

Adventist World

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Week of Prayer 2021: Introduction

"Unprecedented" is the word often used to describe recent world developments. Never before have such earthshaking events converged in such a relatively short period of time, affecting nearly every aspect of life so quickly and dramatically. Perceptions are running high that something stupendous is about to happen, but predictions about the future are vague and uncertain. Now is the time, if ever there was such a time, for Seventh-day Adventists to proclaim with Holy Spirit-inspired boldness the messages of the three angels found in Revelation 14:6-12. There is no work of such great importance, we are told, than proclaiming this "last warning for a perishing world."

During this 2021 Week of Prayer we will dive deeply into these all-important messages that have Jesus Christ and His righteousness at their core as He seeks to bring home the necessity of uniting our lives fully and totally with Him.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a prophetic movement, raised up by God at a specific time in earth's history to proclaim a specific message that could be given only at this time—that of the three angels of Revelation.

Now is the time to study these messages, to pray with hearts open to God's leading, and to commit ourselves fully into His hands, saying, I will go to proclaim the three angels' messages!

May the Lord bless you in a special way as you spend time with Him during this worldwide Week of Prayer.

Ted N. C. Wilson, President

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church



Meet the Authors

This year's adult Week of Prayer readings is a collaborative team effort of the *Adventist Review* and the *Adventist World* family. Ángel

Manuel Rodríguez is well known to readers of *Adventist World* as he authors our monthly Bible Questions Answered column. He retired in 2011 as director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, where he served for a total of 19 years. Rodríguez was born in Puerto Rico, earned a Th.D. from Andrews University, and has worked for the Adventist Church as pastor, educator, and administrator. His daughter, **Dixie Lisbeth Rodríguez**, recently joined the editorial team of *Adventist World* as an assistant editor. She earned a doctorate in rhetoric from Texas Woman's University and returned to seminary to complete a Master of Divinity. Prior to this appointment she taught as a university professor and still serves as a hospital chaplain.

We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to prayer@adventistworld.org, and pray for us as we work together to advance God's kingdom.

First Sabbath

The Three Angels' Messages and the Mission of the Church

God calls us to go.

TED N. C. WILSON



In every age God has given His people a special mission. And while the specifics of how to carry out that mission may vary, the ultimate goal is always the same—to bring people into a saving relationship with God that will last for eternity.

More than 2,500 years ago God called a young man to an important mission lasting not only through his lifetime but down the ages into our time and beyond. Standing fearlessly in the courts of kings, Daniel was a bright light as he ministered to those at the highest levels while standing in the presence of the King of kings who “reveals secrets” and “makes known what will be in the latter days” (see Dan. 2:29).

Those prophecies, particularly the ones regarding the last days, are identified in Revelation 10 as a “little book,” sealed until the time of the end. John is told, “Go, take the little book which is open. . . . Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth” (Rev. 10:8, 9).

In Revelation 10 John represents God’s people who experienced the Great Disappointment in 1844. The open book is the book of Daniel, containing the 2,300-day/year prophecy concerning the cleansing of the sanctuary and the coming investigative judgment. Believing Jesus was about to come was sweet to the Advent believers, but when Christ did not appear as expected, it was a bitter disappointment. They had preached the message of Jesus’ return, but their work was not yet complete. There was an additional message that, in God’s plans, must be given to the whole world. This message, divided into three parts, is outlined in Revelation 14:6-12, and is known as the three angels’ messages.

The Spirit of Prophecy tells us the first and second messages were given by the early Advent believers. The third message would be added to the first

two and would be given just before Jesus returns. The combination of these three messages would be the final appeal of God to this world.

Our mission as God’s remnant church is made abundantly clear by inspiration: “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. . . . The world is to be warned, and God’s people are to be true to the trust committed to them.”¹

Since we are entrusted by God to proclaim these messages to the

We must move forward with Christian love and biblical authenticity, just as those in the past have carried out the mission God gave to them.

world, how important it is that we understand the messages and the importance of sharing them.

THE FIRST MESSAGE

The first angel's message, in Revelation 14:6, 7, proclaims the everlasting gospel: salvation through Christ's righteousness and grace—His justifying and sanctifying power. The angel announces that the time of judgment has come and calls people back to the true worship of God, recognizing Him as the Creator.

The announcement that we are living in the time of the judgment is based upon the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 8:14—after 2,300 mornings and evenings (or prophetic days, which equal years) the sanctuary would be cleansed. Since October 22, 1844, we have been living in the period of time known as the pre-Advent judgment—the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The results of this investigative judgment will determine who will be taken to heaven when Jesus returns.

The call to worship God as Creator automatically places upon people the responsibility to observe the day that honors His creative act. We are told, "The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not."²

But there is more to worshipping God as Creator—there must be a willingness to reject false theories about the origin of life. It is impossible to believe in evolution and yet say God is Creator of heaven and earth. The two concepts do not mix. Further, evolution is a part of spiritualism, since "spiritualism teaches 'that man is the creature of progression; that it is his destiny from his birth to progress, even to eternity, toward the Godhead.'"³

SECOND MESSAGE

The second angel's message, found in Revelation 14:8, announcing the fall of Babylon, was first presented in the summer of 1844.⁴ Because in the prophecy this announcement follows the preaching of the judgment, and because the churches to which this message applies were once pure, Babylon here refers to churches that have rejected the warning of the judgment.

The message "Babylon is fallen" is repeated in Revelation 18:1-4. God's people who are still in Babylon are called out so that they will not be guilty of participating in her sins and will not receive the plagues to be poured out upon her. Therefore, Babylon is constituted by churches that teach many of the theological errors passed down through the church of the Middle Ages.

Although the fall of Babylon began in the summer of 1844, it is a gradual process and will not be complete until (1) the churches

reject the three messages of Revelation 14 and accept the strong delusions and lying wonders presented by Satan; (2) these apostate churches unite fully with the world, accepting and believing what the world accepts and believes.⁵

For God's people still in Babylon to understand the urgency of getting out, they must understand the sins and errors of Babylon. This places a tremendous responsibility upon God's people to carry out His mission of proclaiming these messages. Although this proclamation will be met by intense anger and fierce opposition for exposing Babylon for what it is, we must move forward with Christian love and biblical authenticity, just as those in the past have carried out their God-given mission.⁶

THIRD MESSAGE

The third angel's message, found in Revelation 14:9-11, contains a clear warning: don't worship the beast or its image, or receive its mark. This message is based on the prophecy of Revelation 13. The beast represents the apostate church. The image of this beast is created by the second animal, representing the United States. Note Ellen White's explanation: "In order for the United States to form an image of the beast, the religious power must so control the civil government that the authority of the state will also be employed by the church to accomplish her own ends."⁷

For more than 200 years the United States has stood as a beacon of religious freedom. According to Bible prophecy, however, the time is coming when religious freedom will be violated, and a movement will so control the government that laws will pass fulfilling the wishes of the apostate churches. The end result of forming this image is intolerance toward anyone who disagrees with what this church/state relationship demands.⁸

The mark of the beast, observance of a false day of worship, is an institution that clearly sets forth the authority of the beast. One church boldly boasts that it has changed the seventh-day Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Other churches indicate they worship on Sunday as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. Neither assertion is biblical.

Apostate religious leaders will be filled with anger as they are unable to refute scriptural evidence for the sacredness of Saturday, and Sabbathkeepers will be persecuted and imprisoned. Amid these events the proclamation of the third message will have a powerful effect as people see prophecy being fulfilled exactly as commandment keepers said it would. As the conflict between truth and error intensifies, a purging takes place in God's church. "As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of

the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side. . . . They become the most bitter enemies of their former brethren."⁹

Those who hold fast to their Savior and refuse to abandon the truths found in the three angels' messages realize they must, through God's strength, carry on with His mission, leaving the results with Him. Their faces will be "lighted up hastening from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. . . . The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. . . . The truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. . . . Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side."¹⁰

Brothers and sisters, what we are seeing today is a wake-up call, urging us to look to God's Word and be ready for what's coming. Only by relying completely on Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit will we be able to accomplish anything! God is preparing us for the outpouring of the latter rain, enabling us to proclaim with a loud voice the life-giving messages of the three angels.

Today I invite you to respond to God's call by saying, "Yes, Lord, by Your strength and power, I will go

proclaim the three angels' messages. Wherever You send me, I am willing to go." Amen. ©

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1909), vol. 9, p. 19.

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 605.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 554.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 606.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

Ted N. C. Wilson is president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Additional articles and commentaries are available from the president's office on Twitter: @pastortedwilson and on Facebook: @Pastor Ted Wilson.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it important to read the three angels' messages in the larger context of biblical prophecy?
2. What would you say to people who have read this reading and tell you that they are afraid to think about end times and final events?
3. How would you formulate the essence of the three angels' messages if you were to share them with a friend who has never heard about them?

Sunday

A Loving Appeal

The eternal gospel in the first angel's message

Angels descended on the city of Bethlehem proclaiming the good news of the birth of the Savior (Luke 2:8-11), and now shortly before the coming of Christ angels come again proclaiming the saving power of the eternal gospel. As a matter of fact, within the messages of the three angels (Rev. 14:6-12) the gospel functions as their bookends: the eternal gospel is mentioned at the beginning (verse 6), and at the end we find faith in the saving work of Jesus—justification by faith (verse 12). The first angel proclaims the gospel in the context of God's final judgment; the second announces the triumph of the eternal gospel in the collapse of Babylon's false gospel (verse 8); the third announces the final judgment, when evil powers will acknowledge the love and justice of God revealed through the Lamb (verse 10).

GOSPEL, LOVE, CONFLICT

The emphasis on the gospel found throughout the messages means that "of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world"¹—a most serious challenge. We will highlight three characteristics of the gospel in the message of the first angel.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL OF DIVINE LOVE

The gospel is eternal, for it was conceived in the divine mind in eternity and was manifest within history through Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:25, 26; Col. 1:26, 27). It is eternal, for it is unalterable and has permanent saving power. In Revelation the gospel encompasses all God did for us through Jesus Christ, including His substitutionary death, resurrection (Rev. 1:18), ascension (Rev. 12:5), and enthronement (Rev. 4 and 5); His work of mediation in heaven (Rev. 8:3, 4); and His return in glory to consummate the salvation of His people and to judge the wicked (Rev. 1:7; 14:10; 19:11; 22:20). John takes us to the very depth of the gospel manifested on the cross of Christ.

The gospel first appears at the beginning of Revelation when John offers a doxology to Jesus: "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (Rev. 1:5).² What is beyond the full comprehension of any creature has happened, and for them it is good news! This is about love and blood; about the God who went through the valley of death making atonement for us; cleansing us from sin. This is divine love made visible within history. Notice that the

verb is in the present—"who loves us"—indicating the constant flow of divine love toward us. According to John, this unique love was manifested in the sacrificial death of His Son on the cross (notice the past tense—"released us"). Love, taking the form of a bloody sacrifice, broke the power of sin and freed us to serve God.

THE LAMB AND THE GOSPEL

It is the figure of the Lamb that was slain, however, that dominates the saving message of Revelation. His first appearance in the book is dramatic and powerful. God is sitting on His majestic throne with a sealed book in His hand that could only be opened by the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:1-6). The angel calls Him "the Lion" from the tribe of Judah, a messianic title (verse 5), but when John turns to look at the Lion, he sees "a Lamb standing, as if slain" (verse 6). The good news is that the Lion will vanquish God's enemies by becoming a Lamb, a sacrificial Lamb. Yes, there is force and power here, but it's the force of a Lamb that was slain, that is to say, the power of God's love displayed on the cross. When those around the throne see the Lamb, they fall down to worship Him while singing, "Worthy are You . . . for You were slain, and purchased



In Revelation the Lamb is the embodiment of the eternal gospel.

for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (verse 9). Once more we find together the two fundamental concepts of blood and redemption through which God extends to repentant sinners a glorious future.

In Revelation 7:9-15 God’s end-time people stand before the throne of God and the Lamb, praising them and ready to serve them. They are standing before God and the Lamb because “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14). The sacrifice of the Lamb not only redeems human beings but also cleanses them from their sins.

In fact, it’s redemption from the power of sin that makes it possible for us to be in His presence and to serve God. Since the sacrificial death of the Lamb accomplishes this glorious liberation, it is now possible for us to join the Lamb in the cosmic conflict against the dragon and to “overcome him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11). Two elements in their proper sequence: victory made possible through the sacrifice of Christ and witnessing on behalf of what God has done for us through the Lamb. In Revelation

the Lamb is the embodiment of the eternal gospel.

GOSPEL AND CONFLICT

The proclamation of the gospel occurs in a context of conflict. It’s part of a story of rebellion that originated in heaven (Rev. 12:7, 8) and that captured the human race (Gen. 3:1-8). As the end of the conflict approaches, the dragon gets ready to overcome God’s people through deception and persecution (Rev. 13:13-15). He unifies apostate Christianity (verses 1-17) and through the message of three demonic spirits (spiritualism) gains the support of the kings of the earth (Rev. 16:13, 14). At the same time, through the messages of the three angels, God is gathering His end-time people from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6-12) in preparation for the return of Christ (verses 14-20). In this final conflict victory is possible only through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

CONCLUSION

The gospel is to be proclaimed throughout the planet as the only solution to the cosmic conflict. The three angels “represent those who receive the truth, and with power open the gospel to the world.”³ We are unveiling here what is at the heart of the Adventist message—

the gospel. We should never be distracted from proclaiming the sufficiency of the blood of the Lamb though word and action. We need to have a clear comprehension of the gospel, but we also need to allow it to be incarnated in our lives, making us loving people in service to others. Our churches and institutions should be places where the love of the Lamb is displayed in lives totally dedicated to Him. ☉

¹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 188.

² All Scripture quotations have been taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

³ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol, rev. ed., Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), vol. 7, p. 979.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it so important to see the gospel in the messages of the three angels?
2. Are you afraid of Revelation’s message of judgment? Why or why not?
3. How can we communicate effectively the Lamb and the gospel in the book of Revelation in a secular world?

Repentance and Judgment

The eternal gospel in the first angel's message

The proclamation of the eternal gospel leads to an appeal for human beings to take God's side in the cosmic conflict (Rev. 14:7). God respects human freedom and invites every individual to respond freely to His plan for them. This most important decision will determine each one's eternal destiny. The call is like that of parents who, sensing the child is about to make a wrong decision, would do all they can to dissuade them from making it. The appeal comes from the heart of a loving God.

GLOBAL APPEAL

The magnitude of the decision is expressed through the use of three verbs in the imperative: *fear* God, *give* Him glory, and *worship* Him. We will discuss all three of them in more detail.

"FEAR GOD"

Fear could awaken us to do something to avoid the danger that generates it. In the Scriptures the presence of God could engender fear. Who would not tremble in the presence of a God who manifests Himself in glorious and impenetrable light and that causes nature to shake and recede before Him? Humans fear for their life, not because God threatens to kill them, but because they realize that

the experience is so intense that they fear they would not survive it (Ex. 20:19). This incomparable God approaches His creatures longing to be their God. Consequently, the fear that manifested itself in trembling and terror pulls them to Him in awe, expressed in grateful submission to Him, in worship, and in fellowship with the One who is life in Himself (Deut. 5:26, 27). This is true reverential fear for the Creator and Redeemer God (Ex. 20:1; Rev. 4:10, 11; 5:8, 9).

The best biblical parallel for the appeal to fear God (Rev. 14:7) is Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. (1) The *imperative* is used in both passages ("fear God"), indicating that this is an urgent matter. (2) The call is *universal* in that it is addressed to all human beings ("this applies to every person" [Eccl. 12:13]; "to those who live on the earth" [Rev. 14:6]). (3) To fear God is connected to *judgment* (He "will bring every act to judgment" [Eccl. 12:14]; "the hour of His judgment has come" [Rev. 14:7]). (4) To fear God is associated with keeping His *commandments* ("fear God and keep His commandments" [Eccl. 12:13]; "the saints who keep the commandments of God" [Rev. 14:12]).

The first angel urgently invites humans to make this glorious God their personal God and to manifest

their "fear" of Him (or their "awe") in submission to His loving will. The alternative is to fear/submit to the dragon to escape death (Rev. 13:15), but only He who is "the living One" died but is now "alive forevermore." Only the Lamb that was slain can preserve life (Rev. 1:18).

"GIVE GLORY TO HIM"

Humans are to set aside their pride and instead ascribe honor and glory to God. The angel specifies how humans, immersed in a cosmic conflict in which God's justice and love have been questioned, ought to glorify Him. The phrase "give glory to God" is used in the Bible in the context of judgment, to acknowledge human sinfulness and God's righteous judgment. In such case, the phrase is a confession of guilt (Joshua 7:19) and/or an expression of repentance (Jer. 13:16; 1 Sam. 6:5).

In Revelation, "to give glory" to God describes, first, what takes place in heaven, where heavenly beings declare with one voice that God is worthy of receiving glory because He is the Creator (Rev. 4:9-11) and, through the Lamb, the Redeemer (Rev. 5:9-13). Second, humans are commanded to give glory to God here on earth (Rev. 11:13; 14:7; 16:9). Third, at the close of the cosmic conflict all will

Judgment is in principle a legal search for the truth.



give glory to God (Rev. 19:7; cf. Rev. 5:13). On earth there is unwillingness to recognize that people are sinners and that God is a righteous, loving God. The appeal should go out to all, for some of them will witness the destructive upheaval of the forces of nature and will “give glory to God”; they will acknowledge that they are sinners and that God’s judgments are just (Rev. 11:13; Rom. 10:8, 9).

WORSHIP AND JUDGMENT

The appeal to accept the majestic God of the Bible as one’s personal God (to “fear Him”) and to confess one’s sinfulness, acknowledging God’s justice and love, is stated in the context of the announcement that “the hour of His judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7). Judgment is in principle a legal search for the truth. A crime of cosmic proportions was committed by evil powers when they attacked the integrity of God’s loving character, but in the final judgment His name will be cleared. The wicked promoted the dragon’s deception, but the judgment will reveal their mistake. It is now that humans should fear God and give glory to Him.

The final judgment is a Christian doctrine. According to the Bible, the final judgment consists of three stages. The first is the pre-Advent

judgment in heaven, where the lives of God’s people are investigated to reveal whether they have remained faithful to their faith commitment to the Lamb (e.g., Dan. 7:8-10, 13, 22; Rom. 2:5, 6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8). Christ will come to save His people and not judge them (Heb. 9:28).

Christians who believe in the immortality of the soul also believe in a pre-Advent judgment. The judgment of the immortal soul occurs when the person dies; at that moment the eternal destiny is legally determined. The Bible rejects the immortality of the soul and teaches that the person “sleeps” in the Lord until the coming of Christ. Second, there is a judgment after the millennium, when the forces of evil and their supporters will stand before the throne of God (Rev. 14:10; 20:11, 12), to be followed by the third aspect of the final judgment, the executive phase (Rev. 20), when the cosmos will be purified from sin. This most glorious event was typified in the Old Testament by the Day of Atonement, pointing to the moment (“the hour”) in history when the judicial process will begin in heaven, according to the divine calendar, in 1844 (Dan. 8:14; cf. Rev. 11:19; 14:7). While living in the antitypical day of atonement,

we are to appeal to humanity to fear God and give Him glory.

CONCLUSION

The glorious and transcendental God of the Scriptures wants to be our God, but the decision is ours. The final judgment will reveal that, through the cross of Christ, God manifested His infinite love, saving sinners like us. For now, we have chosen to fear and to give glory to Him, taking the side of the Lamb in the cosmic conflict. ☺

* Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How can we connect the judgment message of the three angels in Revelation to the love story of the Gospels?
2. How can we “give glory” to God in our daily life?
3. Why is the promise of divine judgment a hopeful message in a world that is governed by ambition, sin, and evil?

Tuesday

Worship the Creator

The eternal gospel in the first angel's message

The heavenly message, proclaimed by the first angel, is to resonate throughout the world, urgently appealing to all to fear, give glory, and *worship the Creator* (Rev. 14:7). Worship takes us to the core of the cosmic conflict, challenging us to worship the Creator and not the fallen cherub (cf. Matt. 4:9), whose intent is to permanently dislodge God from a portion of His creation. In the conflict, worship is the acid test.

WORSHIP—A DISPLAY OF LOYALTY TO THE LAMB

The Greek verb translated “to worship” in Revelation 14:7 is *proskuneo*, literally meaning “to bow down” or “prostrate oneself.” When applied to humans, it designates an act of homage, but when God is the object, the verb designates the bending down of both the body and the inner being as an expression of the dislodging of our fallen self in order to find in Him wholeness of being, the center and goal of our life. Worship points to two important attitudes.

WORSHIP AS CONFESSION OF FAITH

Before the throne of God heavenly beings fall down and worship God, declaring, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created

all things” (Rev. 4:11).¹ They confess that they worship God the Creator and invite humans to join them in worship. The act of worship is fundamentally a confession of faith in God, whom we declare to be *my* Creator. This confession of faith is, through the Spirit, deeply rooted in our inner being and is verbalized through word and action; the bending of the self in absolute submission (cf. Rom. 10:9, 10). In fact, worshipping the Creator has much to do with life, for He is the source of our life. Consequently, worship is being at home, for we are in the presence of our Father, who through a loving act of creation gave us life. This explains why in the Bible only those who are alive can praise the Lord (Ps. 115:17, 18). Created life sees the One who is life and bows down in gratitude and love before Him. This type of worship is not something we do occasionally, but it is life that lives constantly in the presence of the Lord and that walks humbly before Him.

John also sees heavenly beings fall down before the Lamb in worship declaring, “Worthy are You [the Lamb] . . . ; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Worship is a confession of faith in Christ who as Redeemer has made us new creatures (John 3:7; 2 Cor.

5:17). Redemption assumes that God’s original creation was damaged by the fallen cherub and that humans drifted away from home. Then the Son of God descended to a planet of self-centered creatures to bring them back home (cf. Isa. 53:6), to their Source of life. Lost life, restored to us through Christ’s saving work, confesses before the universe that He is our Redeemer by bending our fallen self before Him in grateful worship.

CONFESSION OF LOYALTY

Worship is a confession of loyalty to God as Creator and Redeemer. It is taking God’s side in the cosmic conflict, and consequently it is an act of rebellion against the powers of evil. Like the three friends of Daniel (Dan. 3:16-18), and Daniel himself (Dan. 6:10), the followers of the Lamb are not intimidated by the dragon. Since creatures do not possess life in themselves, they are incapable of preserving their own life, much less the life of other creatures. Therefore worshipping the fallen cherub, as an expression of loyalty to him, is choosing death. God’s loyal people have “the perseverance of the saints” and “keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Worshipping God as Creator and Redeemer is manifested in their life by persevering in their obedience to

Worship is being at home, for we are in the presence of our Father.

God's commandments and in keeping their faith in Christ as Redeemer.

The commandments mentioned in Revelation are primarily the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17). The call to worship God is an invitation to obey the first commandment (Rev. 14:7); the warning not to worship the image of the beast invites us to keep the second commandment (verse 9); and the condemnation of the beast for speaking blasphemies against God's name requires obedience to the third commandment (Rev. 13:6). The imperative to worship God "who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs of waters" (Rev. 14:7) uses the language and ideas found in the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:11), pointing to its importance for the question of whom to worship. "Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel."²

The Sabbath is not only a memorial of Creation but a memorial of the One who, through Christ, created everything. It is indispensable for the dragon to set aside this memorial permanently. This explains how "the Sabbath question will be the issue in the great conflict in which all the world

will act a part."³ At the present time the rejection of the Sabbath commandment takes at least two basic forms. The first comes from apostate Christianity through the dismissal of the seventh day as the biblical Sabbath and the promotion of Sunday observance. The second comes from the world of the study of natural sciences. The theory of natural evolution removed from the consciousness of many scientists and other scholars the existence of a transcendental and yet personal Creator God—the Sabbath as the memorial of the Creator was ignored. According to them, there is no Creator and there is no need for Him, because everything we see is the result of random and purposeless natural processes. Many Christians have tried to harmonize natural evolution and the Christian faith, arguing that God created through a long evolutionary process consisting of struggle, suffering, survival, and death. This God does not resemble at all the loving biblical God who is Creator and Redeemer. It is in this context that the first angel calls all to worship God; it is a matter of life or death.

CONCLUSION

The conflict is on, and the fundamental concern is clearly identified: who is worthy of worship? Only

God, who through Christ created everything and through the Lamb redeemed us, is worthy of worship. Only the very fountain of life can create and re-create life through redemption. This we confess to be true as we bow down before God and the Lamb and worship. ☉

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 438.

³ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol, rev. ed., Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), vol. 7, p. 979.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Consider this statement from today's reading: "The act of worship is fundamentally a confession of faith." How can this concept inform our worship?
2. Why is it important to understand the connection between worship and Creation?
3. How can we creatively and engagingly relate the first angel's message to people living around us who believe in evolution?

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a brown blazer over a light blue shirt and grey pants, stands in a classroom. She is smiling and pointing her right hand towards the right. In her left hand, she holds a white piece of paper and a blue pen. A white line-art graphic of a megaphone is superimposed over her, with its handle extending down towards the bottom right. In the background, a whiteboard is partially visible with the word "the" written on it. To the right, the back of a student's head with braided hair and a green shirt is visible, with their right arm raised.

Wednesday

The Gospel Vanquishes All Opposition

The second angel's message

In the book of Revelation the actions of evil powers are depicted as mimicking those of God. For instance, God has three angels proclaiming the gospel to the world (Rev. 14:6-12), and the dragon has three demonic spirits going to the kings of the earth to gather them for the final confrontation with the Lamb (Rev. 16:13, 14). The message of the second angel is based on this way of thinking. God has a city and the dragon creates his own city: Babylon. Babylon proclaims a message to humans that is the counterfeit of the eternal gospel, and as a result it will not prevail.

BABYLON AND THE LAMB

The second angel proclaims good news: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality" (Rev. 14:8).¹ In the following we look in more detail at the key elements of this message.

ANCIENT BABYLON AND THE FALLEN CHERUB

It all began on “a plain of the land of Shinar” (Gen. 11:2), another name for Babylon designating the southern part of Mesopotamia. There, after the Flood, humans decided to build a city called Babel, with a tower reaching to heaven (verse 4). In the narrative the noun Babel is based on the Hebrew verb *balal*, meaning “to mix,” indicating that Babel means “confusion.” The narrative is about a project that unifies humans in a common goal. It is about human deeds and achievements rooted in a concern for self-preservation. It is about a human ambition beyond imagination, for it intends to have dominion over the earth and the heavens—over everything. It is an ambition of cosmic proportions that consists in building a cosmic city that, in total independence from God, would integrate the two most important spheres of existence, namely, the human and the divine. Babylonians called the city *bab-ilani*, “Gate of the Gods,” probably because the city was visualized as a cosmic city that unified humans on earth with the gods in heaven. The biblical story is about an act of rebellion against the divine intention for humans (Gen. 9:7; 11:4). The building project and its intended purpose came to an end when God, the uninvited One, intervened by altering the unifying role of human language (Gen. 11:7, 8).

The pride and self-sufficiency of Babylon are fully developed in Isaiah when the Lord announces His judgment against Babylon, represented by its king (Isa. 14:3-23). The passage uses the deepest ambitions of the fallen cherub to describe the ambitions and intentions of the king of Babylon, and in so doing, God unveils the inner corruption of the cherub: “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend

to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly . . . I will make myself like the Most High” (verses 13, 14). The same ambition, in one way or another, has found a place in the human heart too. Although the historical Babylon fell, the ambitions of the cherub are still alive, and he will try to attain them during the time of the end.

END-TIME BABYLON AND THE FALLEN CHERUB

The nature and purpose of the ancient city of Babylon are now used as a type of the end-time Babylon. In Revelation Babylon is, *first*, an unclean trinity. It is constituted by three powers united to promote the agenda of the fallen cherub (Rev. 16:13). These are the dragon, who seems to assume the role of God (e.g., Rev. 13:2, 4); the beast from the sea, often mimicking Christ (e.g., Rev. 1:8 and 13:14); and the beast from the earth, also called the false prophet, performing the work of the Spirit (e.g., Rev. 13:13; 19:20). In the historicist interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies, the beast from the sea represents the Christian church during the Middle Ages; the beast from the earth stands for American Protestant Christianity; and the dragon is spiritualism—based on the pagan idea of the immortality of the soul, through which Satan will work deceiving miracles (Rev. 16:13, 14).

Second, Babylon is an end-time climatic expression of apostate Christianity of global dimensions. It is a portion of the church of Laodicea that did not heed the call of Christ to open the door and return to Him (Rev. 3:14-22). Since she is wealthy (Rev. 18:3, 11-13) and possesses beautiful dresses (verses 16, 19), there is no need for the wealth and the dress that Christ offers to all—the richness of

the gospel (Rev. 3:18). The beasts that constitute Babylon are not the beasts of social and economic oppression in modern societies, but an apostate expression of Christianity that will oppose God’s end-time people (Rev. 13:15).

Third, Babylon reaches out to the world with a false message of salvation. She “has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality” (Rev. 14:8). The force that drives Babylon is passion/desire and not a mind enlightened by the Spirit. By sharing the wine of spiritual harlotry, Babylon is identified as an unfaithful wife, implying her unfaithfulness to the Lord. In the Old Testament the unfaithfulness of Israel to God consisted in making alliances with the nations in order to preserve itself (Eze. 16:26-29) and by accepting religious practices and beliefs from other nations (Jer. 2:20, 21; Eze. 6:9; 16; 23). Both were expressions of apostasy (Ps. 106:35-39). In Revelation Babylon seeks the support of the kings of the earth (Rev. 17:12, 13) and supports the deception and worship of the dragon (Rev. 13:4).

Fourth, in the process of constituting the end-time Babylon, the dragon reaches out to the non-Christian world to unify it around the convictions of apostate Christianity. This is certainly a difficult task, because the planet is filled with a multiplicity of global religions, antagonistic political powers, contradictory ways of thinking, and even atheism and secularism. The most effective way for the dragon to achieve its purpose would be through the use of supernatural phenomena. There is hardly anything more effective to change humans’ loyalties than a supernatural experience that would appear to be unquestionable. Revelation speaks about the

It is not the attack of the Lion that defeats [the unholy trinity], but the sacrificial figure and work of the Lamb who was slain for our sins.

performance of great miracles on the part of the dragon and his agents that will result in changes in the social, political, and religious map of the world that at the present time seem to be impossible to anticipate (Rev. 13:13, 14).

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB

What is it that Babylon is specifically offering the world? Babylon is offering her own way of salvation through the proclamation of a false gospel. God offers to the world the gospel of salvation through the Lamb, but Babylon offers her wine. Wine is often a symbol of God's saving blessings for His people. Babylon provides for her followers the wine of her own "saving blessings," namely, her spiritual immorality. In the Old Testament, wine is called "the blood of the grape" (e.g., Deut. 32:14), an excellent symbol for the blood/life of Jesus. During the Lord's Supper He offered to His disciples the wine that represented His life given for the forgiveness of sin (Matt. 26:28)—the good news of the gospel. In the Gospel of John, Jesus offered His blood as the only source of life for sinners (John 6:53, 54; cf. John 19:34). By giving to the dwellers of the earth her own wine, Babylon is handing out a false gospel allegedly validated through the extraordinary miracles performed by the dragon and his agents (Rev. 13:13, 14; 16:13, 14). This false gospel is called "the wine . . . [that is to say] the passion of her immorality [her apostate teachings]" (Rev. 14:8). It is the corruption of the divine plan for the human

race, and it is therefore spiritual unfaithfulness/immorality.

The human race will be polarized by the confrontation of the gospel of salvation through Christ and the false gospel of salvation through the dragon/the fallen cherub. The final result would be the fall of Babylon. This fall will take place in two stages. The first one is a spiritual one that is still in the making. It will occur when the apostasy that began early in the history of the church would reach its climax in the reunification of apostate Christianity. The fullness of Babylon is not yet present until such an event occurs. The second fall will transpire at the second coming of Christ and will result in the final defeat of Babylon. John says that at that time, "The great city [Babylon] was split in three parts" (Rev. 16:19). The unholy trinity is unable to stand united before the Lamb (cf. Gen. 11:8): "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them" (Rev. 17:14). The wicked will seek to hide themselves "from the presence" of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16). It is not the attack of the Lion that defeats [the unholy trinity], but the sacrificial figure and work of the Lamb who was slain for our sins. The Lamb embodies the gospel and comes out triumphant in the conflict.

CONCLUSION

Babylon is not yet present in the world in all of her fullness. As we already indicated, the process

of apostasy began early in the Christian church and will reach its culmination shortly before the coming of Christ (2 Thess. 2:1-10). It is important for us to observe what is taking place in the relationship between Protestants and Catholics, particularly the significant increase of the influence of Catholicism in some parts of the world, even among non-Christian religions. The world is changing rapidly, and we should expect more significant changes, particularly of a religious nature. Meanwhile, it is our duty to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, alerting the world about what lies ahead of us. "We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the papacy, but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God."² ©

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² Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 65.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we avoid a "Babylonian" mindset in our own lives?
2. Why is Revelation's message of Babylon's fall good news for those who follow the Lamb wherever He leads?
3. Revelation references a "fake" trinity that seeks to imitate Scripture's Trinity. How can we be prepared to avoid being duped by this unholy trinity?

AD HERE

A Loving Warning From God

The third angel's
message

The Lord expressed His deep concern for sinful human beings through the proclamation of the eternal gospel, through His appeal to them to return to Him (message of the first angel), and by alerting them about the false gospel of Babylon (message of the second angel). Now God's heart opens up again, warning humanity about the fate of those who identify themselves with the dragon, hoping that they will listen and choose loyalty to the Lamb. This message takes us to the final judgment and the resolution of the cosmic conflict through the Lamb.

WE HAVE TO CHOOSE

The language and images used in the message of the third angel (Rev. 14:9-11) appear to some to be incompatible with the Christian gospel. Only a reading of the message from the perspective of the sacrificial love of the Lamb will disclose the intent of the message.

LOYALTIES

The third angel's message focuses on one of the most important questions humans face: To whom do we owe ultimate loyalty? It implies that there is a conflict and that regardless of our involvement there are sides to take. Reluctance to choose is a choice

for the wrong crowd! There are only two options: the Lamb or the fallen cherub. In this conflict there is not such a thing as being loyal to ourselves.

The concept of loyalty found here is profound, for our character displays the identity of the object of our loyalty. This is what the language of bearing the name and mark of the beast indicates (Rev. 14:9, 11). Loyalty to the fallen cherub leaves a visible imprint in our lives. Having the name of the beast means that we have identified ourselves with the agenda and ambitions of the fallen cherub; we belong to him. The idea of belonging is clearly expressed through the mark of the beast. A mark of loyalty in the hand and the forehead is visible to all and reminds others that this person belongs to the fallen cherub (Ex. 13:9). The mark is a symbol of the authority of the object of our loyalty.

If we examine the history of apostate Christianity looking for a symbol of authority that would reveal one's loyalty in the conflict, it is clearly Sunday. The claim to have authority to change the law of God is unsurpassable. The authority of God, who established the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest and worship, was silenced by the human voice that changed Sabbath

to Sunday. The law of God will play a major role in the final conflict. Notice the connection between worship and the mark of the beast in Revelation 14:9: "If anyone worships the beast . . . and receives a mark."¹ These two elements are inseparable. Since Sunday is a day of worship, submitting to it is at the same time an act of worship. Two commandments are violated, the first and the fourth. Sunday becomes a counterfeit to the Sabbath, which is a sign of God's sanctifying authority.

WINE AND FIRE

The final fate of the wicked consists in experiencing the wrath of God. Here we confront what some would call the difficult topic of a wrathful God. John tries to explain what it is, using the metaphors of wine and fire and brimstone. These images are employed in the Old Testament to describe God's judgment against His enemies (Jer. 25:15-28; Ps. 11:6; Gen. 19:24). The language is symbolic because God's wrath is not literally drinking from a cup. In this case what matters is the type of wine the wicked will drink, for it expresses the point of the comparison. This wine was not mixed with water (as was common), but its intoxicating power was increased through the use of

The wicked will experience God's wrath unmixed with mercy—there will not be room for repentance.

spices (Rev. 14:10). The wicked will experience God's wrath unmixed with mercy—there will not be room for repentance (Rev. 22:11).

The second metaphor is fire and brimstone. The wicked will be tormented with fire and brimstone, or with "burning brimstone." This metaphor compares the experience of God's wrath to the pain one feels when burning brimstone touches our body. God's wrath is a painful experience. The metaphor also builds on the fact that what is destroyed by fire cannot be recovered; it is destroyed forever. The idea is that the wrath of God will result in the final extinction of the wicked, called the second death (Rev. 20:6, 14). The fire is eternal for what it burns is eternally destroyed; it burns until nothing is left (Isa. 34:9, 10; Jude 7). While the wicked are experiencing the second death there is no rest for them.

CHRIST'S SUFFERING

The painful and final death of the wicked is something that we cannot begin to imagine, because no one has yet gone through it. The only exception was Jesus Christ, and He did it in order for us to escape from it. During the final judgment no one should go through the second death; at least there is no valid reason for this to happen. A Christ-centered

view of the final judgment has to connect it with Christ's judgment on the cross. There He took upon Himself the judgment of the world (John 12:31), bore the sins of the world as a sacrificial victim (John 1:29), and drank from the cup of God's judgment against sinful humanity (John 18:11) in order for those who place their faith in Him as Savior not to perish but enjoy eternal life (John 3:16). On the cross He experienced His baptism by fire and said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). On the cross the Godhead suffered together. "God suffered with His Son, as the divine Being alone could suffer, in order that the world might become reconciled to Him."² The excruciating pain He felt was not so much physical but the inner pain of realizing that He was separated from the Father (Matt. 27:46). Something similar will be the fate of the wicked during the final judgment as they realize that they will be eternally separated from God.

CONCLUSION

The conflict is indeed about loyalty. The warning from God sounds threatening because of the seriousness of the situation humans will face. His transparency uncovers a heart in pain for God does not want His creatures to die. The language is the language of a sign alerting

people to stop because there is a deadly threat ahead of them. God knows about this because He and His Son experienced it on the cross. Meanwhile we are God's ambassadors, inviting people to choose the Lamb who reconciled us to God. ©

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), p. 161.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Scripture focus so vividly on the destruction of the wicked and evil?
2. How does our concept of God inform our understanding of judgment? What can we do to offer a complete picture of God's character to people who struggle with the image of a wrathful God?
3. How can we best communicate the "wrath of God" in the context of the plan of salvation?

The Final Judgment and the Love of God

The third angel's message

The message of the third angel is a warning intended to persuade humans to avoid the fate of the wicked by taking the side of the Lamb. The strong warning leads to a description of the ultimate goal of the final judgment. Strong language and imagery continues to be used: "He will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10).¹

THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND THE CROSS

The Greek verb *basanizo* ("to torture, torment") conveys an idea that is repugnant to most people today. The verb designates an intense physical and/or mental pain over which the person has no control (cf. 2 Peter 2:7, 8). In Revelation it is used to describe the excruciating pain the woman experienced during childbirth (Rev. 12:2). In the case of the wicked, a future passive form of the verb is used—"he will be tormented." The question is who or what is tormenting them. We will review the wording and intent of the passage to find answers.

BEFORE/IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LAMB

The wicked are tormented "in the presence of the holy angels and in

the presence of the Lamb." The picture is that of the wicked suffering intense pain while standing in the presence of angels and the Lamb. The image of Jesus accompanied by angels finds its roots in the Old Testament in passages announcing the coming of God escorted by angels to judge the wicked and save His people (Deut. 33:2; Zech. 14:9). In the New Testament it describes the visible and glorious reality of the coming of Christ. At the Second Coming Christ will come escorted by His angels (Matt. 16:27; 25:31, 32; Mark 13:26, 27). This would be the most glorious apparition of Jesus to human beings, and everyone will see Him (Rev. 1:7); they will be standing in His presence (cf. Rev. 6:16, 17). Revelation 14:10 is not about the second coming of Jesus, when only those who are alive will see Him. Here the angel borrows the language of the coming of Christ to inform us that during the last judgment Christ will appear for a last time to the wicked of all ages and to the fallen cherub.

THE LAMB AND THE CROSS

We should not overlook the fact that the language of the third angel is very precise. The wicked are standing before *the Lamb*, not before the King of kings, nor even before the Lord. When they look

up, they see Christ as the Lamb of God who on the cross displayed God's infinite love to all of His creatures. In Revelation the image of the Lamb that was slain is a visual expression of the gospel of salvation through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus (Rev. 5:9). The eternal gospel is precisely about God's loving nature, which is always oriented toward the other. Jesus stated, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32), some for salvation (John 3:14, 15) and others for judgment (Rev. 14:10). In God's court of law the wicked and all evil powers are taken back to the deepest disclosure of God's love ever revealed in cosmic history.

As they look at the Lamb, they realize that God is indeed a God of love and justice and that the cosmic conflict was unjustifiable. Ellen White writes about the moment when the throne of Christ rises above the walls of the New Jerusalem and they see Him and "above the throne is revealed the cross."² She also writes, "Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned."³ We could perhaps conclude that what torments the wicked is the display of the love of God through the Lamb. This love awakens their sense of guilt, and

The eternal gospel is precisely about God's loving nature, which is always oriented toward the other.



they see themselves as they really are while realizing that they are eternally separated from such a wonderful God. The pain will be extremely excruciating. It would be correct to say that the love of God revealed in the sacrificial death of the Lamb, which fills the heart of God's people with joy and gratitude, will fill the heart of the wicked with intense pain and guilt. Had they accepted the gift of salvation offered to them through the Lamb, they would have escaped the judgment of condemnation. The apparition of the Lamb to the wicked will bring the cosmic conflict to a peaceful resolution.

COSMIC HARMONY

During the last judgment the most persuasive evidence that God will submit, in His court of law to the wicked and Satan and his demons, will be His self-sacrificing love revealed on the cross through the Lamb that was slain. In fact, this is the only evidence He presents, and it is sufficient. Its persuasive power cannot be fathomed, because it will hold the whole universe together throughout eternity. Looking at the sacrificial Victim, the forces of evil will recognize and confess that God is indeed righteous in His judgment against them; that they deserve to

die because this is what they chose. John anticipated this moment when he wrote, "And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying: 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever'" (Rev. 5:13; cf. Jude 14, 15). The whole cosmos with one voice will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). In the final conflagration the cosmos will be cleansed from the presence of evil powers and from the result of their work. Then "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

CONCLUSION

Love frames the cosmic conflict. Before sin originated, the universe pulsed in perfect harmony by the power of love, and, before the conflict is over, love brings everything back into perfect harmony. At the very heart of the three angels' messages is this most wonderful story of cosmic dimensions that the whole world is to hear in preparation for the coming of Christ. Every effort is to be made by the church to place each one of its teachings, particularly its eschatology, and actions at the service of the eternal

gospel of salvation through faith in the Lamb (cf. Rev. 14:12). This the Lord's message to the world, and it should be incarnated in our words and actions. ©

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² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 666.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 58.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How can we share with others the perfect balance of love and justice in God's character?
2. Discuss the following quote from today's reading: "Love frames the cosmic conflict." How does it affect our daily walk with Jesus?
3. How can we best share the good news of the three angels' messages with the next generation of Adventists?

Second Sabbath

The Three Angels' Messages

Platform for an
end-time stand



saw a company who stood well guarded and firm, giving no countenance to those who would unsettle the established faith of the body. God looked upon them with approbation. I was shown three steps—the first, second, and third angels’ messages. Said my accompanying angel, ‘Woe to him who shall move a block or stir a pin of these messages. The true understanding of these messages is of vital importance. The destiny of souls hangs upon the manner in which they are received.’ I was again brought down through these messages, and saw how dearly the people of God had purchased their experience. It had been obtained through much suffering and severe conflict. God had led them along step by step, until He had placed them upon a solid, immovable platform. I saw individuals approach the platform and examine the foundation. Some with rejoicing immediately stepped upon it. Others commenced to find fault with the foundation. They wished improvements made, and then the platform would be more perfect, and the people much happier. Some stepped off the platform to examine it and declared it to be laid wrong. But I saw that nearly all stood firm upon the platform and exhorted those who had stepped off to cease their complaints; for God was the Master Builder, and they were fighting against Him. They recounted the wonderful work of God, which had led them to the firm platform, and in union raised their eyes to heaven and with a loud voice glorified God. This affected some of those who had complained and left the platform, and they with humble look again stepped upon it.

“I was pointed back to the proclamation of the first advent of Christ. John was sent in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way of Jesus. Those who rejected the testimony of John were not benefited by the teachings of Jesus. Their opposition to the message that foretold His coming placed them where they could not readily receive the strongest evidence that He was the Messiah. Satan led on those who rejected the message of John to go still farther, to reject and crucify Christ. In doing this they placed themselves where they could not receive the blessing on the day of Pentecost,

which would have taught them the way into the heavenly sanctuary. The rending of the veil of the temple showed that the Jewish sacrifices and ordinances would no longer be received. The great Sacrifice had been offered and had been accepted, and the Holy Spirit which descended on the day of Pentecost carried the minds of the disciples from the earthly sanctuary to the heavenly, where Jesus had entered by His own blood, to shed upon His disciples the benefits of His atonement.

“But the Jews were left in total darkness. They lost all the light which they might have had upon the plan of salvation, and still trusted in their useless sacrifices and offerings. The heavenly sanctuary had taken the place of the earthly, yet they had no knowledge of the change. Therefore they could not be benefited by the mediation of Christ in the holy place.

“Many look with horror at the course of the Jews in rejecting and crucifying Christ; and as they read the history of His shameful abuse, they think they love Him, and would not have denied Him as did Peter, or crucified Him as did the Jews. But God who reads the hearts of all has brought to the test that love for Jesus which they professed to feel. All heaven watched with the deepest interest the reception of the first angel’s message. But many who professed to love Jesus, and who shed tears as they read the story of the cross, derided the good news of His coming. Instead of receiving the message with gladness, they declared it to be a delusion. They hated those who loved His appearing and shut them out of the churches. Those who rejected the first message could not be benefited by the second; neither were they benefited by the midnight cry, which was to prepare them to enter with Jesus by faith into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. And by rejecting the two former messages, they have so darkened their understanding that they can see no light in the third angel’s message, which shows the way into the most holy place.

“I saw that as the Jews crucified Jesus, so the nominal churches had crucified these messages, and therefore they have no knowledge of the way into the most holy, and they cannot be benefited by the intercession of Jesus there. Like the Jews, who offered their useless sacrifices, they offer up their useless

**Make sure
that your
building is
on the rock.
Do not risk
eternity on a
probability.**



prayers to the apartment which Jesus has left; and Satan, pleased with the deception, assumes a religious character, and leads the minds of these professed Christians to himself, working with his power, his signs and lying wonders, to fasten them in his snare. Some he deceives in one way, and some in another. He has different delusions prepared to affect different minds. Some look with horror upon one deception, while they readily receive another. Satan deceives some with Spiritualism. He also comes as an angel of light and spreads his influence over the land by means of false reformatations. The churches are elated, and consider that God is working marvelously for them, when it is the work of another spirit. The excitement will die away and leave the world and the church in a worse condition than before.

"I saw that God has honest children among the nominal Adventists and the fallen churches, and before the plagues shall be poured out, ministers and people will be called out from these churches and will gladly receive the truth. Satan knows this; and before the loud cry of the third angel is given, he raises an excitement in these religious bodies, that those who have rejected the truth may think that God is with them. He hopes to deceive the honest and lead them to think that God is still working for the churches. But the light will shine, and all who are honest will leave the fallen churches, and take their stand with the remnant" (*Early Writings*, pp. 258-261).

"The proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages has been located by the Word of Inspiration. Not a peg or pin is to be removed. No human authority has any more right to change the

location of these messages than to substitute the New Testament for the Old. The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other. The Old Testament presents lessons from the lips of Christ, and these lessons have not lost their force in any particular.

"The first and second messages were given in 1843 and 1844, and we are now under the proclamation of the third; but all three of the messages are still to be proclaimed. It is just as essential now as ever before that they shall be repeated to those who are seeking for the truth. By pen and voice we are to sound the proclamation, showing their order and the application of the prophecies that bring us to the third angel's message. There cannot be a third without the first and second. These messages we are to give to the world in publications, in discourses, showing in the line of prophetic history the things that have been and the things that will be. . . .

"Our work is to proclaim the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 'Prepare to meet thy God' (Amos 4:12) is the warning to be given to the world. It is a warning to us individually. We are called upon to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. There is a work for you, my brother, to do, to yoke up with Christ. Make sure that your building is on the rock. Do not risk eternity on a probability. You may not live to participate in the perilous scenes on which we are now entering. The life of no one of us is assured for any given time. Should you not watch every moment? Should you not closely examine your own self, and inquire, What will eternity be to me?

"The great burden of every soul should be, Is my heart renewed?

Is my soul transformed? Are my sins pardoned through faith in Christ? Have I been born again? Am I complying with the invitation 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matt. 11:28-30). Do you count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus? And do you feel it your duty to believe every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God?" (manuscript 32, 1896 [see also *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, pp. 6-23]). ©

This article contains excerpts from *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1882, 1945), pp. 258-261, and manuscript 32, 1896. Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What can we learn from those who proclaimed the first advent of Jesus? Why is that significant for those waiting for the second coming of Jesus?
2. How can we creatively reach people around us who may have no understanding of biblical truth with the messages of the three angels?

BY RANDY FISHELL

Courageous Kids

Following Jesus No Matter What

The author of this year's children's readings is **Randy Fishell**. Fishell is known to younger generations of Adventists for his creative work as editor of *Guide* magazine. He holds a M.Div. and is the creator of the popular Tucker Barnes & Friends product line for kids.

Illustrations: Xuan Le



God Has a Special Mission for You!

“Then I was told, ‘You must prophesy [teach] again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings’” (Revelation 10:11, ICB).*

DANGER IN ALASKA

The entire town of Nome, Alaska, was in danger. It was 1925, and Nome, which lies near the Arctic Circle, had only one doctor.

“I believe your child has a case of tonsillitis,” Dr. Curtis Welch told several parents. But as more cases with similar symptoms arrived, he wondered if he might be wrong. When people began dying, he knew the truth: an epidemic of a deadly disease called diphtheria had crept into town.

“Our local supply of medicine is too old to be used,” Dr. Welch explained. And the closest medicine that could be used was hundreds of miles away! Nome was totally surrounded by ice, so ships couldn’t be of any help. The few airplanes that might have been able to make the trip had been taken apart for the winter. And snowmobiles hadn’t yet been invented!

Dr. Welch sent a desperate telegram message to the proper authorities:

“AN EPIDEMIC OF DIPHTHERIA IS ALMOST [CERTAINLY] HERE. I AM IN URGENT NEED OF ONE MILLION UNITS OF DIPHTHERIA [MEDICINE].”

Meanwhile, still hundreds of miles away, the needed amount of medicine was eventually rounded up. But how would it get to Nome? A man named Mark Summers suggested it travel by dogsled. It was their only hope of getting to Nome in time to avoid a horrible outbreak of diphtheria.

The trip from the starting point, Nenana, to Nome was 1,085 kilometers (674 miles). Normally it took about 30 days to make the journey. But that would need to be greatly shortened.

The journey began, with dogs and their drivers, known as mushers, enduring frostbite and more. Over dangerous mountain ranges and through blinding blizzards the teams pressed on.

The mission was a success! To everyone’s astonishment, the entire trip took only *five and a half days*! There was a sad price to pay, though, because at least five dogs died.

In the end, deaths from diphtheria were fewer than 10 in Nome, at the time a town of about 1,300, with 10,000 in the surrounding areas. And all thanks to a lifesaving mission accepted and completed.

* Bible verses in these Children’s Readings credited to ICB are from the *International Children’s Bible*, copyright © 1986, 1988, 2008, 2015 by Tommy Nelson. Used by permission.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Have you ever been sent on a special mission? What was it?
- What do you think about the idea that you’re part of a special group called to help others be ready for Jesus’ return?

TODAY’S PRAYER IDEA

Thank God for inviting you to be a part of His end-time mission. Ask Him to help you better understand these messages, and how you can share them with others.

Good News for Everyone

“Then I saw another angel flying high in the air. The angel had the eternal Good News to preach to those who live on earth” (Revelation 14:6, ICB).

GOOD NEWS IN THE PARK

Zarita and Aiko* were bored. “Let’s walk over to the park,” Zarita suggested. When they arrived, the park was nearly empty, except for three boys gathering stones and carrying them to the top of a nearby slide.

“What are you guys doing?” Zarita called up to the boys. But instead of answering, each boy picked up a stone and aimed it at the girls! Zarita silently asked God for wisdom.

For some reason, instead of running away, Zarita asked, “What are your names?”

The boys seemed confused. “Aren’t you scared of us?” one of them asked.

“A little, but I asked God to be with us,” Zarita responded.

Now the bullies were really puzzled! They dropped their “ammunition” and climbed down from the slide. That’s when Zarita seemed to hear a voice whisper, “Tell them about God. They’ll listen.” Zarita looked around, and Aiko seemed to be doing the same thing. But nobody else was nearby.

The three boys came over toward the girls. They told Zarita and Aiko their names. Soon the girls were telling the boys about Jesus! And the boys listened! Finally one of the boys asked the girls to pray. When they’d finished, the boy started praying, asking Jesus for forgiveness.

Back home Zarita said, “Aiko, at the park I heard a whisper in my head that told me to tell those boys about Jesus.”

Aiko’s eyes grew wide. “So did I!” she exclaimed. And right then the girls thanked God for the opportunity He’d given them to share His good news.†

* Not their real names

† Story adapted from Rachel Woitt, “A Whisper and a Prayer,” *Guide*, December 10, 2005.

THINK ABOUT IT

- How would you explain the gospel in a sentence or two?
- Does the idea of sharing the good news of Jesus’ love and salvation make you uncomfortable? If so, what do you think could be making you feel this way?

TODAY’S PRAYER IDEA

Ask God to show you what the gospel really means in your own life. Pray that you’ll be ready to share the gospel whenever the time is right.



Turn Away From Sin!

“Worship God. . . . The time has come for God to judge all people” (Revelation 14:7, ICB).



A TROUBLEMAKER MEETS JESUS

Three angry men suddenly burst into the place where Carl's father, an Adventist pastor, was telling others about Jesus. "You have 10 minutes to get out of here!" one of the men shouted. Between them, the men had a gun, a knife, and a long iron bar.

"We'll be back to fight in 10 minutes!" one man shouted. With that, the three troublemakers turned and left.

What will Father do? Carl wondered. *Will he stop talking and tell everyone to leave?* But instead, Father kept preaching!

About 10 minutes later the three men returned. Carl looked at their faces. *They're really angry now!* he thought.

But when Carl turned to look at his father, he noticed something happening. Father looked straight into the men's eyes. As he did so, the men began to shake, and then backed away and left!

A few weeks later Father was holding a baptism in a nearby river. The man who'd held the long iron bar showed up! He came over to Father. "Pastor," he said, "I want to be baptized too. But I'm not ready yet, because I have been a very wicked man."

Can a man like that really change and serve Jesus? Carl wondered. But to his amazement, a few weeks later Father led the man into the river.

Carl was very proud of his father. And he was amazed at what can happen when a person chooses to turn from evil and follow Jesus!*

THINK ABOUT IT

- What sin might there be in your life that you'd like to turn away from?
- What are some things that might be causing you to take your eyes off Jesus? How can you change this?

TODAY'S PRAYER IDEA

Ask God to help you turn away from wrong thoughts and actions. Thank Him for His power to change and for His loving forgiveness.

*Adapted from Barbara Westphal, "DeadlyThreats," *Guide*, December 15, 2001.

Worship the Creator God and Honor His Sabbath

“He made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7, ICB).

OUT OF THIS WORLD

It was Christmas Eve, and three men were a very long way from home. Bill, Jim, and Frank weren't even on Planet Earth. The three astronauts were in the Apollo 8 space capsule, orbiting the moon!

From their distant viewpoint the crew saw light rays creeping across Planet Earth. The sun was brightening the little blue planet so far away.

The three astronauts had been waiting for this moment. Astronaut Bill Anders adjusted himself and began speaking into a microphone. “We are now approaching lunar sunrise,” he said, “and for all the people back on earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you.”

What are the astronauts about to tell us? people wondered.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . .” The astronaut was reading Genesis 1:1,* the very first verse in the Bible! He continued reading, and then astronaut Jim Lovell took over.

“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.” This, too, was from the Bible's story of Creation—Genesis 1:5. Astronaut Lovell kept reading, and then it was the third astronaut's turn.

“And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.” Astronaut Frank Borman continued reading from the book of Genesis. “And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.”

Awestruck by the beauty and wonder of what they were seeing from outer space, the astronauts felt the need to praise Someone bigger than themselves. Astronaut Borman closed with these final words: “God bless all of you, all of you on the good earth.” With that, Apollo 8 continued circling the moon.

*The verses the astronauts read were from the King James Version.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Why does Satan want people to believe in evolution instead of God as Creator?
- Why is it important to God that people honor the seventh-day Sabbath instead of Sunday or another day?

TODAY'S PRAYER IDEA

Pray that God will show you more of the wonders of His creation. Ask Him to help you to always honor the seventh-day Sabbath no matter what.



Get Away From False Worship!

“Then the second angel followed the first angel and said, ‘She is destroyed! The great city of Babylon is destroyed!’” (Revelation 14:8, ICB).



FINDING TRUTH IN TONGA

Asipeli lived on the Polynesian island of Tonga, in the southern Pacific Ocean. That's where he'd chosen to follow the religion of his father. But now he had questions.

A few weeks earlier two men had arrived on Tonga and began holding religious meetings. Curious, Asipeli and his friend Manu attended. They were shocked to learn ideas from the Bible that they'd never heard about.

Asipeli and Manu went to the meetings every night. When the meetings ended, they both knew a lot more about the Bible. But one question now haunted them: Which is the true church?

One day Asipeli made an announcement. “A big ship is going to arrive in port tomorrow from Australia. I will go to the ship and ask God to show me someone who can answer my question, ‘Which is the true church?’”

At the port Asipeli watched as travelers left the big ship. Finally he saw a man he felt God had chosen for him to speak with. “Are you a Christian, sir?” asked Asipeli.

Startled, the man said, “Why, yes, I am a Christian—I am a Baptist. Why do you ask?”

Quickly the eager Tongan asked his question: “Can you tell me which is the true church?”

Now, this passenger had been taking Bible studies for the past few months, and he had been learning Bible truth. “Write to this address,” he told Asipeli. “They will tell you which is the true church.” Asipeli found a pencil and wrote down the address the man gave him. Eventually he began taking Bible studies through the mail. Asipeli learned

about God's true church, one that believed in Jesus and kept all of the Ten Commandments—including the seventh-day Sabbath.

Soon Asipeli and Manu were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It's amazing how God leads when we invite Him into our lives.*

* Story adapted from Walter Scragg, “Excuse Me, Sir, Which Is the True Church?” *Guide*, September 14, 1966.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Have you ever followed someone or something that led you in the wrong direction? What would you do differently?
- Do you have friends or relatives who belong to a church that doesn't totally follow Bible truth? How does this make you feel?

TODAY'S PRAYER IDEA

Ask God to show you clearly which is His true church. Thank Him for safeguarding His Word, the Bible, through the ages so that you can read its truth today.

Stick With the Bible

“This third angel said in a loud voice: ‘It will be bad for the person who worships the beast and his idol and gets the beast’s mark on the forehead or on the hand’” (Revelation 14:9, ICB).

HIDING ON THE SABBATH

Eleven people gathered on a hidden riverbank in southern Europe. During that time in this country, Seventh-day Adventists were threatened with violence. A mob heard about the baptism and attacked the newly baptized members. Sadly, a mother of two children was killed by the mob.

The woman’s two children were 10-year-old Alex and his 8-year-old sister, Marie. Some of their relatives found the children a foster home.

After breakfast on the first Sabbath in their new home Alex and Marie went out and hid in a large pile of hay to study their Sabbath School lesson and read from the Bible. When they came back, the man of the house gave Alex and Marie a beating.

The following Sabbath they spent the day in some nearby woods. And once again, when they returned, the foster father beat them.

The third Sabbath the foster parents stopped the two children as they headed toward the woods. But just as the man was striking Alex and Marie, some neighbors arrived. Later they reported to the authorities what they’d seen. The foster parents were arrested.

When it came time for the foster parents to be punished, the judge said harshly, “You shall be beaten just as you have beaten these children!”

Suddenly Alex stood and said, “Please, judge, do not have them beaten. It is true that he has beaten both me and my sister because we kept the Sabbath. But it hurts to be beaten. We know. The New Testament tells us to love our enemies and pray for them.”

The judge’s heart was softened. He did not have the foster parents beaten, but they did have to sign a promise that they would never again bother the children about their faith.

Soon afterward, the foster father accepted Bible studies from some of the local Adventists, and he was baptized. Nobody was happier about his changed life than Alex and Marie.*

*Adapted from Barbara Westphal, “Don’t Flog Him, Please,” *Guide*, September 1, 1965.

THINK ABOUT IT

- How does the thought of being punished for your beliefs make you feel?
- Can you think of some Bible stories in which people were punished for their beliefs?

TODAY’S PRAYER IDEA

Thank God for the many examples we have of people honoring your beliefs no matter the cost. Ask Him for the courage to do the same.



God's Love Wins

“He will drink the wine of God’s anger” (Revelation 14:10, ICB).

THE POISONED DRINK

Eustorgio, a Peruvian farmer, hated the Adventist more than anything. Tonight he would invite the Adventist to dinner, but not to enjoy a meal. No, tonight he would poison his guest.

“That smells good!” the Adventist said as he stepped into Eustorgio’s adobe hut. “I’m so glad you invited me,” he continued. “I have so much to tell you about what’s happened to me since I invited Jesus into my life.”

“That sounds good,” Eustorgio lied. “Why don’t you tell me about it while we eat?”

The two men sat down to a simple meal of rice and beans. Sitting before each of them was a glass filled with drink. The glass in front of the Adventist had little flowers on it—and deadly poison *in* it.

The Adventist bowed his head and thanked God for the meal set before them. Soon he picked up the glass of juice and emptied it in one big gulp. “Ah, that was delicious!” he said. “Papaya juice is my favorite!”

“I made it especially for you,” Eustorgio said with an evil smile. *Soon this Adventist will double over and die!* he thought.

But as the minutes ticked by with nothing happening to his guest, Eustorgio shifted nervously in his chair. Two hours passed as the Adventist enjoyed his meal and spoke of God’s love.

At last the Adventist stood to leave, but not before inviting Eustorgio to attend church with him on Sabbath. As the man walked away, Eustorgio fell to his knees inside his hut. Trembling, he thought, *How could that man still be alive? Is he a wizard of some kind? Or . . . maybe everything he’d said about God was true!*

“Oh, Lord, God of that Adventist,” Eustorgio whispered, “now I see that You are real and that You have the power to save. Please save me too!”*

*Story adapted from Juliana Marin, “Blessed Poison,” *Guide*, December 12, 2009.



THINK ABOUT IT

- What are some spiritual lies that people believe?
- Why do you think it is important for God’s end-time judgment to take place?

TODAY’S PRAYER IDEA

Thank God for giving you the freedom to choose your spiritual beliefs. Ask Him to teach you about His love and how that takes away any fear about the end-time judgment.

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 Seventh-day
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A Part That Remains

“Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith in Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

TWO-STORY CHALLENGE

See if you can figure out what the two following stories have in common.

STORY 1

Nadia's bedroom carpeting had worn out, and her parents said she could choose the color of the new carpet. “Oh, I love that one!” she said, pointing to a roll of pink carpeting. Her mom and dad agreed.

The salesperson said, “That's a popular choice. In fact, this small roll is a remnant from a much larger roll. The good news is that means I can sell it to you at a discount!”

STORY 2

Elijah had been on the run from wicked Queen Jezebel. Exhausted, he entered a cave to spend the night. He felt so alone!

Suddenly he heard a voice! “Elijah! Why are you here?” It was God speaking to him!

“Lord, God of heaven's armies,” Elijah responded, “I have always served you the best I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you. They have destroyed your altars. They have killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left. And now they are trying to kill me, too!”

But God knew Elijah was not the only person left who was serving the true God. He said to Elijah, “I have left 7,000 people living in Israel. Those 7,000 have never bowed down before Baal.”*

* Quotations are from 1 Kings 19:9-18, ICB.



THINK ABOUT IT

- What Bible examples of a remnant person or people can you think of? Hint: This group refused to bow down and worship a gigantic golden statue.
- What responsibilities come with being part of God's end-time remnant church?

TODAY'S PRAYER IDEA

Ask God to show you clearly His end-time remnant people. Invite Him to give you the courage to always follow Jesus and honor the Ten Commandments.

AD HERE