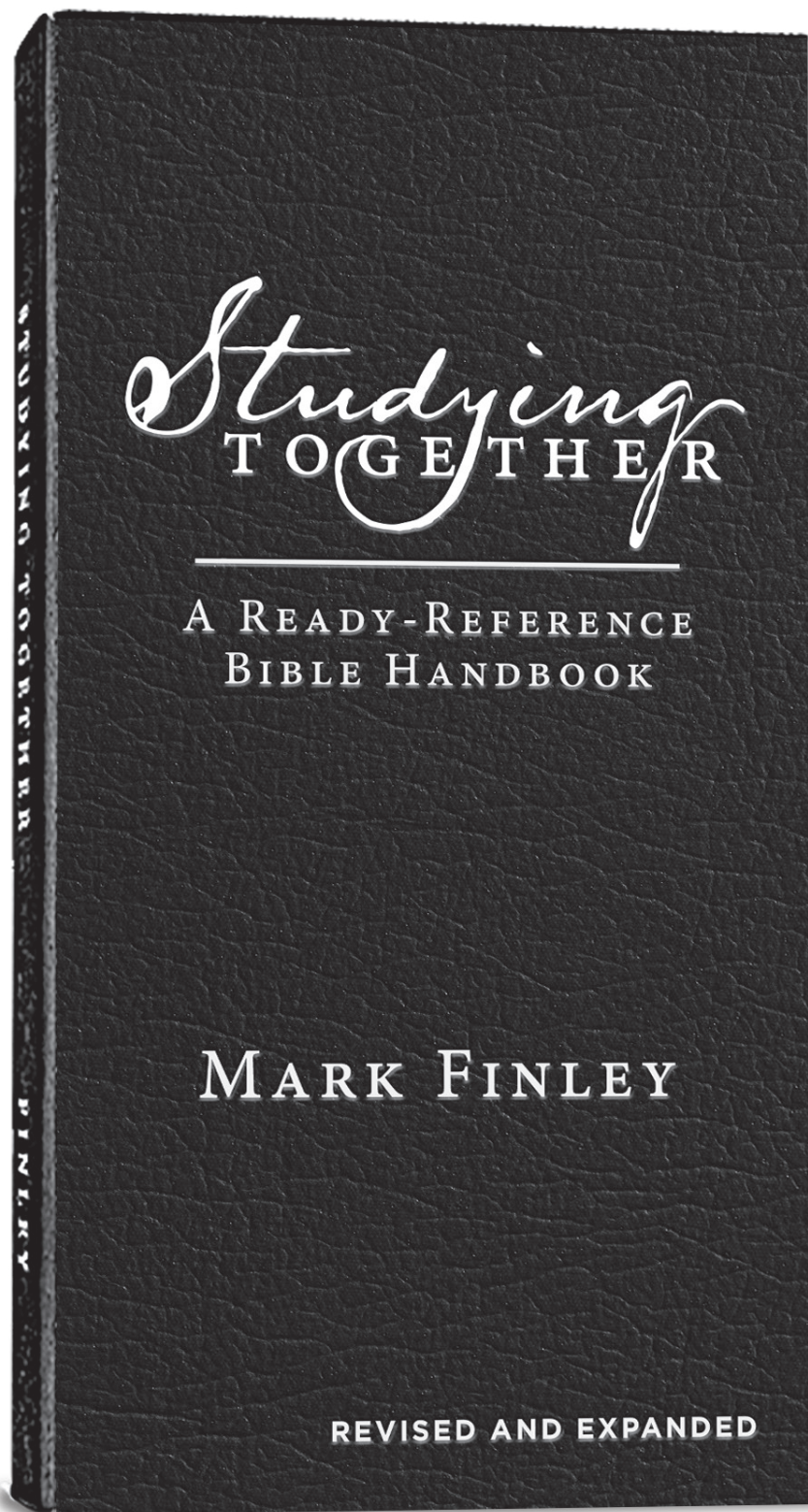
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