

A REASON FOR
courage

A STUDY OF REVELATION 14:6-13



New King James Version of the Bible was used for all
scripture quotations and text references.

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About THESE LESSONS

Joyful greetings, my sisters. At General Conference Women's Ministries, we love to prepare resources to send to you that will encourage and build you up spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and in other ways, and this is one of those times.

We are sharing with you *A Reason for Courage*, a series of seven Bible study lessons based on the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-13. This is one of the most important sets of Bible lessons we have prepared. It is for this time in history.

We live in a time of uncertainty, fear, worry, hopelessness, discouragement, depression, increase in suicide, and loneliness. How are we coping each day with what life throws at us? How do we help others who are not coping well, and who do not know Jesus, to find in Him a Friend and Savior?

Today women need courage more than ever. The messages will lead us to a relationship with Jesus, deeper than we have known in the past. They will give you the courage to *believe*, to *choose*, and to *stand* for the right.

These lessons have been prepared with much prayer, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will bless each of you as you study, and then go reach your world for Jesus with this message.





HOW TO USE THESE *Lessons*

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Be Still. Begin each time of study with prayer. Ask God to help you understand the passage you are reading and show you how to apply it to your life. Take time to meditate on God's Word before rushing ahead.

Write. Read the questions and find the answers. Write your answers in a notebook as you study these lessons. Writing your responses helps you clarify your understanding of each section.

Apply. Scripture is meant to transform us. Examine the text with the purpose of utilizing what you learn. How is the lesson relevant to you? Can you apply it to your daily walk with God? What parts of the lesson apply to your own life? How can you share what you learn? Keep a record in your notebook of how you are being transformed in your journey.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

OPEN EACH STUDY SESSION

The facilitator (who might also be the group leader) or different members of the group should open the study session with a time of prayer. This prayer may also reflect any significant events, joys, or needs of the group members.

READ FROM THE TEXT

- Encourage all participants to read the text passage of the lesson ahead of time.
- Invite one person to read the passage aloud as you begin the lesson. This will refresh the message for those who read it at home and will provide opportunity to hear the passage for those who have not read it already.
- Consider reading the passage aloud during this time from another translation. Spend a few moments identifying any significant differences.



THE FACILITATOR SHOULD:

- Create an unhurried atmosphere during the group's discussion.
- Invite everyone to participate.
- Encourage and validate each person's contribution.
- Be comfortable with silence. Read the silence: has the topic been exhausted? Then move to the next. Has boredom crept in? Find active and creative ways for revitalizing the group...singing, getting up, moving around, etc.

THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IS:

- To keep the discussion focused and moving.
- To encourage active participation by all.
- To encourage free expression of ideas without inserting personal bias.
- To monitor the time.





BEFORE YOU *Begin*

Welcome to *A Reason for Courage*, a series of seven Bible study lessons that develop the biblical imagery of Revelation 14:6-13 with the purpose of engaging women in personal ethical and spiritual choices they will confront in the cosmic conflict that Revelation portrays as a great controversy between good and evil, God and the accuser.

Some passages of the Bible instantly warm your heart with encouragement and promise. Other passages are hidden treasures that take careful listening, deep thought, and even extra prayer just to understand what God is saying. To be sure, Revelation 14 is filled with hidden treasures, some buried deeper than others! But the Holy Spirit who gave the vision to John is with you to help you understand it better! Trust Him; the treasures are endless.

That means *A Reason for Courage* is only a guide for your personal encounter with Jesus. It is not a commentary or interpretation, even though it contains thoughtful comments and provides some helpful background. Your own prayerful study of the passages will be the source of your greatest blessing. To hear Him speaking to you most clearly—

PRAY before you begin. Pray if you don't understand a passage. If you're studying with others, pray as you listen to the discussion.

Dear Lord, I am coming to Your word without the ability to really understand what You want me to hear. I know it is rich with truth about You, about my own heart, and about the world around me. Send your Holy Spirit to help me learn and live what You will teach me today. AMEN.

LISTEN to the text. John's vision was meant to be heard and experienced. He wrote for your imagination! Don't be quick to find "the answer." Don't scan the comments to figure out what you're supposed to learn. Listen to the text until you've noticed everything John described:

Listen for the action, color, sound, emotion. He included it all.
Listen to what God was saying to the scattered believers in Asia Minor.

Only after you've "eavesdropped" what was taking place between Jesus, John, his angel-guide, and the early believers are you ready to listen to the message God has for you. The *Listen* questions have been provided to help you hear what the text says.



REFLECT on what God is saying to you. Your best reflections will take place as you think more carefully about what He might be saying to you, not just what you're feeling! So—

Reflect on what the text is saying to you about God.

Reflect on what it is saying to you about yourself and what God wants for you.

Reflect on how you can share what you are learning.

The *Reflect* questions have been provided to help you find personal meaning even in complex, difficult passages. Never bypass the opportunity to hear God speaking to you!

PRAY about what you've learned. Pray about what you hear God saying to you. Pray about what you don't yet understand. Thank God for giving you one-on-one instruction. Ask Him to show you how you can tell others what you've learned. You've probably heard that you should never open the Bible without prayer, but never close it without prayer either!

As you begin this study of the three angels' messages, first allow God's invitation of mercy to sink deep into your own heart so that you can be living proof of His message of mercy and hope to those around you.





THE PROCLAMATION OF

Three Angels

Revelation 14:6-13

⁶ 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—
⁷ 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.”

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.”

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

¹² Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘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.”



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A black and white photograph of an orchid flower, likely a Phalaenopsis, in the foreground. The flower is in sharp focus, showing its petals and the central column. In the background, other orchid flowers and leaves are visible but blurred. A large, light gray circular overlay is centered on the image, containing text. The text is in a serif font and is flanked by two white line-art branches with leaves.

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A REASON FOR *Courage*

INTRODUCTION

Does Anyone Know WHAT'S HAPPENING?

TO EXPLAIN

John the Apostle, who wrote the book we call Revelation, also wrote the Gospel of John and three short epistles in the New Testament. He referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20). He was considered the youngest of the twelve disciples and the only one still living when, at about 85 years old, he was banished by the Roman authorities to the island of Patmos. He was living there in exile when he received the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The phrase “the great controversy” refers to the conflict that began in heaven with Lucifer’s challenge to God’s government (Isaiah 14:3-27). It will be resolved only when God’s character and leadership are cleared, and the universe is cleansed of sin (Revelation 22:1-5). Our world—and our personal lives—are embroiled in that conflict.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ is the last book of the Bible and contains the vision John was given on the island of Patmos towards the end of his life. It is the story of the closing events of the great controversy, most of which had not taken place when John wrote it. That is why it is called “apocalyptic (last days) prophecy.” It is meant to be read or recited. The intense audio and visual details that John included engage the imagination in such a way that the listener can experience it almost as vividly as John did.

The seven churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 1:11) to whom John addressed the account of his vision were actual groups of believers in cities across Greece and Turkey at the time John wrote. They were the first to hear the account of his vision and no doubt found the messages meaningful to each of their situations. As a prophecy, though, the messages also describe each period of the Christian era from John’s time until the Second Coming.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

The verses we will be studying in this series describe only one small part of a tragic conflict that has engulfed heaven and earth for thousands of years. The three angels' messages that are recorded in Revelation 14 are part of a scene-within-a-scene that takes place at the very end of this conflict. The drama, with all its parts and players, can look so confusing that you may wonder how you can possibly understand it, much less find it meaningful.

But, as we open some of the most intriguing prophecies of the Bible, remember—

- All Scripture, prophecy especially, is given to build our faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15), and to give us light to understand what is really happening in the world (2 Peter 1:19).
- Scripture provides its own key for understanding the messages God has for us (Luke 24:44, 45).
- We don't need to understand everything about a text to hear something the Holy Spirit wants to teach us (Psalm 119:130).
- The clearest parts of the Bible help us understand the more difficult passages (Luke 24:44, 45 and Isaiah 28:9, 10).
- In the end, we will understand the Bible only with the constant help of the Holy Spirit who inspired it (2 Peter 1:21).



TO LEARN

As you study, you'll be invited to relate in two different ways to the verses we're studying. First you want to take time to LISTEN to the text (Revelation 1:3). Read the passages out loud. Absorb the full sound and action that John saw. More importantly, be quiet enough with your own thoughts so that you can hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you in the passage.

After listening carefully and prayerfully, at times you'll be invited to REFLECT on the passage in a personal way, which is an important part of personal Bible study.



HAVE YOU NOTICED?

If you're standing in the familiar space of your own world, surrounded by the people you love and the routines you follow, courage may seem to be what soldiers, fire-fighters, or rock climbers need. But you would have to have your curtains drawn and windows shut tight not to hear the sirens on the streets outside your world. Or to ignore the crumbling lives around you. Or to dismiss the rumble of world events in each day's news.

In fact, chaos and pain may be battering at your own home or threatening to crash through the peace of your own life.

Our world is not in a good place. Most people won't even argue with you about that. But everyone handles the unsettling thought differently. Some hope the next politician will help. Some figure this is how life happens. Some don't care as long as they're okay right now—until they're not. A few explain confidently that God knows.

But that can create more questions than answers. If God knows, what is He doing about it? How much does He know? Is it enough to fix things? Does He even care? Could He at least tell us what He knows?





THERE'S A REASON FOR COURAGE

Read Revelation 1:9-19

To our great blessing, God *does* know what is happening, He *does* care, and through a special Revelation of Jesus Christ, He *does* help us understand many things. In fact, if we know a little history and understand some of the action John described for us, we might be able to prepare for what is going to happen in the future!

But in the process of learning what God is about to *do*, we can miss knowing *who* He is, and what He wants to do *for us personally* at an unusual time in earth's story. We are not passive observers to the drama John saw. Whether we realize it or not, we are in the story and the message is personal.

Listen: How did John describe the majestic being who startled him that Sabbath on Patmos? (Revelation 1:9-15) How did Jesus identify Himself differently at the beginning of the vision than He did years earlier as the Messiah? (Revelation 1:17-18)

The Jesus John saw in vision is very different from the humble, approachable teacher who walked the paths of Palestine with fishermen, tax collectors, and others.

Reflect: How do you feel the Jesus of the Gospels is like the Jesus of Revelation? How is He different?

Our minds can hardly comprehend the Jesus of Revelation. John himself was terrified. But the brilliant and powerful being was not too mighty to bend down, touch John's shoulder, and assure him, "Do not be afraid" (Revelation 1:17). The horror and violence we see in John's vision—even in the short verses we will be studying—is very much part of our world. But we never want to get so distracted by the drama John saw that we fail to see the great hope and comfort that Jesus offers, if we accept it.

Do not be afraid for what you're seeing happening in the world around you. Do not be afraid as you meet the unknowns ahead. Jesus Christ Himself is in the midst of it all. Every victory you see in Revelation is for your sake. Every promise He will keep for you. He Himself will be the hope and the courage you need for everything that is ahead.

Reflect: What is the picture of Jesus that gives you the most courage?





WHAT GOD KNOWS

Read Revelation 1:1-8

You will never, ever know even a tiny fraction of what God knows (Isaiah 55:9). You probably are aware of times when you were not even sure *what you knew*! That's not meant to make you feel small. That's just a reminder of how resourceful and powerful God is and how much you need Him.

Listen: What phrases did John use to suggest what God knows? (Revelation 1:1, 3, 4, 8)

Reflect: Does the text give you any hint as to why Jesus wants to share some of what He knows?

HE KNOWS EVERYTHING

Jesus is aware of everything that's already happened to everyone since the world began. He also understands all that is taking place right now, this moment, to every living person. And, He understands in a way we simply don't comprehend, because He sees the future clearly now and knows all that will happen. Of course, He doesn't show us everything He knows, but He has a specific purpose for what He chooses to reveal.

Reflect: Why can you be at peace knowing that Jesus knows more than you do?

One reason God shares what He knows, including a glimpse into the future, is so that "when it does come to pass, you may believe" (John 14:29). He wants to prepare you to meet what is ahead (Matthew 24:25) and to give you courage in spite of what may be happening around you (Matthew 24:6).

But He has another reason.

GOD NEVER ACTS ALONE

Ever since our creation, God has chosen to engage humanity in everything He does for us. Adam worked the ground and planted seeds that God caused to grow. Noah built a boat from divine drawings. God used David and his five stones to rout the Philistine army.

So, John began his account by confirming that God never works alone. In fact, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit together send "grace and peace" (Revelation 1:4, 5) to the believers in Asia Minor. And throughout the vision, John repeatedly identified the activity of each of them. But interestingly, the three members of the Godhead didn't act on their own; they chose to send the blessing *through* John! (Revelation 1:1, 2). God works *for* humanity *through* humanity. The *divine* plan always calls for *human* involvement.

Of course, the supreme example of that divine-human relationship is found in Jesus Christ Himself, the perfect expression of divine-human cooperation (Revelation 1:5). In the great mystery of God's heart, the Revelation of Jesus Christ to an elderly prisoner on Patmos demonstrates how much He values a close working relationship with those He wants to save.

IT'S WORTH IT

God does not make a bargain with any of us that suggests "If you do this, I'll do that." However, John does share the spiritual principle that there is blessing in reading, hearing, and keeping the message of Revelation. The blessing comes in the personal impact it can have on your life, not because you know more than others or have all the symbolism figured out, but because you have seen Jesus more clearly.

Listen: What clues does the text provide as to what it means to "keep," or (in the Greek) to "guard, and keep on guarding" what is in this prophecy? (Revelation 1:3)

We usually guard what is valuable to us. Unfortunately, John's vision has been cheapened. It has become intriguing details to the curious, inside knowledge to some, or strange conspiracy theories to others. It only becomes truly valuable and worth guarding if you meet the same Jesus whom John saw—take Him to your heart and allow Him to change your life. "The time is near," John says, and the best protection for the event you are about to meet is to press close to Jesus.

LOVE DRAWS OUT LOVE

Re-read the hymn recorded in Revelation 1:6, 7. (If you love music, try singing it to a familiar melody, or create one.) As John introduced the vision to the believers in Asia Minor, he broke into a praise chorus. He knew that after experiencing the entire Revelation of Jesus Christ as he did, they would join him in praise that Jesus Christ has loved them, cleansed them from their sin, restored them to honor, and called them to represent Him to others.

Reflect: As you prepare to enter into a part of John's vision, ask God to keep your heart open so that you also can praise Him for His love, cleansing, honor, and calling. (Revelation. 1:5, 6)





WHAT GOD SHARES

John began his account by confirming the first thing we need to know. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is God's perspective of what is happening in our world. It's the account of God's focused activity to save our world. And John confirmed that what he was sharing is time sensitive.

Listen: How can you explain the 2,000 years that have passed since John was told that what he saw "must shortly take place"? (Revelation 1:1, 3, 7)

THE TIME FRAME

When John recorded his vision, the great controversy had already been raging for thousands of years. Even from his perspective it had gone on too long. About sixty years earlier, as Jesus was disappearing into the clouds above the Mount of Olives, the angels had promised He would return (Acts 1:11).

To help us, John gave us the time frame of his vision. It was about things that would take place "shortly" (Revelation 1:1) and would extend to Jesus' coming (Revelation 1:7).

For John to write as if it was already happening wasn't just his wishful thinking. The first scene in the vision of the seven churches and some of the scenes he would see later overlapped his own lifetime. Some of the events pictured in Revelation were already beginning to take place. Some would unfold in the centuries following John's vision. Some reveal what is taking place in our world right now. Some are waiting to happen. He was in a story that wasn't finished, but it had begun.

Reflect: How long have you known that Jesus is coming, and how comfortable are you to refer to His Second Coming as real, present, even in your lifetime?

THE CAMERA ANGLES

It's challenging to write about even a single event in history; an author writes hundreds of pages to describe the details of only a few days. But imagine that John had witnessed thousands of years of events happening in different places, involving billions of people, most of them living at different times. That doesn't count the challenge of describing what's happening in heaven too. For God to show it all to John—ahead of time, in probably just a few hours—required symbolism, representation, coding. Everything John saw was packed with as much information as possible in as descriptive and brief form as possible.

John's vision was even more complicated. Although he was shown thousands of years of events, he didn't see them all in sequence. At times one scene required the explanation of a much later event. Sometimes a panoramic overview froze in order for him to zoom in to focus on one part of the view. Sometimes the same plot replayed itself several times from different angles.

Listen: Scan through John's entire vision and notice how many times he wrote, "And I saw," "I turned to see," "after these things I looked," "Immediately I was in the Spirit," "So I wept much," "And I looked," "Now I saw," "After these things I saw," "Then I took," "Then I was given," "Then I heard," and so on—for 22 chapters! What encouragement did John receive that he could possibly understand what he saw and heard? (Revelation 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 29 and more)

Reflect: What assurance do you have that even though you can't explain everything in Revelation, you can understand what the Spirit wants to show you?

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS

John was not shown everything that would happen in the world's history. Many other things were taking place on earth while God was fulfilling the plans Revelation reveals—and God was active in the other places too. But you can assume John saw the most critical events taking place for the sake of the world's future, and essential for your salvation. "The words of this prophecy" (Revelation 1:3) are meant to reassure you that God is in control and to draw your heart into what God is preparing for you.

John was faithful to record everything he saw—details he didn't understand, scenes that words couldn't describe, grotesque creatures, heavenly beings, even God's throne. But, as the Holy Spirit inspired him, he recorded both simple messages of warning and hope as well as intricate, complex information for deep study.

You will never fully understand it all until you stand in eternity and see God's hand at work behind the scenes. Until then, you can join John in praising God. His love is not only bringing this world through its terrible ordeal but is also providing everything possible so as many as choose to can be saved too. "To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!" (Revelation 1:6).

BEGINNING WITH THE END

Just in case you might miss the point, even before the vision began John gave a glimpse as to where the Revelation of Jesus Christ eventually leads: He is coming again! (Revelation 1:7). Jesus is going to return as promised (Acts 1:11).

Imagine how John felt as he watched everything he had hoped for and preached about taking place. He had believed the promise and now, prophetically, he had seen how it would be fulfilled: Jesus keeps His word. He is coming back to finish what He had begun.

Listen: What important details did John want you to "see" about Jesus' second coming when he exclaimed, "Behold!" (Revelation 1:7)

Reflect: What does it mean to you to be able to witness, through John's vision, how God will fulfill His promise to return for you? How can prophecy be a double promise to your faith?

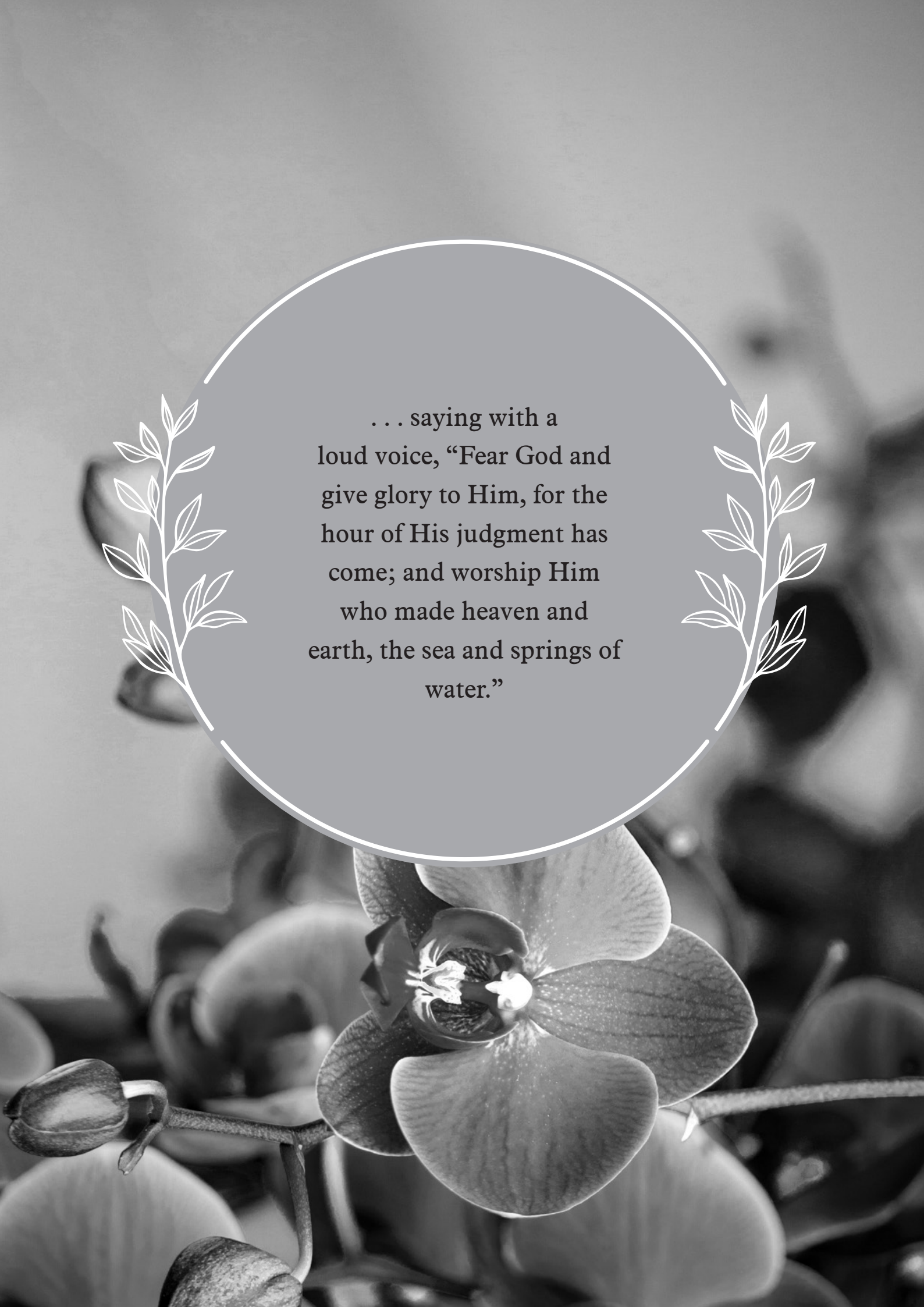




PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Father, I am in awe that You would reveal so much, so long ago, just so I can be prepared. I want to keep these things in my heart and to be blessed by this picture of Jesus—the Beginning and End, the First and Last. I want to anticipate, without fear or uncertainty, that amazing moment Jesus appears to fulfill every promise He has made. I want to say with John, “Behold!” Oh, I want to see You. I want to behold You!

But until that wonderful day, may I sense Your hand on my shoulder always assuring me, “Don’t be afraid.” I believe You. I draw my courage from You. I choose to live for You. In Your name and in Your strength, I pray, AMEN.



... 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."



THE COURAGE TO *Believe*

LESSON ONE

YOU ARE IN This Story

TO EXPLAIN

A chiasm or chiastic pattern is the organization of a story or thought where parallel ideas are presented in mirrored stair-steps, with the main point of the story appearing in the center. Chiasms are very common in the Bible as well as secular literature and are used to frame a main point.

Prophetic time is figured based on a day for a year (Ezekiel 4:5), making each of the time frames expressed in Revelation 12 – 14 calculate to 1260 days, meaning 1260 years:

REVELATION 12:6	REVELATION 12:14	REVELATION 13:5
1260 days	A time (a year of days or 360 days), Times (two years or 720 days), Half a time (180 days) $360+720+180=$ 1260 days	42 months (a month of 30 days) $30 \times 42=$ 1260 days

The three angels' messages is a phrase used to identify the entire scene in John's vision (Revelation 14:6-13) of three angels who appear in midair, turning John's attention from the redeemed standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. Their messages, coming together, build on each other to call attention to the judgment taking place in heaven, the dangers of Babylon, and the call to the Sabbath truth. As a single message, all three remain relevant and will be preached right up to the coming of "One like the Son of Man" and the harvest in Revelation 14:14 that depict the second coming of Jesus.

The Lamb is a reference to Jesus, our Savior. John the Baptist identified Him as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). He was represented by the sacrificial lamb in the sanctuary service, but He is also the triumphant Lamb that John saw throughout His vision.

TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

In the time markers John's vision provides, Revelation 12 and 13 contain prophecies of what would take place following John's death. In one of the clearest prophecies in Revelation can be seen the era of Christianity we know as the Dark Ages, the rise of America, and the re-emergence of the Roman Catholic Church as a world power "whose deadly wound was healed" (Revelation 13:12). These chapters provide a sobering picture of how thoroughly Satan has infiltrated both religious systems and civil powers to further his purposes. It is sobering information. It is not for judgment against individuals but to identify what Satan has used to promote his agenda and to prepare you for the issues that our world is confronting.

In response to that challenge, the Seventh-day Adventist Church identifies itself as God's selected movement to carry the messages of the three angels to the world just before the second coming of Jesus. The messages meet the issues John saw develop in Revelation 12 and 13, and they speak to people like those he describes in Revelation 14:1-5 who follow the Lamb anywhere He goes. That gives the Adventist Church a unique role in our world—to pass the messages on to others clearly and effectively and to invite a lost world to follow the Lamb.

But the church mission is *personal*. It happens through the personal mission of each one who has heard the messages, taken them to heart, and is willing to serve as a messenger of what the three angels share. That's why it is so important for you to understand what John saw and the message God has for you.



TO PREPARE

Read Revelation 12 and 13 in preparation for this lesson.



FOR FURTHER READING

Raoul Dederen, "The Three Angels in the Nineteenth Century," *Adventist Review*, October 2, 2020. <https://www.adventistreview.org/2010-26>.

George Knight, *A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventists*, Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1999.

Ellen G. White, "Why Was Sin Permitted?" *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33-43.





DON'T MISS THE POINT

Everyone loves a good story, but it can be hard to stay focused if it's long, detailed, and complicated. Even a simple experience from someone else's life can be hard to follow. Imagine how John must have felt trying to absorb the universe-size story the angel was guiding him through. Or what it took for him to write it all down describing the most important things he heard and saw. Maybe he felt something like you do as you try to imagine how you're going to make sense of it all.

Thankfully, John had the leading of the Holy Spirit in directing his experience, so you have help in understanding the main point.

THE SHAPE OF THE STORY

If you were to make an outline of John's vision, you would discover that the sequence of scenes he saw forms what Bible students call a *chiasm*. That means everything in Revelation 1-11 is mirrored in reverse in similar scenes in Revelation 15-22. That makes Revelation 12-14 the center of the chiasm, which is considered the most important part of the structure, the main point of the story. While some cultures build a story line to the end with the main point at the closing, the Bible writers were accustomed to organizing the story line around the mid-point, with the beginning and end moving from the center of the story line.

The striking organization of a vision that has so many random-looking scenes and uncommon actors helped John—and all who hear the vision—understand the critical, personal message it carries.

The *chiastic structure* also helps us understand why John's vision doesn't read like a world history book. The universe-size plot he watched unfold was more complicated than anything ever recorded here on earth. He witnessed countless real-world events, but not necessarily in the order they occur or as history might record them. He also saw activity in heaven that happens at the same time as events on earth. In addition, everything was hidden in symbols.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

To make it even more challenging, everything shared with John was from God's perspective! How thankful you can be that the Holy Spirit followed the common literary chiasm to organize such a complex, lengthy experience. It helps you understand what He wants you to hear.

Listen: Briefly scan Revelation 12 and 13, remembering it represents the center of the plot John is watching unfold. What can you clearly identify about the nature of the different actors John sees? What role do they take in relationship to God? What issues do they seem to raise?

Reflect: What similar issues do you see raised in the world around you? In your own life?

In a profound way, the chiasm also can be seen as an expression of God's grace. He knows the issues of the great controversy are incredibly complex, especially for sin-burdened minds. The structure itself provides a way for God to highlight the message He wants you to hear. He is saying—

"When you're living in the middle of this confusing story, this is what is most important for you to know. When the chaos threatens to confuse and overwhelm you, this is what you need to do. If you want to understand what is happening, this is what I'm doing."

The book of Revelation is often seen as one of the most unclear, even mysterious, books of the Bible. But within the organization of the vision are keys for understanding how you can be drawn into the safety of what God is doing and how you can understand your part in joining heaven's activity.

Listen: What confidence does the Bible give you that anything God reveals about Himself or His activity is for you personally and is intended to make a difference in your life? (2 Timothy 3:16)

A quick look at the scenes in Revelation 12 and 13 gives you the backdrop as to why the messages in Revelation 14 are so timely, and why they are meant for you personally: You live in one of the most intense points of the conflict that John was witnessing, and God wants you to come through it for eternity!





MOVING TOWARD THE MESSAGES

THE WOMAN AND THE CHILD

The scene John saw in Revelation 12 opened with a frightening encounter between a woman in labor and a dragon waiting to destroy her baby boy. When the woman's son was taken to heaven out of the dragon's reach, the woman became the object of the dragon's fury. She fled into hiding where heaven protected her (Revelation 12:6) or, as John described later, where she was cared for out of the dragon's reach (Revelation 12:24) for a time, times and half a time (compare with Daniel 7:25).

In the middle of this scene (Revelation 12:7-9), everything stopped. Evidently to help him understand the background of the conflict, John was shown a traumatic scene from the deep past—the war in heaven. The child and dragon had in fact met before; Michael had fought Satan in heaven. John recognized the devil, Satan, and the serpent as all the same character. When Satan was thrown out of heaven and his campaign was confined to earth, the serpent drew Adam and Eve into his rebellion.

But not for long. On the very territory Satan claimed as his, “the blood of the Lamb” overcame the intruder (Revelation 12:11). The dragon's doom was certain; he was enraged (Revelation 12:10-12).

Listen: What familiar Bible stories are being referred to by the baby's birth (Luke 2), the child's retreat to heaven (Acts 1), the activity of the serpent (Genesis 3), and “the blood of the Lamb” (Hebrews 9:14)?

Each confrontation in the scene seemed more decisive. The dragon was not able to kill the baby boy, the woman was protected from the dragon, and heaven rejoiced that the dragon had been overcome by “the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). But the war was not over.

Listen: What was the motivation for the dragon's fury by the end of this scene? Who became his specific target? (Revelation 12:17)

THE DRAGON AND HIS FORCES

John was probably still focused on the dragon's rage (Revelation 12:17) when he suddenly found himself standing “on the sand of the sea” (Revelation 13:1).

As if a camera were zooming in on the last scene of Revelation 12 and enlarging the frame for Revelation 13, John focused on a terrifying beast emerging out of the sea—a monstrous creature with ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns, and physical characteristics of a leopard, bear, and lion. With the influence and authority that the dragon gave to the beast, the beast was allowed to exert extraordinary power for 42 months—the same amount of time the woman in Revelation 12 was protected from the dragon. One of the beast's heads was wounded, but it healed. The whole world marveled and followed him (Revelation 13:1-10). John must have been overwhelmed, not only by the fury of the scene, but by the details that obviously had special meanings.

The beast coming out of the sea was terrifying enough, but John noticed “another beast” coming out of the earth (Revelation 13:11-17). This one was deceptive, with coercive powers. It looked like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. This second beast gave life and power to the first beast. This is not surprising because they had a lot in common; both beasts were tools of the dragon, both used force, both demanded worship. While the whole scene was filled with mystery, one thing was clear: The dragon had succeeded in gathering an intimidating force to make his war against the saints (Revelation 13:7).

Reflect: From what is described in these two scenes of John’s vision, why do you think the dragon would be so enraged by those who are obedient to God and have faith in Jesus?





IT'S PAST TIME

Most of the prophetic timeline John saw was marked off by a series of different trumpets, bowls, horses, seals, woes, and more. But here, in the center of the vision, John was told that this scene represents a certain time in history, for a specific length of days. The woman was given relief for 1260 days (Revelation 12:6). In what seems to be the same scene from a different angle, she was nourished in the wilderness for a time, times, and half a time (Revelation 12:14). Interestingly, the first beast wielded his blasphemous, destructive power for 42 months (Revelation 13:5).

PLEASE NOTICE

The repetition of this information three times, stated from a different perspective each time but always the same length of time, is highlighting the same event, but experienced by different actors. Here is the unmistakable signal to John and any observer. Here is a key to understanding this scene. This is important information. Please notice!

Listen: Describe what situation each time frame refers to:

- 1260 days (Revelation 12:6)
- Time, times, and half a time (Revelation 12:13)
- 42 months (Revelation 13:5)

If timing is important, when does the prophecy begin? When does it end? Even more importantly, why would anyone need to know?

Reflect: How is any of this information related to you and meaningful today?

The imagery in Revelation 12 is easy to identify even to a casual reader. The story of the Man Child depicted Jesus' coming to earth as a baby, His ascension after His death and resurrection, the dragon's fury against the early Christian Church.

CONNECT THE POINTS

What John saw recorded in Revelation 13, then, traces the apostasy of Christianity from the pure, biblical teachings of Jesus to the major world religious-political power of the Dark Ages. This prophetic time frame finds a remarkable connection to world events: In A.D. 538, the Roman Emperor Justinian decreed his leadership over spiritual as well as political matters, creating the religious-political power of the Holy Roman Empire that gave power to the Roman Catholic Church. This religious-political power dominated world and religious history for the next 1260 years. But as if following the prophetic timeline, one of Napoleon's generals entered Rome and took Pope Pius IV captive in 1798, officially ending the influence and authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

For 1260 years this power on earth—but certainly not the only one—was used by “that great dragon, the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan” (Revelation 12:9) to carry on his conflict with Christ and His followers (Revelation 12:17).

Listen: What phrases or references in Revelation 12 and 13 would indicate that the great controversy involves spiritual issues and personal spiritual decisions? (Revelation 12:11, 17; 13:4, 8, 16)





PROPHECY IS PERSONAL

Read Revelation 12:10-12

Prophecy can sound far removed from your own life, especially if most of the events happened long ago. But God uses prophecy *in order* to speak to you personally:

- He wants you to know that He is aware of and involved in our earth's experience.
- He wants you to know that He has a plan to save the world that will continue unhampered.
- He knows that the long view of earth's story will help you identify the issues more clearly and make better choices.
- He wants you to see your part in His plan and to accept it with courage.

Reflect: How can God's use of prophecy change how you see Him in your daily routine? Are you sure He is involved in your daily activities? How confident are you that He has a plan for you? On what do you base your daily decisions? How can you identify what He wants to do for you each day?

Beyond such daily assurance, though, God has a personal reason for revealing so much to you through John's vision. Consider the timeline of 42 months we've been looking at in Revelation 13:5. It ended in 1798, more than 200 years ago. Much of Revelation 13 has already taken place. Whatever the world is experiencing right now must be prophesied in the following scenes of John's vision. Before the appearance of the "One like the Son of Man" (Revelation 14:14) who is returning for the harvest, one significant event still has to take place.

That means you are living in the center of John's vision, where the closing scenes of earth's history are described. God has revealed what is about to happen—for your sake. While the great controversy rages around you, a conflict is taking place for your life. The battle is personal, and the messages are for you.

Listen: According to the loud voice in heaven, what two responses are able to meet the dragon's power and to overcome him? (Revelation 12:10)

Reflect: What does it mean for you to live in the power of the Lamb's blood and to meet the enemy by "the word of [your] testimony?"



We cannot save ourselves from the tempter's power; he has conquered humanity, and when we try to stand in our own strength, we shall become a prey to his devices; but "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name.

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 130.4



WHO ARE THESE?

Read Revelation 14:1-6

After John experienced the harrowing view of the beasts (Revelation 13:1, 11) and the hot breath of the dragon that gave them power (Revelation 13:2), he must have been relieved by the serenity and harmony of the next scene.

Listen: What did John notice first in this new scene? Where was it taking place and why would that make a difference? What words did he use to describe what he heard? What intriguing characteristics did John notice about those in this scene?

NOT WITHOUT THE LAMB

It's easy for us to be impressed by the credentials of this unique group; they are remarkable. They have attracted the attention—and envy—of countless Bible students and aspiring saints! However, notice that everything John identified about them is *in relationship to the Lamb*.

- They have His name on their forehead. They carry His identity, a likeness to His character (Revelation 19:13, 16; 22:4).
- John hears a voice like many waters. This is how he described the voice of Jesus in Revelation 1:4.
- Their song is about their redemption. They understand their great need for a Redeemer and are expressing their praise in song (Hebrews 9:12).
- They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They are obedient, surrendered to the Lamb, and live as He lived (Revelation 14:4).
- They are standing before the throne without fault. Their purity is not by their own achievement, but because of the covering of the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 19:13, 16; 22:4).

Reflect: Using a melody you know, create a verse of the song John heard that you might imagine the redeemed are singing.

Many have wondered who this remarkable group is, who gets to belong to them, and why they are so special. If we can't answer that right now, we can at least be sure of what is in the text. These are individuals who have surrendered everything to the Lamb. They are filled with praise for what He has done. They have high moral principles, impeccable integrity. They are redeemed.

They symbolize not only a far-off, heavenly reality, but a promise of the experience of those who respond to the three angels' messages and embrace all that God has done for them through Jesus.

Reflect: How would you describe how you would feel to be one of those who "follow the Lamb where He goes"? (Revelation 14:4).





THE LAST CALL

As the account of John's vision moves through Revelation 12 through 14, five important scenes follow closely behind the first beast's reign of power for 1260 years, which ended in 1798.

- The rage of the dragon against "the woman [and] the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17).
- A second beast, who spoke "like the dragon," that arises *after* 1798 (Revelation 13:11).
- A glimpse of the redeemed before God's throne (Revelation 14:1-5).
- **The proclamation of the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-13).**
- The appearance of "one like the Son of Man" and the harvest (Revelation 14:14).

You may not be able to explain everything John saw; he surely couldn't. But some things are obvious in his account: The dragon was furious, earth's conflict was coming to its end, the redeemed would be victorious through the Lamb. But before Jesus returned to claim this earth as His own (Revelation 14:14), He made one last appeal for anyone who would listen.





LOUD AND CLEAR

Read Revelation 14:6-13

In a fast rewind from the glorious picture on Mount Zion back to what was happening under the feet of the dragon and two beasts, John was suddenly distracted by a magnificent angel flying overhead—and then two more close behind. The three angels' messages were about to sound across the face of the earth.

This is the passage that has become the symbol of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its world mission. This is the scene which has, since the mid-1800s, inspired the founding of Adventist schools, hospitals, publishing houses, and churches all over the world.

YOUR HEART HEARS FIRST

But these messages were not given for institutions and organizations, however divinely appointed those can be. John heard a message for “those who dwell on the earth.” The call was to individuals who, as the vision confirmed, would certainly be caught in the downward spiral of the human systems around them if they weren't warned. The appeal was for a critical personal decision. With a message this urgent, anyone who would respond would have every reason to quickly pass it on.

Listen: What in the verse might indicate that sinful human beings in need of Jesus deliver the messages the angels bring? (Revelation 14:6)



No one hears the voice of these three angels' messages for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working in harmony with the universe of heaven. Men and women, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and sanctified through the truth, proclaim them in their order.

—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 429.1

The original Greek word, *aggelos*, refers to angel or messenger. It is not extraordinary in the Bible for God to send His messages through earthly messengers. In keeping with God's way of working, those who have embraced the messages themselves are God's best messengers for reaching others.

As you begin this study of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, first let God's invitations of mercy sink deep into your own heart so that you can be living proof of a message of mercy and hope for those around you.





PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Father, I am overwhelmed to realize where I'm living in our world's history! I don't know all that means, but I know where in the story I want to appear. I want to follow You wherever You go. I want to be pure. I want to live honestly. I want to be covered with the blood of the Lamb, faultless before Your throne. I am weak and helpless to be any of that on my own. I accept all You have done for me, and all You want me to become. May I trust that You have everything I need to fulfill my part!

In Your powerful name I pray, AMEN.

A black and white photograph of an orchid flower, likely a Phalaenopsis, in the foreground. The flower is in sharp focus, showing its petals and the central column. In the background, other orchid flowers and leaves are visible but blurred. A large, light gray circular overlay is centered on the image, containing text. The text is framed by two white line-art branches with leaves, one on the left and one on the right, extending from the circle's edge.

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.”



THE COURAGE TO *Believe*

LESSON TWO

God Needs LIVING EVIDENCE

TO EXPLAIN

The everlasting gospel is the eternal good news that God has demonstrated His true character of love (John 3:16) in providing for our salvation through Jesus. This news is not only about Jesus' coming to earth, but also about His work in heaven right now as our High Priest standing in our place, pleading the case before God of each sinner who has accepted His sacrifice in their place.

Judgment is a central theme in the Bible that refers to the steps God takes to lead the universe through the process of resolving the accusations made against Him (Revelation 19:6, 7; see also Ellen G. White, "Why Was Sin Permitted?" *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33-43), and to defend those who have chosen to identify with Him (Revelation 18:20). Although different phases of judgment appear in the Bible, the first angel is announcing the investigative judgment or pre-Advent judgment that takes place before the second coming of Jesus. This is the phase of judgment depicted by the Day of Atonement of the Hebrew sanctuary service where Jesus enters the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary to offer atonement for those who have accepted His life and death in their place.

The 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 12 contains the timeline that points to 1844 as the beginning of the pre-Advent judgment in heaven, where the lives of those who have claimed to follow Jesus are examined to determine if they have accepted Jesus' righteousness as part of their life and can be saved.

Those who dwell on the earth is a phrase used by John to describe those who live by earthly principles, as opposed to others he identifies as "saints" or "blessed," who live by heaven's principles.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

During the early 1800s, Bible students from all denominations came to an understanding of the first angel's message as a warning of a judgment to come. Many recognized that the time prophecies of both Daniel and Revelation had ended, and that the world was entering the time of the end. A handful of believers understood the prophecy to be referring to the Second Coming, and they began preaching He would return in October of 1844.

The Great Disappointment that followed drove some back to a study of the Bible. Their prayerful search resulted in an understanding of the first angel that not only proclaimed the beginning of Jesus' work as High Priest in the heavenly judgment, but also an understanding of the heavenly sanctuary in salvation history, a call to worship the Creator through the Sabbath truth, and the soon and visible return of Jesus.



TO LEARN MORE

Ellen G. White, "Facing Life's Record," *The Great Controversy*, 479-491.

Ellen G. White, "In the Holy of Holies," *The Great Controversy*, 423-432.

The Book of Hebrews

Leviticus 16, "The Day of Atonement"



THE GRACE OF WARNINGS

You've probably held tightly onto a squirming little hand trying to twist out of yours as you walk along the side of a busy road. Or you've caught a toddler's shirt as he's about to bolt into a busy parking lot. You might have lifted a small chin to look up at you as you describe with a shudder how big and dangerous cars can be, how terribly sad it would be if someone got hurt. You wouldn't risk making light of what could happen, and you wouldn't need to exaggerate the risks. You know you're talking about threats, danger, pain, and death that are real and horrifying.

No one needs to exaggerate what sin causes either, especially God, who has experienced the full strength of the enemy's power. Like any picture you might draw for a toddler about the tragic consequences of standing in the path of a car, God's message to you is as clear as possible, even blunt. It's hard to look at the harsh end of poor choices, and John's vision will do that honestly, forthrightly.

But before God asks you to do that, He gives you a striking picture of grace. He has sent a last, urgent message for you to get out of the way of danger and to hold on to all that He's provided for you so you can be safe—and saved.





ALWAYS GOOD NEWS

Read Revelation 14:6

John must have been closely inspecting the group following the Lamb in the scene that opens Revelation 14. They weren't just good singers. He noticed remarkable character traits—pure, faultless, without any deceit, completely surrendered to the Lamb (Revelation 14:3-5). He apparently was also impressed with the song they were singing. It was new to him, unfamiliar. He realized no one could even learn it without going through what they'd experienced (Revelation 14:3).

But his curiosity about those following the Lamb was interrupted by three magnificent angels flying overhead calling loudly. Even if they seemed to be interrupting, heaven was sending the three angels intentionally to bring a sobering contrast to the beautiful scene John had just enjoyed. He was about to hear a warning of all warnings of what will happen to those who choose *not* to follow the Lamb.

AN ECHO OF JESUS

The three angels John heard overhead had each given a separate, specific message. But the messages came to earth as one cohesive message. The first message prepared hearts for the second message. The second message was necessary to understand the third. The second and third messages developed the first. Together they were warning, pleading, inviting.

Listen: What part of the first angel's message might be considered a warning? A command? An invitation? (Revelation 14:6)

Reflect: If you were hearing this message for the first time, what part of it would you notice the most?

The first message signaled the nature of all three messages: All were to be proclaimed as clearly and loudly as possible. Every nation, kindred, tongue, and people needed to hear all three of the messages. Each one of them offered hope for anyone on earth who will respond. Together all three were an expression of heaven's longing to give every individual on earth one more chance to choose.

Listen: In what way does Revelation 14:6 echo Jesus' final instructions to His disciples? (Matthew 24:14)

Together the angels' messages carried the same message Jesus had given His followers: They had been given a message to be preached to all the world until the end! At the time, He was talking to those who had weathered His death and were still processing His resurrection. They were the ones who would preach until it could be said they had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

But Jesus was also talking to those who at the close of earth's history would re-discover the truths of the Bible and hear in these last day appeals a special message for the world. Because John noticed in his vision that all three of the angels' sober messages were carried with the power of the gospel!



These are a sacred trust to be communicated to the world.
The three angels' messages of Revelation 14 represent the people who accept the light of God's messages and go forth as His agents to sound the warning throughout the length and breadth of the earth.

—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, 455.2

IT IS GOOD

Listen: Even though the messages sound sobering, what is the first thing John noticed about the angels that would suggest they came with hope? (Revelation 14:6, first part)

Before John could even *hear* what the angels were saying, he could see they came with *good news*, translated "gospel" from the Greek word *euaggellion*. He recognized that the gospel was what motivated them and what gave their message power and purpose.

John didn't use the term "gospel" in any of his other biblical writings, but he knew everything Jesus had ever done was good news. Everything Jesus stood for was good news. Everything Jesus had ever meant to him was good news. Jesus was the reason the messengers had any appeal at all.

Listen: How did Jesus—the same Jesus of John's Revelation—refer to "the gospel" when He was here on earth? (Matthew 24:14, Mark 1:14, Luke 4:18 compared with Isaiah 61:1).

Reflect: What does "the gospel" mean to you? How can "the everlasting gospel" carry even more personal meaning?

A message supported by the good news of the gospel is rooted in all that heaven has done or is ever going to do for those on the earth.

- It is good news that God in Christ Jesus created a world of beauty and a race of beings in His image, in relationship with Him (Genesis 1:26, Colossians 1:16, 17).
- It is good news that in response to sin's tragic sentence, God's love would not abandon our darkened world (John 3:16).

- It is good news that God came to earth as one of us to reveal what He is really like and to accept the shame and guilt of each broken soul (Isaiah 53).
- It is good news that He met death, broke the power of the grave (Revelation 1:18), and is now in heaven representing us before God's throne (Hebrews 8:1).
- It is good news He promised to return again (Acts 1:11), and finally, to cleanse the universe completely of every sin (Revelation 21:4).

LIVING THE POWER

The best part, however, of seeing messengers who "have" the good news is the realization that they are carrying more than information or even prophetic insight. They themselves have received the gospel, the very news that prompts the message. The messages have been absorbed and demonstrated in the life of the messenger. What better support can you give to the message you're carrying than to be living the power of the message?

Reflect: Return to Isaiah 61:11, the passage Jesus used to explain what the gospel accomplishes in the lives of those who receive Him. What would it mean for you to "have" the gospel in your life?

The messages are sober warnings, but they come from a God who is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). In the last moments of this universal conflict, He has sent one last message of appeal, an invitation, and He will send it out carried by the lives of messengers *who themselves have known the power of the gospel*.

God knows that a message you yourself understand and embrace is the most effective evidence for the power and value of the message you share. You are the best living proof, the finest demonstration of what the gospel is. The blood of the Lamb, the grace of a self-sacrificing God, has the power to transform and save a sinner despite the odds. That is wonderful, good news, especially when it's displayed in a living witness!





WHY SO LOUD?

Even though John described the fury and rage of the dragon, the heat of his breath, and the power and violence of the beasts, he offered no audio for us to hear with those scenes. But how interesting that the Holy Spirit provided John with an impressive soundtrack whenever heaven spoke. Over and over throughout his vision, John heard “a loud voice,” or a voice like thunder or many waters, a mighty angel’s voice, heavenly announcements, crying saints, and a messenger in mid-air “saying with a loud voice.”

A CLEAR MESSAGE

The word translated “loud” in Revelation 14:6 is the Greek *mega*, from which we get the word *megaphone*, used for sound amplification. But the purpose of a megaphone isn’t just for volume. A powerful message is only good if it’s understood. Indistinct information can become misinformation. Whatever the messengers say must not be confusing or misleading.

God knows that heaven’s message is “heard” best when the messengers themselves serve as living proof of the message they carry. When the messengers “have” the gospel, God can speak the loudest. The message is never just information or facts; it must be a living reality. Through the three dimensions of a real-time demonstration of a life transformed, God can give the best answer to the dragon’s accusations. The messenger is living proof of what God is like and what He’s done to defy the dragon’s wrath.

Reflect: How can you be “living proof” of the gospel when you’re imperfect, still a sinner? Consider the role of the Lamb in Revelation 14:1-6.

ABSOLUTELY EVERYONE

John noticed that heaven’s chosen audience for these messages was very broad; this eternal message was meant for a universal audience. It is not enough that this message was to be proclaimed to “those who dwell on the earth,” a reference used in Revelation for those following human systems. John even identifies those who are to hear it: Every national group. Every ethnic subgroup or family clan. Every language group. Everybody. Nobody was to be left out.

Listen: Compare the choir members whom John heard singing “a new song” in Revelation 5:8, 9 with those meant to hear the three messages of Revelation 14. In what ways are the two groups similar? How might both references be related to the group who sang “a new song” in Revelation 14:1-6?

Reflect: What does the universal nature of the redeemed say to you about your Redeemer? What does it say about our human tendency, from the children of Israel on, to be spiritually exclusive, racially divided, economically classed, or . . . ?

This last-day scene wasn't the first time God had envisioned a message going to the entire world. Many centuries earlier, God had selected a messenger group "through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3). Some among them embraced the message as if it were only for themselves. The story of Abraham's call and Israel's failure fills most of the Bible.

But Jesus called others, renewed His commission (Matthew 24:14, Matthew 28:18-20), and poured out the power of Pentecost. Even still, Peter—and many others with him—wrestled with what it meant to give heaven's good news to everybody (Acts 10). No distinctions.

Reflect: Why is it challenging to reach out to those who are different from you? Who is the "other" nation, tribe, tongue, and people in your world? Do you know of anyone who heard the gospel because someone else had reached beyond her own world?





WHO NEEDS JUDGMENT?

Not until we stop and listen to the actual message of the first angel is it clear, even though it isn't a time prophecy, that the message is time sensitive. In addition to all the instructions it contains, the message is being given **"for [because] the hour of His judgment **has come**"** (Revelation 14:7).

That kind of announcement, coming after the final time prophecy in the Bible and before the harvest of the world, should get everyone's attention: Judgment is happening, and this is an appeal to prepare. The messages to "those who dwell on the earth" (v. 6) are directly related to what is happening in heavenly places. God is initiating something in heaven that is certain to affect everyone on earth, no matter their nationality, their family circle, their mother tongue, or their people group. The message has arrived at the very time of the event, and absolutely everyone is involved.

To most of us, the thought of judgment creates pictures of courtroom proceedings, condemning evidence, sentences, and punishment in the name of justice. But the Greek word *krisis*, translated "judgment," simply means decision. While the Bible often talks about a day of judgment—or a specific time that determines the consequences of each person's decisions—it also uses the word judgment to describe the decision-making process. In fact, at times the judgment, or decision, that takes place is positive.

Listen: What are some ways that judgment is referred to in the Bible?

- *The purpose of Aaron's breastplate of judgment (Exodus 28:29, 30)*
- *King David's request (Psalm 119:66)*
- *The three things the Lord exercises (Jeremiah 9:24)*
- *The Ancient of Days' action regarding the saints (Daniel 7:22)*





IT'S ALL ABOUT JUDGMENT

Judgment is a major theme of the Bible. It's not about one day or one frightening event, though. The whole record of the Bible is to give us as clear a picture as possible of God's judgments, or decisions, in relation to the problem of sin. He sent Adam and Eve away from the Garden (Genesis 3). He flooded the earth in its wickedness (Genesis 6-9). The ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah leave their own testimony (Genesis 19:24). Israel felt God's judgment in response to their rebellion (Jeremiah 11:1-5). The list could be very, very long.

At the same time, Abraham acknowledged that God is "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25). God gave Moses the instructions for the sanctuary service to illustrate to Israel the judgment process that protects those who are covered by the blood of the Lamb (Hebrews 9:6-12). Daniel gave us a vivid picture of the judgment taking place in heaven where God is able to rule in favor of His holy people (Daniel 7:22—"the saints of the Most High").

These decisions, or judgments, show you His character, His heart. He wants you to know what to expect from Him so you can trust Him. The better you understand His decisions, the more confident you will be in sharing His love.

Listen and Reflect: Select any story in the gospels of the thousands of decisions we know Jesus made and identify what you learn about God. (For example, John 8:1-11)

DECISIONS GO BOTH WAYS

Of course, God's judgments are both positive and negative; any decision He makes can either save or condemn. His judgments (decisions) have brought us the incredible plan for Him to accept the price of our sins; He will be able to judge favorably those who have accepted what He has done. But those who don't will be left on their own in this conflict. They are unprotected from what the enemy provides—death and destruction.

Unlike the picture many have of a terrible Judgment Day far in the future, the Bible records how God's judgments (decisions) reveal a process that became active as soon as sin arose, a plan rooted in the nature and character of God. It's a plan that will be in full effect until the universe is at peace once again.

God wants a safe universe free from doubts, questions, or risks. He wants all to understand the real nature of Satan's accusations against Him so that every intelligent being of the universe can declare that God is just and true and loving.

Listen: What is the focus of the hymn of praise John hears later in his vision? (Revelation 15:2-4)

Reflect: Instead of praising God only for what He has done for you, praise Him for Who He is. Share with someone what you've learned in your Bible study about Him, His character, His motives.

IF IT WEREN'T FOR JESUS

While the world around us assumes judgment is punishment, the Bible shows that every step of the judgment process, including the one the first angel announced, is centered around Jesus. He is both the foundation and expression of God's most decisive action, or judgment, in relating to sin. To the universe's astonishment, He didn't come "to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

When God made the decision to become one with us (Matthew 1:23), He also—even as the Judge—accepted the judgment reserved for the condemned and became "sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In His great love for the fallen world (John 3:16), God pronounced the greatest judgment of all—the death of Jesus on the cross—and offered Himself.

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 764.2 and 3.

GOD'S JUDGMENTS BEFORE THE CROSS

Every judgment in the Old Testament—the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the captivity of Israel, and more—reveals how He will deal with sin and save the sinner.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE CROSS

This is the judgment on which all of God's judgments hinge when God Himself in Jesus accepted all humanity's sins and received the judgment on the Cross that you and I deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21).

GOD'S JUDGMENT OF LIFE DECISIONS

This is a judgment that takes place with the decision each person makes to accept or reject what Jesus has done to offer them eternal life (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

THE PRE-ADVENT JUDGMENT

In this phase of judgment just prior to Jesus' coming, Jesus presents to the heavenly court the life records of those who have claimed to follow Jesus. Before the entire universe, each name is examined as to how they lived out their claim (Daniel 7), to determine if they have truly accepted Jesus' life as their own and are safe to save.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

His coming is when the judgments that have already been made are implemented based on each person's decision and the life they led. Jesus will award eternal life to those who have accepted His salvation and those who have refused will die at His coming.

THE MILLENNIUM JUDGMENT

All those who are saved are given an opportunity to examine the records of the lost and confirm that God's judgments have been true and righteous (Revelation 20:1-6).

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

This takes place as the New Jerusalem is descending to the earth following the millennium. The wicked will be raised from the dead and Satan will gather them to surround and attack the holy city. However, when in the presence of God's throne and before the entire universe, all the wicked will acknowledge that God is just and true and that they deserve to die (Revelation 20:7-10).

The scene continues: In anger all who have chosen loyalty to Satan turn on him, suddenly aware that he is the cause of all sin and suffering. He becomes the object of their rage.

Only then. Only then when the universe is in complete agreement, only then when everyone understands that God is all He ever claimed to be. Only then does God bring the final judgment of a consuming fire on the wicked. Sin and sinner are no more. The universe rests, finally at peace.

Listen: What does the picture in Revelation 21:1-4 tell you about the judgment process God is overseeing in order to get to this point?

Reflect: What have you learned about God as you consider the first angel's announcement of the judgment that "has come," and the further judgments that our world faces?





GOD'S BEST EVIDENCE

A process so broad and thorough makes it clear that the judgment God is overseeing involves the entire universe. The drama of the ages is about much more than just your salvation or even this world's relief. The Bible reveals a clear picture of how carefully and soundly God is working to expose the enemy's lies and to settle any doubts about who He is and what He is like.

Satan has challenged God Himself. He has accused God of being an exacting, arbitrary ruler. God's character of love has been maligned by Satan's lies and misrepresentations. His law has been pronounced too exacting. Satan has demanded the death of every sinner. So, before God continues in the salvation of anyone, He allows the opportunity for everyone—in heaven and on earth, fallen and unfallen alike—to understand the real nature of Satan's charges. He invites the universe to inspect the fairness and rightness (righteousness) of the salvation of those who have accepted what He has done for them.

NOT WITHOUT AN ADVOCATE

The pre-Advent or investigative judgment involves the unfallen, intelligent beings and, as the angel announces, takes place just before the Second Coming. This phase, which began in 1844 according to the time prophecy of Daniel 7, is the judgment the first angel is announcing. It is the heavenly event that is mirrored by the Day of Atonement in the Hebrew sanctuary service.

With all time prophecies on earth at an end, the focus of the entire universe turns to heaven expectantly. Jesus, now our heavenly high priest serving in the heavenly sanctuary, takes His place before God's throne. The Bible describes a daunting picture of a courtroom, a Judge, a book of record, a ruling, and a sentence (Daniel 7:9, 10, 21, 22, 26). But your Advocate is present too. Beginning with Adam and moving through all those who have ever claimed Jesus' name, He stands in place of each one who has truly accepted His blood for their sin and His power to live like Him (Hebrews 9:24).

Listen: What part of the courtroom scene is referred to elsewhere in the Bible, and what would that role involve? (1 John 2:1, 2)

Reflect: What does that mean to you as you imagine your life being exposed before the heavenly court?

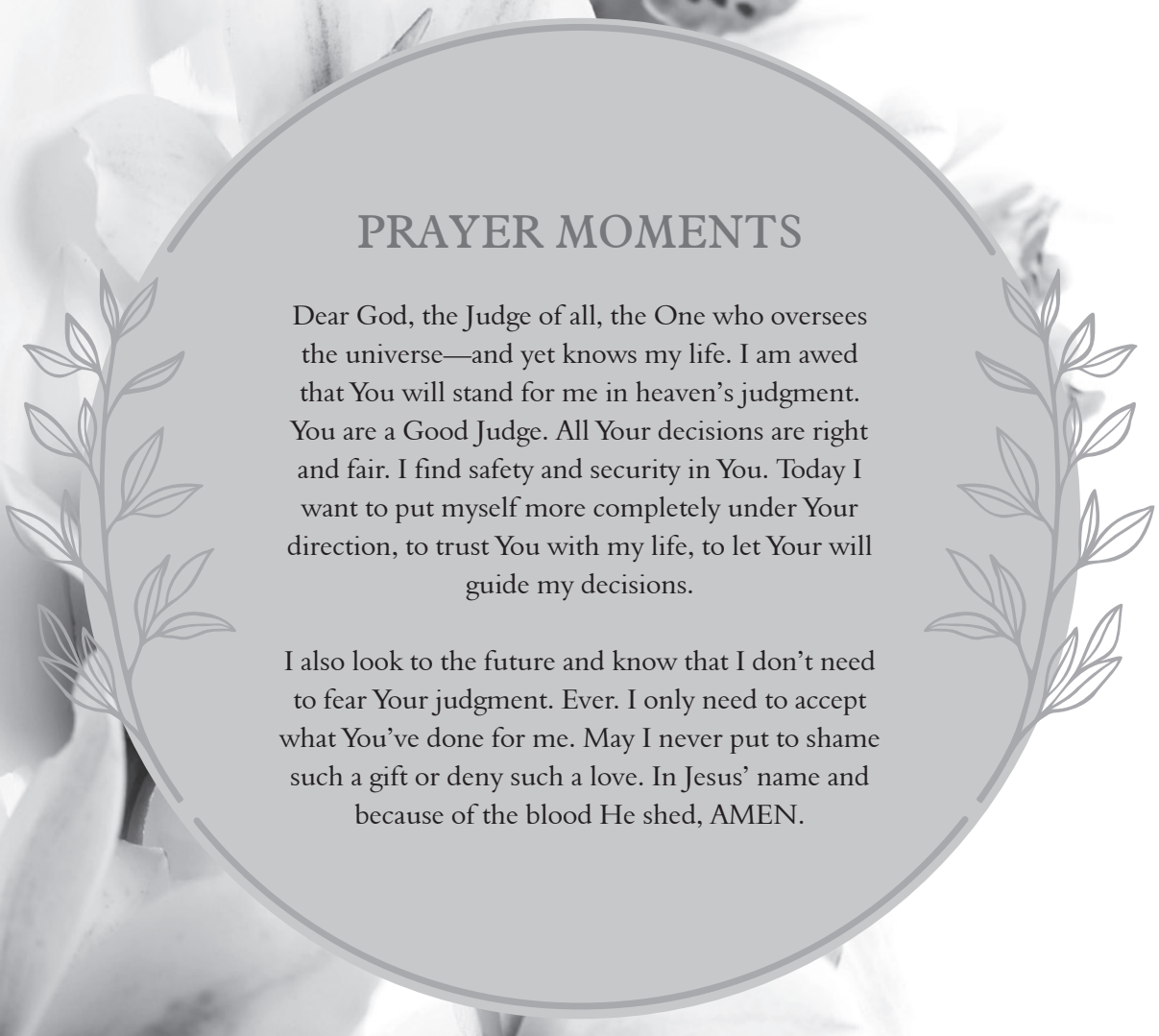
The comforting part of this unusual heavenly scene is that Jesus is standing there representing you in the heavenly courts. He is One with the Eternal Judge and forever One with humanity, and He is saying:

"This is _____ (your name), Father.
She daily accepted My death as hers and received My power in her life
to live and grow in My righteousness. She is safe to save for eternity."

The record of your life, covered and growing in Jesus, is the strongest evidence God has in this heavenly judgment setting to show that His love has provided enough to save humanity, one person, one decision at a time.

Reflect: Considering all that Jesus has gone through to represent you fairly, how does that shape your desire to represent Him well to those around you?





PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear God, the Judge of all, the One who oversees the universe—and yet knows my life. I am awed that You will stand for me in heaven's judgment. You are a Good Judge. All Your decisions are right and fair. I find safety and security in You. Today I want to put myself more completely under Your direction, to trust You with my life, to let Your will guide my decisions.

I also look to the future and know that I don't need to fear Your judgment. Ever. I only need to accept what You've done for me. May I never put to shame such a gift or deny such a love. In Jesus' name and because of the blood He shed, AMEN.



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, . . .



THE COURAGE TO *Choose*

LESSON THREE

He's the Only One WORTHY OF YOUR WORSHIP

TO EXPLAIN

The Sabbath commandment is one of the Ten Commandments God gave from Mount Sinai to the children of Israel and the only commandment that provides a reason for observing it. "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" (Exodus 20:8-11). This reference to God as Creator of all things is also found in the first angel's message (Revelation 14:6) that calls everyone to worship "Him who made heaven and earth, the sea, and springs of water." The two passages together link Creation, the Sabbath commandment, and the last-day call to worship God in a powerful association that soundly responds to Satan's accusations against Him.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, when the prediction of Jesus' return on October 22 did not materialize, some Advent believers went back to the Bible to understand what the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 really meant. Through long hours of personal Bible study, they prayerfully concluded that the end of the 2300 day prophecy in Daniel 8 actually marked the beginning of a new phase of the judgment process and, following the timeline of Revelation 12 and 13, it is the same judgment referred to in Revelation 14:6. As they discovered the whole system of truth revealed in the earthly sanctuary, they concluded that Daniel 8 refers to Jesus entering the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary where He is reviewing the names of each one who has ever claimed His name, beginning from ages past to the present generation. This investigative

phase of the judgment, carried out before the watching universe, is to provide evidence that Christ's sacrifice is effective in bringing sinners into harmony with God through forgiveness of their sin, and His transforming power in their lives. In the process of this deeper study of these passages, the searchers discovered the Sabbath truth and the nearness of the Second Coming.



FOR FURTHER READING

Ellen G. White, "Heralds of the Morning," *The Great Controversy*, 299-316.

Ellen G. White, "An American Reformer," *The Great Controversy*, 317-342.

Ellen G. White, "A Great Religious Awakening," *The Great Controversy*, 355-374.

Ellen G. White, "Why Was Sin Permitted?" *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 33-43.





THE COMPASSIONATE COMMAND

Read Revelation 14:6

In a world of politically correct courtesies, commands usually come only from the barked orders of a military leader or the executive decisions of a dictator. It can be hard to hear any compassion or even personal consideration in the terse commands of the first angel's message: Fear God. Give glory to Him. Worship Him.

But trust God's heart; each is filled with His longing to help you prepare for what is ahead at the most critical time of earth's history. That's why it's worth considering the assurance that these three simple commands truly represent—

The Judge is on your side. Can you imagine a judge who will sit down with you before a hearing and explain what you can do in order for him to rule in your favor? It's an amazing act of grace that the One presiding over the judgment that "has come" (Revelation 14:7) also gives you the opportunity to cooperate with Him as your case proceeds. That's not because He's slack on the rules, but because He's provided for your defense and rehabilitation. The warning of a judgment to come contains detailed information for how to meet the Judge with confidence.

God wants to be clear. Like the Ten Commandments that they mirror, the messages of Revelation 14 are unmistakable. These are distinct, direct statements. God wants you to know how you can relate to Him meaningfully, so He speaks clearly. These aren't deep essays that need special interpretation. He doesn't use complicated reasoning. His commands are simple.

This is urgent. Of course, with the impending crisis, God doesn't want to mislead you with soothing, pleasant words. Heaven's message is urgent. It is critical that you know the issues, and that you are prepared. The more He cares about you, the more urgent is His appeal to you. He is not willing that any of His children are lost because they did not have sufficient warning. A fire alarm is piercing, not to irritate you but to save you.

You are loved. The doubts Lucifer first raised in heaven accused God of being oppressive and His demands excessive. He claimed that God's government functioned for God's benefit alone and at everyone else's expense. God's response to such a challenge has been to demonstrate to the universe in every way possible that He dearly loves His creation. Selfless, giving love is the foundation of His government. Everything He does is for the good and blessing of His creation.

Listen: What blessings does God promise alongside some of His strongest commands?

- Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12)
- Bring all the tithes (Malachi 3:10)
- Fear God and keep His commandments (Deuteronomy 5:29, 33)
- Walk in My ways (1 Kings 2:3)
- Obey all My regulations (Deuteronomy 12:28)

Reflect: Have you ever done what God asked without knowing why or how it could help you? Do you feel you were giving resigned compliance or trusting obedience?

When God's commands seem arbitrary and you don't see any logical reason for following them, there's still one thing you can trust—at least if you know anything about God's heart. He wants what is best for you (Jeremiah 29:11-12). He will never ask you to do what is not for your good. The Bible's record of His faithfulness to others and His promises to you provide a "revelation" of what He is like, and why you can trust Him. If you ever doubt it, spend time in His Word and learn how He has shown His love to others.

FEAR GOD

If you see God as a loving heavenly Father, *fear* is not exactly the word you would associate with Him. If you see God as harsh and overbearing, the command to fear Him might seem to confirm all your uneasiness about Him. Why would He give such a command to anyone?

It's true that sometimes the Bible uses the word *fear* to mean terror, dread, trembling, anxiety, or foreboding. Far more often, though, *fear* carries the meaning of reverence and respect, which sounds far less threatening. But, underlying that reverence is a rich, powerful motive that completely engages the heart:

Listen: How does Moses use the word "fear" in Deuteronomy 10:12? How does he associate fear with a person's behavior and heart?

In the Bible, then, fear is your best, most appropriate, response to a holy God. Humble, loving obedience is how that kind of fear is best expressed. In fact, after the children of Israel had trembled at God's declaration of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, Moses appealed to them to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Fear, prompting your complete surrender, accurately acknowledges the great difference between who He is and who you are.

Reflect: Why do you obey traffic laws? Environmental laws? Nature's health laws? The Ten Commandments?

It's possible to obey man-made laws for many different reasons: Perhaps an authority requires it. Or you don't want the consequences of not obeying. Or everyone around you expects you to obey. But to fear God means to take Him seriously.

He is much, much greater than you are. He has wisdom you can't comprehend, unlimited power you desperately need, and love beyond anything you've ever known. Because He is big enough to fear, you are safe surrendering everything to Him and following wherever He leads. If you ever doubt it, the Cross reminds you that the infinite power He held, the honor He was due, even His eternal identity was given up willingly to become a murdered slave (Philippians 2:5-8).

The more you fear Him, the more greatness you see in Him. The more you realize what He has given for your sake, the more you can trust His rulership in your life.

GIVING GOD GLORY

The twisted picture of glory that pulses out of the neon colors of a rock concert or the roaring bleachers of a sports stadium can easily distort the glory God invites us to give to Him. Does that mean you celebrate God as the biggest hero? Or that you should sing more up-beat praise songs, gather a larger crowd, applaud longer?

If glory is something you—a sinful, broken human being—are supposed to give God, how could you possibly honor Him with more than He already has? Even the suggestion sounds arrogant. But it's clearly the urgent plea of the first message. The opportunity for you to give God glory is one of the most amazing accomplishments of His plan of salvation.

To be honest, His view of glory is very different from the glory we usually give the rich and famous.

Listen: What did Moses "see" when God showed him His glory? (Exodus 33:18-23, 34:6, 7)

This is a profile of God—what He is like, His important qualities, how He relates, His character. That is His glory. Nothing honors Him more than for His creation to reflect what He is like. While His glory, His character is the focus of Satan's accusations, it's also the strongest evidence God can give to refute those charges. That's why the plan of salvation provides not only forgiveness for the full penalty of your sin, but power to become more like your Savior, more like God Himself.

The first message is a plea to let God create within you the very qualities that distinguish Him from the accuser and to accept His power to become more like Him and affirm by your life what He is like.

Reflect: Look over the qualities of the "glory of God" that Moses saw in Exodus 33 and 34 and consider how much God is helping you to reflect those same characteristics in your life.

Impossible? Beyond your imagination? As we will see throughout the angels' messages, God does not give a command without the power to fulfill it.

WORSHIP HIM

The command in the first message to worship God carries a subtle acknowledgement. Human beings, no matter their nation, tribe, language, or people, are designed to worship. Why else would God be so specific about worshipping Him?

Worship is understood as a reverence or awe towards something divine, a devotion. But it can also be a thing, a thought, an achievement, a person. The history of faiths and philosophies gives us a record—whether for good or ill—that everyone will worship something, anything. The object of your worship, whether it's sacred or secular, will be your focus, where you place your affections, where you invest.

Of course, in the intense conflict with God, Satan is satisfied if you worship something less than yourself, something helpless, even something that is degrading or addicting. Anything but God. It is no wonder that in response to Satan's delusions this first message carries a specific, forceful command, "Worship God, the only Creator God." He is not just an option among many. He is not just the best among the good. He is the *only one* worthy of worship, the only one who deserves your worship. Why?

Listen: On what basis did Hezekiah make his appeal to God and how did he compare God to other sources of help he could turn to? (Isaiah 37:15-20)

Reflect: On what basis do you go to God when you have an urgent need? What difference does it make to you that He is your Creator?





HE IS WORTHY

Exodus 20:8-11

Throughout the Bible, whether by the testimony of others like Hezekiah or God's own declaration, He is the rightful owner of all that He has made. He alone has the power to bring something out of nothing. He alone put all things in place. He alone knows what His creation requires. He alone can provide what His creation needs. He alone cares so deeply for His creation that He has given Himself to redeem and His power to transform anyone who accepts His gracious provision. He alone deserves your worship.

It's not surprising that the conflict of the ages centers around worship—the worship Lucifer was loath to give God. He suggested God wasn't worthy of obedience, much less worship. He presented himself and all his lies as a better plan (Isaiah 14:13, 14). He claimed power to provide another way to live—without the Lifegiver. The alternate options Satan offers are countless, but they are all based on lies (John 8:44). The worship he demands eventually destroys (Matthew 7:13).

The tragedy is that across the world's history only a handful of people at any one time have known the truth about God, what He is like, and what He has done. Few have been able to offer God anything close to the worship He deserves. Most of us are caught, ignorant and helpless, in the terrible consequences of worshipping anything but God.

To meet the lies that tempt us and hold us captive, the first message brings one last, hopeful appeal. Stop. Look up. Worship God. He is your only hope. What's even more meaningful, like the Sabbath commandment, His appeal comes with the reason He is *worthy* of your worship. He is your Creator, and He wants to share eternity with you. Just as He first intended.

Listen: Notice the similarities between the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) and the first angel's message (Revelation 14:6).

Remember the 7th day to keep it holy
For in six days
the Lord made
the heavens and the earth
the sea, and the fountains
of water. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Worship Him

who made
the heavens and the earth
and the fountains
of water. (Revelation 14:6)





REMEMBER THE TRUTH

The direct reference to the Sabbath commandment in the first angel's message is a forceful reminder that God is not willing that Satan's lies go unchallenged. God will not declare final judgment on a world ignorant of who He is or groping in the enemy's fabrications. He appeals to every listening nation, tribe, tongue, and people to refute Satan's lies.

Come into His presence to meet with Him personally, to humble yourself in your dependence. Open yourself to His holiness and *experience* the truth about Him that has been so long blurred.

Reflect: What true things about God—or yourself—does the command to worship God help you remember, considering it reflects the Sabbath commandment?

Remember the Sabbath day	Without the Sabbath, you will tend to forget you are created, dependent, in need of God
To keep it holy	In the Sabbath, you can enter into His holiness
Six days thou shalt labor	_____
And do all thy work	_____
Thou nor thy son, daughter...	Your Sabbath experience touches everyone around you
The Sabbath of the Lord thy God	_____
Thou shalt not do any work...	_____
For	Here is the reason the Sabbath is meaningful:
In six days	_____
The Lord made heaven & earth...	_____
And rested the seventh day	_____
Wherefore He blessed	_____
And hallowed the Sabbath day	_____

THE BLESSED TEST

The Bible is clear that in response to these last appeals, honoring the Sabbath will be a distinct, observable sign of allegiance to God (Exodus 20:11). But the Sabbath test is not an arbitrary demand on God's part. He didn't randomly pick it out as a nice gesture of loyalty. Within this command is a priceless blessing; it is God's invitation to be lifted into His presence each week, where He is free to work in you, change you, prepare you, save you.

Listen: How does Jesus' reflection about the Sabbath in Mark 2:27, 28 underline the purpose of the Sabbath—and the personal advantage of obeying the third command to worship God?

Reflect: How can Jesus' simple observation reshape all that the Sabbath means to you, and how you chose to "keep" it?

The Sabbath was made for your benefit. It is your opportunity to experience what God is really like and to refute Satan's overwhelming delusions. If it sounds like a command, it is one given as a gift with eternal proportions; the Sabbath is the point in time where God can do for you—and for any who respond to the appeal of the first message—everything He first intended at Creation.





HE IS LORD

Read Colossians 1:15-20

Within the Sabbath is the fulfillment of every blessing God has provided. From the power that created you to the power that provides everything for your salvation (Ephesians 3:14-21), the Sabbath carries all that God, in Christ, has for you.



Satan was seeking to exalt himself and to draw men away from Christ, and he worked to pervert the Sabbath, because it is the sign of the power of Christ.

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 283.4

When you worship your Creator, you are acknowledging the power of Christ in your life (Colossians 1:15-20). Through Christ, the Triune God created you. Through Christ, the Triune God has redeemed you. Through Christ, each Sabbath offers you holy time to know who God is, what the Cross means, and how much the Holy Spirit's power is available to you.

With so much available for your blessing, the sacred hours offer premium time to receive everything God wants to give you. The standard for “keeping” the Sabbath, then, is not a list of restrictions or obligations, but how much you can receive from Him! The Sabbath is time to love Him more (fear God), to become more like Him (give glory to Him), and to worship Him with all your heart. The quality of your Sabbath experience, then, becomes your personal, heartfelt response to the first angel's appeal. The judgment has come, but your Judge has set time aside to prepare you!

CHOOSE HIM

The choices that guide your Sabbath experience, then, put you within reach of His power:

- Does my Sabbath experience reflect my complete dependence upon Him?
- Do I preserve my best energy for this sacred time with God?
- Do I listen to learn something new about God each Sabbath?
- Does my Sabbath experience witness to others that I am not my own but His?
- Does this sacred time help me reflect His character more and more?
- How does my Sabbath experience allow me to share what He is like that makes Him deserving of worship?
- How does each Sabbath help me live the coming week for His glory?

Your worship—your humble awe before God—protected by what you do or don't do, has a positive reason and powerful meaning. Through His power each Sabbath experience can change how you live in the week to come.

The drama in the scenes just before the appearance of the three angels in John's vision are intense. The cataclysmic events following their proclamation are universal and decisive. It may seem inconceivable, but it is remarkable that all God asks *you* to do is to respond to His love, reflect Him in life and character, and offer Him humble, dependent worship.

So often the picture of the last days conjures up battles with beasts, fiery dragons, and frightening assaults. Such battles do exist, but they are not yours to fight. Your only safety, your reason to have courage as the warfare rages around you, is to press near—closely, constantly—to the One who has already won the victory. He is your only hope.

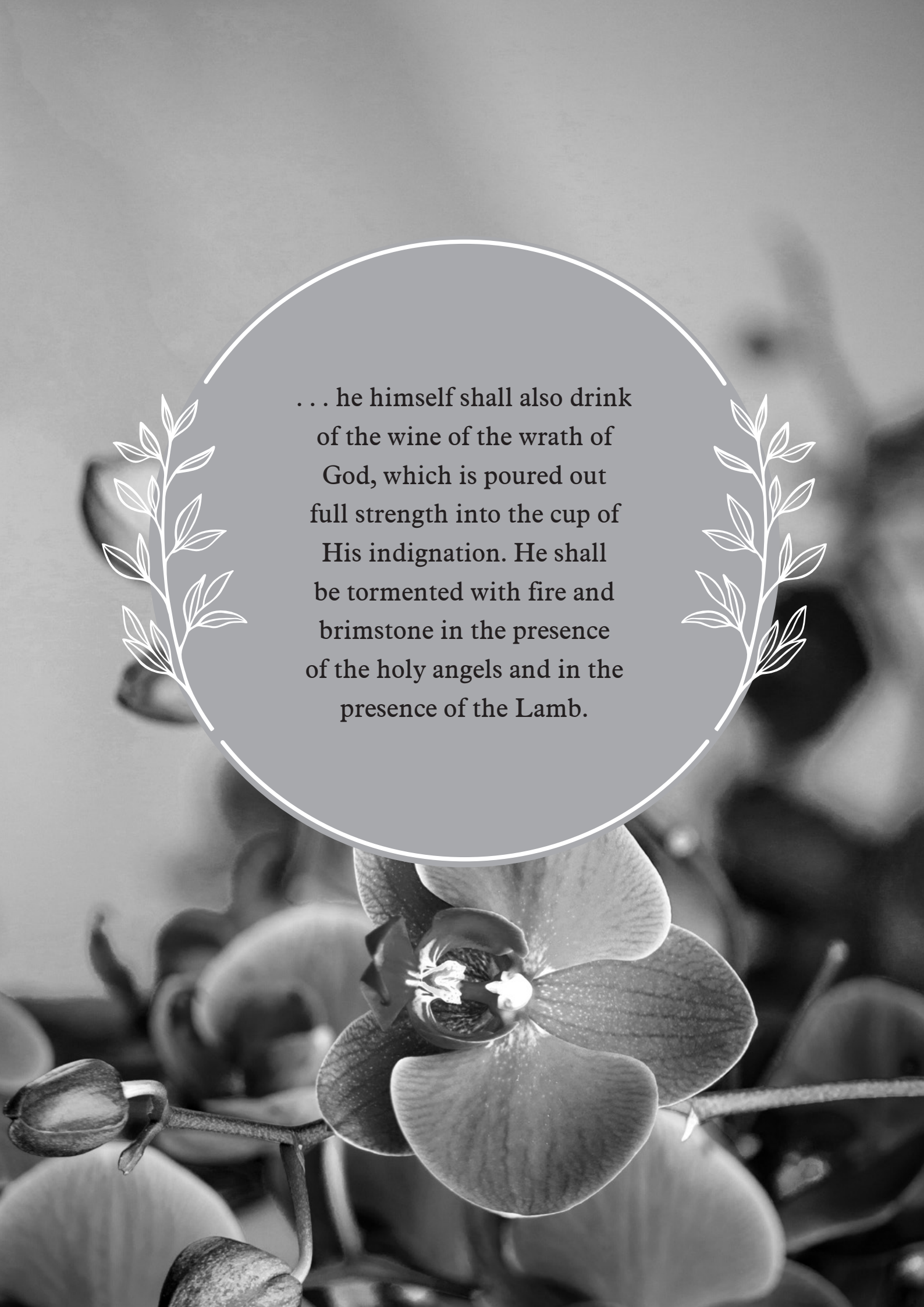




PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Lord, today I want to answer Your appeal to me. I want to lovingly obey You. I want to allow You to shape my life after Yours. I want to worship You for all You are—my Creator, my Redeemer, my Judge, my Advocate. You have come to me with such grace, such compassion. Draw me close into Your Presence; let me hold onto the hope You've given me at such a confusing time of our world's history. May I be a living testimony that confirms

You are everything You say You are—and that others can experience You too! In Your strength and help, AMEN.



... he himself shall also drink
of the wine of the wrath of
God, which is poured out
full strength into the cup of
His indignation. He shall
be tormented with fire and
brimstone in the presence
of the holy angels and in the
presence of the Lamb.



THE COURAGE TO Choose

LESSON FOUR

Don't Go SHOPPING IN BABYLON

TO EXPLAIN

The Babylonian Empire was considered the most glorious of the ancient world empires. Marduk, Babylon's patron god, played a powerful role in the empire's identity and government. Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft were woven deeply into Babylon's politics and worship. In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar overcame Judah, took its people captive, and brought about the end of the Hebrew nation. According to the Babylonians, their victory established that Marduk was superior to the God of the Hebrews. The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah give us graphic pictures of the empire's pride and ruthlessness.

In John's vision Babylon represents *an earthly system* that has, like the empire, placed themselves in proud opposition to God. This includes apostate Christianity of the Middle Ages, the revived power of the Catholic Papacy whose "wound" is healed (Revelation 13:3), and the "false prophet" of Protestantism (Revelation 16:13) that joins the dragon and two beasts. Together they present a formidable combination of religious systems and spiritualism that connects with the power of the state.

Types and antitypes are used throughout the Bible to connect two individuals, events, or messages to give them special meaning. A *type* depicts, or foreshadows, a later person, event, or message, called the *antitype*. Often referred to as *symbolism*, a person, event, or message in the Old Testament can stand for and explain something larger and more significant that appears later in the New Testament. For example, when looking back on the Old Testament, John could see how the bronze serpent lifted up on the pole (Numbers 21:8, 9) foreshadowed Christ lifted up on the cross (John 3:14, 15).

In the Old Testament, Satan repeatedly assaults Job (type), foreshadowing similar attacks against Jesus (antitype). The pattern recurs in Revelation when the raging dragon makes war (12:7) against the woman's offspring (type), foreshadowing the final battle of Armageddon (16:14, 16) against God Himself (antitype).

The angel of Revelation 18 (verses 1-10) represents a further development of events just prior to Jesus' Second Coming that extends or develops the message of Revelation 14:8. While it is a separate, more detailed message given immediately before the close of probation, it helps us understand the second angel's message, the nature of Babylon, and why it has "fallen."

Psalms 119, which is referred to in this lesson, is a song about the meaning of God's law, God's word, and God's will in the psalmist's life. As the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses, it is an acrostic poem based on the Hebrew alphabet and was meant to be sung in worship as a heartfelt prayer to the covenant-keeping God.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

The initial presentation of the second angel's message can be traced to the mid- to late-1800s as Advent believers continued to study the Bible following the Great Disappointment of 1844. At first, they assumed their congregations would eagerly embrace the discoveries they made. But as they shared what they were learning—truths about the coming judgment, the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's high priestly ministry, the seventh-day Sabbath, the soon coming of Jesus—they were confronted by increased opposition from both their fellow church members and their leaders. In the face of the opposition and persecution they met, it became increasingly clear that the larger Christian circles were rejecting the clear truths of the Bible over denominational traditions.

In the second angel's message, the Advent believers not only heard the call to separate from, or "come out" of, spiritual Babylon, but to preach that invitation to their former fellowships. While a handful were convicted by the re-discovered truths, the Christian world overwhelmingly rejected anything beyond the teachings of their past. Their response marks the compromises within Christianity that eventually lead to the call in Revelation 14:8. While there are many sincere individuals in all faiths who are growing in an understanding of God and His Word, the religious systems of Christianity have continued to build on human philosophies and traditions that deny the truths of the Bible.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was formed in the 1860s with a specific mission to fulfill the second angel's message. It has become the hallmark of Adventist evangelism to appeal to any sincere seeker for biblical truth to break from the popular religious systems and to live by "thus saith the Lord." While Adventism sees itself as continuing the process of the Protestant Reformation, Protestantism itself has not moved much beyond each reformers' understanding. That's why the worldwide mission of the Adventist Church continues to carry the burden that all three angels' messages, especially the second, are addressed to every seeker from any faith or philosophy across every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. There is still so much to learn from God's Word.

In the confusion about who God is and what He has done for humanity, the second angel's message is a worldwide warning: The powerful religious systems that hold the world's attention, are not representing God's truth, but their own beliefs. Their power is superficial. They will not stand.



FOR FURTHER READING

Ellen G. White, "The Tower of Babel," *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 117-124.
Ellen G. White, "In the Court of Babylon," *Prophets and Kings*, 479-482.
Ellen G. White, "A Warning Rejected," *Great Controversy*, 375-390.





EVERYTHING'S FALLING APART

Read Revelation 14:8

When the ground shudders and the light fixtures swing, that's no time for a lot of philosophizing about possible causes and optional responses. Get out of the building! The sooner the better. Similarly, the message of second angel is urgent, to the point, not concerned about any explanation.

The second angel's loud cry is meant to be jarring. Of course, it is still carried by the gospel. It still shows God's mercy that heaven even bothers to warn an unsuspecting world. But it is a call to escape for your life. Don't hang around. Don't wander the streets. Don't gawk at the attractions. Don't buy what's for sale. Don't go shopping in Babylon.

In the hope you aren't paralyzed by the very environment that has created the disaster, the message is screaming about present danger: Babylon is falling. Right now. It is collapsing around you.

Anyone within hearing should be alarmed. Babylon? What is that? Why is it falling apart? Shouldn't someone tell us where Babylon is, where not to go, what we're running from? That's bad enough; the *reason* for Babylon's collapse is even more worrisome. Coercion, drunkenness, and immorality are marks of the dark underworld of crime, where evil lurks. Where can you be safe? Where can you run?

*Listen: What assurance does God give whenever He warns of spiritual danger?
(2 Corinthians 6:14-18)*

Reflect: What do you need to do in your own life—and Bible study—to keep the fearful realities that the Bible portrays in balance with God's overall message to your heart?

The terrifying warnings of John's vision can be motivating, and Revelation's drama with its beasts and fiery dragons has been used often enough to leave its frightening impression. But John's vision is not just a thriller to scare you. It is a real-life warning with a real-life appeal for a real-life decision. In the middle of it all, stands God—to provide real-life support and courage as well.





BE IMPRESSED

Revelation 18:16

Think of the most impressive building you've ever stepped into. Maybe it was a palace. A mansion. A cathedral. A mosque. Even a hotel or shopping mall. Fancy places are usually overwhelming. They're meant to impress. They can engulf you in such massive silence that you feel like you've become nothing. Or they can shimmer with so many lights and mirrors that you can hardly tell what part of the sparkle is real and what is an illusion.

If anything in the ancient world was memorable, the Empire of Babylon was. Even the words used to describe it in history books are overwhelming—massive, luxurious, intimidating. Like many great hallmarks of human achievement, it boasted beauty, wealth, creativity, power, and immorality. It claimed to be the center of the world and it planned to last forever. The Babylonian system left no room for God-fearing faith or dependence. It boasted deities and idols, sorcery and magic that claimed no rivals. It even stood in defiance of the God of heaven.

Listen: What does Nebuchadnezzar, the most prominent emperor of Babylon, say of his accomplishments in Daniel 4:29, 30? What does that say about his view of God and his attitudes about himself? (You know the two are always related.)

Reflect: You may not be wealthy or powerful, but in what ways might you share the same attitudes Nebuchadnezzar expressed?

Babylon is gone now, but the Bible doesn't let you forget about its shameless wealth and arrogance, the defiance with which it faced God, or the threat it was to God's people, all of it personified in Nebuchadnezzar's excessive pride. In the Bible, Babylon represents everything that sets itself up in opposition to God and the truth about Him. It represents the human pride that builds a false system of belief and worship. It stands for the suppression of truth and the persecution of any who hold to it.





BABYLON KEEPS FALLING

Read Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:6-8

To help you recognize God's activity in history and to understand the meaning of what He is doing, God uses typology, or symbols, throughout the Bible. In John's vision, the Babylonian Empire in the Old Testament was symbolic of the power of spiritual Babylon that is identified in the New Testament, where John's prophecy prepares you to understand what is happening in your time.

Listen: How are Isaiah's and Jeremiah's proclamations about Babylon echoed in the second angel's message of John's vision? (Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 51:6-8)

Through divinely inspired typology, we find assurance that God is actively involved in the events of our world. He is the One who tags the type and highlights the antitype for us to connect together. Like blinking red lights across the world's timeline, the link demonstrates the order and purpose of God and His movement toward a final answer to evil. He is not just reacting to the heat of the battle; He is prepared and purposed in His response. Time will unfold the truth, and He will work through the time that is needed to accomplish what He chooses.

By sharing the connection with us between type and antitype, He invites us to be prepared too.

Listen: What issues appear to be similar between the type and the antitype? (Compare Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:6-9 with Revelation 14:8)

NOTHING NEW

As we identify some of the types and antitypes that God provides, we're reminded that God is not dealing with anything new. The second angel refers to attitudes of Babylon that found its roots in Lucifer's first arrogant thoughts in heaven. It displayed itself in the idolatrous people of Canaan, the arrogance of ancient Babylon, the iron fist of Rome, the persecuting power of a religious system that buried the truths of the early Christian Church. Eventually we meet pride and spiritual idolatry in our modern world. Babylon—and everything it symbolizes—has appeared to thrive all through our history.

The "fall" of Babylon, pictured in John's vision, has been taking place throughout history as well. It began with Lucifer, "fallen from heaven" (Isaiah 14:12), then the Tower of Babel falling in ruins onto the plain of Shinar (Genesis 11:1-9), the walls of Jericho falling at the sound of Israel's trumpets (Joshua 6:1-20), Dagon of the Philistines falling before the ark of God (1 Samuel 5:1-4), the fall of Belshazzar's Babylon even while he held a drunken party with the vessels from God's temple (Daniel 5) and more. Babylon has been falling for a long time.

A LIVING TYPE

Because types and antitypes are Holy Spirit inspired, no one knows how much the prophets themselves understood the message they gave about the future. Certainly, they knew they were talking about the world power Satan was using to threaten what God was doing. And they knew the battle wasn't over.

They might have suspected, though. Ancient Babylon was not selected as a last-day type simply because it was godless or ruthless; there have been countless oppressive powers throughout history that have created their own deities and built empires at the will of godless emperors. But in salvation history, ancient Babylon represents the proud and seductive system of spiritual arrogance that directly challenges the God of heaven with a self-made view of reality. It boasts false teachings about Him and sets itself up above Him. It exerts its power to oppress and persecute any who do not comply.

Along with the type Babylon provides, another symbol is embedded:

Listen: How does Daniel, surrounded by such a system, provide a type of those in the last days who will represent the God of heaven before a rebellious system and speak truth on His behalf? (Daniel 2:28)

FILLED WITH HOPE

The falling of Babylon in prophecy is really a picture of hope. All that has ever arrogantly set itself up in opposition to God, all the false teachings about God that have confused our view of Him, all the arrogance that has oppressed and persecuted those who have held to the purity of truth—all of it is in the process of crumbling. The arrogant challenge has been in place for ages as a direct spiritual threat to God's plan. But God gives the assurance in the second angel's message that its end is in process. If there was ever a time the issues needed to be clarified, and the call given to escape its grip, it is now. If there were ever an antitypical people to meet the type of Daniel, it is now.

Reflect: How convicted are you of the simple, clear truths of the Bible that can answer the lies about God that have overtaken our world? Are you willing to learn—and live—the truth about God in front of a world overtaken by spiritual Babylon?





IT WILL FALL

Read Genesis 11:1-9

The second angel in John's vision has a frightening message, the kind of warning a person screams as a dust wall rises behind them to envelop a building that is sinking in slow motion and disappearing into rubble. It's the kind of warning that must have echoed across the plain of Shinar as one of the greatest achievements of mankind tumbled into ruins.

The Tower of Babel was a well-organized rebellion. The Flood's survivors dismissed God's mercy, shrugged off His promise, and defied His command to disperse. They boasted about the plush accommodations they built for themselves within its massive walls. They fussed over the special quarters provided for their idols. It was unlike anything anyone had ever seen. They were proud.

Listen: The Bible's account of the Tower is simple, without much commentary, but what does God's response suggest? (Genesis 11:1-8)

The Tower crumbled on the very plain where Babylon, the arrogant Mesopotamian city, would later rise. The smoldering rubble of Babel was an early warning from God of the boundaries of human pride, and the end result of rebellion and idolatry. It will fall.

Listen: In what way do the Tower builders' aspirations reflect Lucifer's conversation described in Isaiah 14:12-14? Or the commentary of his thoughts in Ezekiel 28:11-19?

Reflect: In what subtle ways might you express pride? Self-sufficiency? Even rebellion?

While the Bible gives a record of how God relates universally to the rebellion that Satan promotes at every turn, it also provides a personal commentary on how it can develop and overtake your heart.





FALLING PROUD AND DRUNK

Read Revelation 14:8 and 18:1-10

The Bible traces a very simple pathway that leads to the frightening call of the second angel. The beginning of the rebellion looks much more like the everyday lives of any of us. John sees the horrible end of the powers that stand up against God in the last days. How did the horrors of a false religious system (Babylon) become the home to a world of demons and foul spirits described in Revelation 18:2?

Reflect: What are common, and often socially acceptable, expressions of pride described in Proverbs 16:18 that you see around you?

Pride is where the pathway to sin's horrors begins. Self-love, self-importance, selfishness. Those were at the heart of Lucifer's conversation with himself. Isaiah records it. Proverbs describes it. John's vision develops it and shows where it ends.

The second angel doesn't spend a lot of words describing why Babylon is falling, but the picture is unmistakable. Babylon is powerful and proud, and it has a staggering impact on the entire world.

The angel of Revelation 18 confirms the extent of the fall; the ruins will be left for the underworld. A voice from heaven, who clearly has seen it all, gives a breathtaking commentary on how completely the merchants and nations buy into her religious pretense—and lose.

Listen: What reasons does the second angel give—and the angel of Revelation 18 confirm—as to the cause for spiritual Babylon's destruction? (Revelation 14:8)

Without oversimplifying—drunkenness, immorality, and luxury are only the expressions of the dark heart of sin—the angel is very clear about what takes Babylon down.

DRUNKENNESS

Solomon knew the blurry, deranged thinking of the drunk (Proverbs 20:1). But you don't have to have a high blood-alcohol level to have distorted thinking or a vague sense of reality. If spiritual Babylon is like ancient Babylon, it offers a self-indulgent lifestyle—you can believe what you want. You can follow any religious system or make up your own. It provides pleasure as an end in itself—you can do what you want, because you deserve it. Babylon allows you to stand in judgment on God—your opinion can override God's requirements. In short, whether it's an organized religious power or your own opinions, the view of life from Babylon places you or something you choose at the very center of your own universe instead of God.

Whether it's false teachings, false worship, or false notions about life, in the end the intoxicating power of Babylon's wine is disorienting and debilitating. Babylon's wine gives an illusion of safety. It offers a sense of control and satisfaction. It enhances self as it excludes God Himself. And it gives a religious context to it all. But tragically, the mind shaped by Babylon is so numb that it feels like everything is normal.

Listen: What boundary did Daniel draw as to how much he was willing to allow Babylon to influence him? Why would he take such a risky position? (Daniel 1:8)

Reflect: How many things in your world threaten mental clarity and balance? What influences are around you that threaten to change how you think about God? About yourself? About others?

Daniel was not just interested in healthful living. He was choosing to preserve his mind against the distorting, polluting, even demonic world around him. He wanted his mind free to focus on the precious few sources of godly thinking he would be able to find.

Reflect: What is your mental-spiritual diet? What “dainties from the king’s table” tempt you? What decisions have you made—or can you make—to keep your mind protected for God, and to live under His promised protection from the enemy’s moral ambushes?

Listen: In a sample of the psalmist’s heartfelt answer to that reflection (Psalm 119:9-11) what has he chosen for his strength and protection? Why?

Knowing God’s Word isn’t about planning arguments to defend your beliefs, even if they are biblically correct. It is about learning as much from God as you can. The Holy Spirit is available to help you understand His view of the issues you face, to give you instructions to prepare you for the times ahead (John 16:13). He knows what will fortify you and help you choose carefully. If you are willing to run from the world that’s crumbling around you, He’ll lead you to where you can be safe.

Reflect: Are you as confident as the psalmist that the Holy Spirit through God’s Word can help you be clear minded about the spiritual issues facing you? That He will bring direction to your spiritual life? That He will give you moral strength?

IMMORALITY

Purity. Commitment. Faithfulness. Marriage. It all may sound a little old-fashioned these days. But considering that God gave Adam and Eve to each other in a garden ceremony (Genesis 2:18-22), that Israel was God’s beloved (Song of Solomon), that New Jerusalem is like a bride “adorned for her husband” in John’s vision (Revelation 21:2), there’s nothing old-fashioned about the purity of the marriage relationship.

Neither is it coincidental that God described Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him as worse than the addiction of a prostitute (Ezekiel 16:30-34). Or when He instructed Hosea to marry Gomer so he would understand how shattering Israel’s unfaithfulness was (Hosea 1:2). Or, in John’s vision, where He depicts false, debasing religion as a harlot that has prostituted herself to every king on earth (Revelation 18:9).

Listen: How does the Bible associate your spiritual life—your life with God—to how you relate to others? (Mark 7:21)

God places your relationship to Him in a similar moral context as your relationship to others. *Faithfulness* to Him is expressed in the same language as faithfulness within a marriage. *Purity* in your relationship to God means He has priority above all else; He alone has your highest affections. *Integrity* means you are honest about what is happening between you and your Maker. *Commitment* means you choose to guard a long-term, life-long relationship with Him. *Priority* means you give Him your best time, your best energy, your best resources. And it can go on and on—

Reflect: What additional ways do you feel your relationship to God mirrors how you relate to others?

The enemy also knows that your moral life is supported and fed by your spiritual understanding. That's why he has tried to rub the Sabbath out of the world's memory. Or why he has blurred the meaning of marriage. Or why he has promoted the immortality of the soul across all faiths and persuasions. Or why the most powerful religious systems assume authority over God's Word. Or why he has distorted how most of the world views God Himself.

Even if you've been privileged to see the Bible teachings more clearly than others, the enemy is intent on compromising your loyalty to God and distracting you from the lifelong, exclusive relationship He invites you to. Your faithfulness to God is his target, your commitment to Jesus is his goal. If the second angel's message says anything personally to you at all, it is simply this: God wants you to know that when Babylon goes down, the enemy of your soul would like you to go down with it.

LUXURY

The second angel isn't as explicit as the angel of Revelation 18:1 or the voice from heaven (Revelation 18:4). Even with the added details, we can't predict how it will all play out. But what is clear is that the enemy has succeeded in enmeshing the whole world into the very infrastructure that is crumbling. Babylon has used the political powers of the world to promote its false and God-defying spirituality in a marketplace draped with the appeal of luxury and wealth, self-indulgence, and pride.

Listen: What does the aftermath of the fall, described by the voice of heaven in Revelation 18:11-20, say about the appeal and power of Babylon?

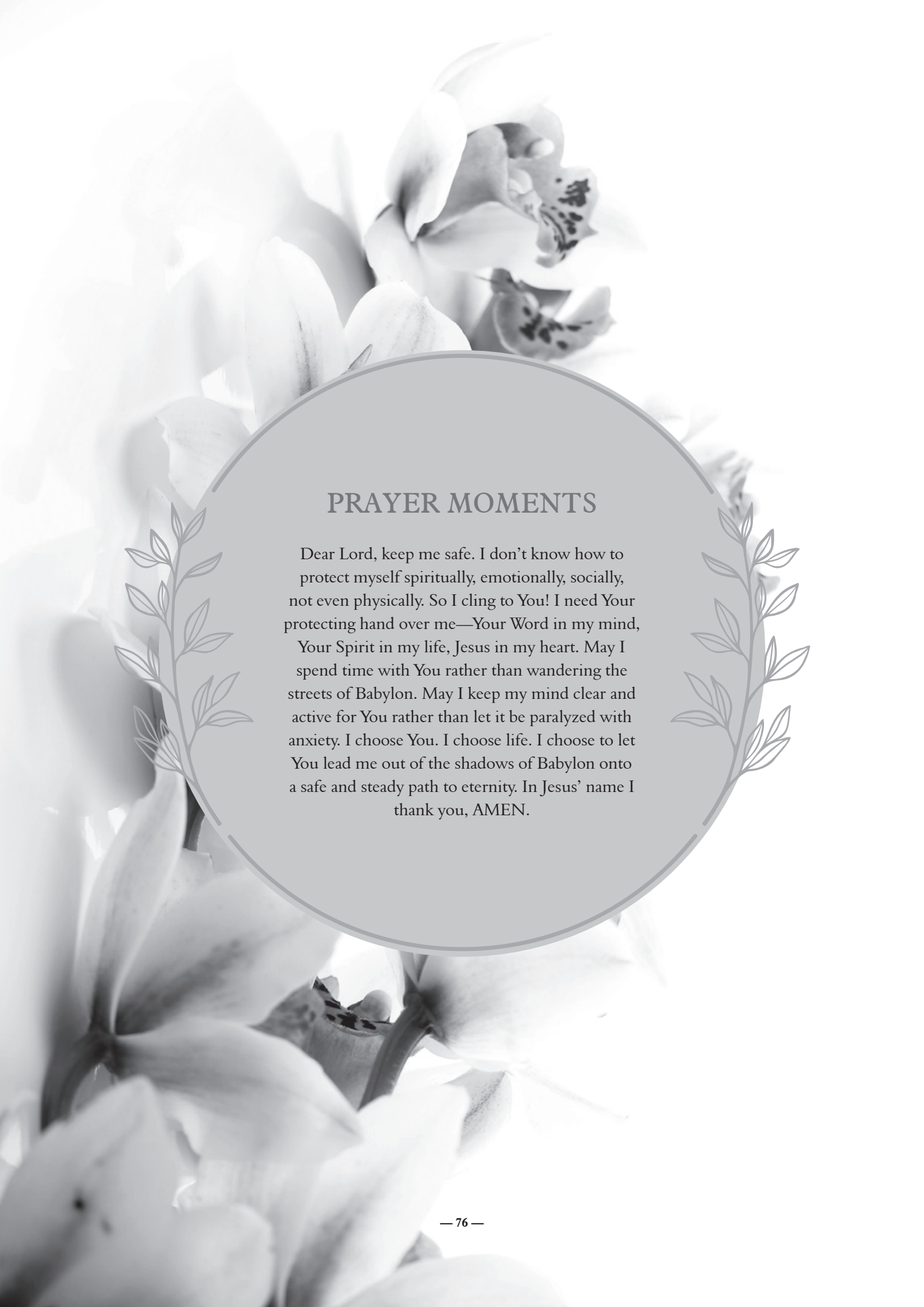
By any standard, Babylon is well-marketed. Babylon knows what's good for business. Its inventory of merchandise is impressive for any shopping mall. In John's vision, the world has bought and sold whatever Babylon has provided—values, priorities, fantasies, religious beliefs, moral life and all the goods that come with it.

As the enemy has planned it, even those who are window-shopping in Babylon fall with Babylon.

- Is it possible to watch Babylon so much that you feel comfortable with the distortions you see?
- Is it possible to listen to the street logic of Babylon for so long that it sounds reasonable?
- Is it possible to breathe the air of Babylon so deeply that pollution smells sweet?
- Is it possible to hear so many lies that you can't tell the truth?

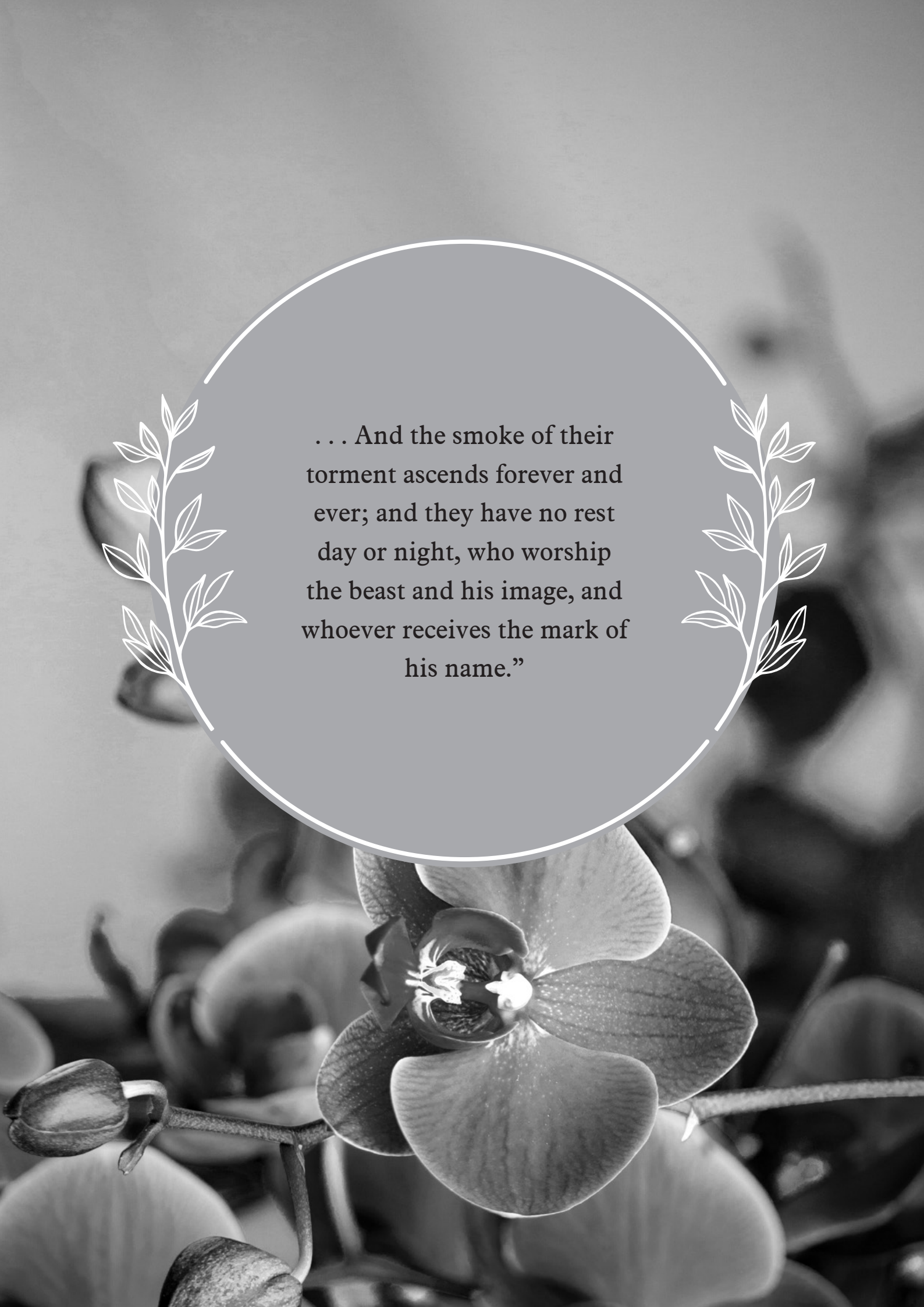
As God has warned, only those who run for their life, far beyond the crumbling walls of Babylon into the safety of what is true and righteous and pure and godly, are safe. You aren't left alone, without help in your escape. The angels' messages continue; if God has called you to choose Him, He will give you the strength to live for Him as well.





PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Lord, keep me safe. I don't know how to protect myself spiritually, emotionally, socially, not even physically. So I cling to You! I need Your protecting hand over me—Your Word in my mind, Your Spirit in my life, Jesus in my heart. May I spend time with You rather than wandering the streets of Babylon. May I keep my mind clear and active for You rather than let it be paralyzed with anxiety. I choose You. I choose life. I choose to let You lead me out of the shadows of Babylon onto a safe and steady path to eternity. In Jesus' name I thank you, AMEN.

A black and white photograph of an orchid flower, likely a Phalaenopsis, in the foreground. The flower is in full bloom, showing its characteristic broad, flat petals and a central column. The background is softly blurred, showing other orchid leaves and buds. Overlaid on the image is a large, light gray circle with a thin white border. Inside the circle, on the left and right sides, are white line-art illustrations of leafy branches. Centered within the circle is a block of text in a serif font.

... And the smoke of their
torment ascends forever and
ever; and they have no rest
day or night, who worship
the beast and his image, and
whoever receives the mark of
his name.”



THE COURAGE TO Choose

LESSON FIVE

SOME THINGS MATTER Forever

TO EXPLAIN

The beast of the third angel's message refers to the beast John described in an earlier scene (Revelation 13). He saw a world power with a blasphemous name that drew its strength from the dragon and received the worship of those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The beast blasphemed God, His name, His tabernacle, and "those who dwell in heaven," even as it "made war with the saints and overcame them." This description is parallel to the beast described in Daniel 7 that speaks "pompous words against the Most High," "persecutes the saints of the Most High" and "intends to change times and laws." It exerts itself for "time, times, and half a time" (Daniel 7:25), which is referred to in Revelation 13 as 42 months. These features identify, from a historical perspective, the religious-political world system of Christianity that exerted its power throughout the Middle Ages as the Roman Catholic Church.

The image to the beast in John's vision (Revelation 13:11-17) was made when the second beast enforced Sunday observance as a day of worship, giving political power of the state to the religious authorities. This second beast appearing in John's vision came out of "the land" or, in prophetic imagery, an uninhabited region, after the 42 months. Unlike the animals of prey that depicted other kingdoms in Daniel's and John's visions, this second beast had docile, lamblike features, even though it spoke like a dragon. It also did "great signs" before the world and had "great power" to breathe life into the beast. These identifying features single out America as the power that validates the authority of the Roman Catholic Papacy and supports it with civil authority to enforce another day of worship over the seventh-day Sabbath, the day God Himself set aside and made holy as the final work of Creation.

The mark of the beast that the third angel associated with worship of the beast is contrasted with the seal of God that John referred to earlier in his vision (Revelation 9:4). The Sabbath, which is part of the commandments of God (Revelation 14:12), was a sign of loyalty to God (Exodus 31:13 and Ezekiel 20:12). By diverting worship from the Creator God and enforcing the traditions of a Christian religious system that claimed the power to change the day of worship

(as well as numerous other biblical truths), Sunday observance became the enemy's alternative to the Sabbath sign. The mark on the forehead or the hand, then, contrasted with the seal of God that was given on the forehead to those who remained obedient to God (Revelation 9:4).

Forever and ever is a phrase used in the Bible to describe the effects of a decision or event. The action doesn't necessarily continue into eternity, but the results of the action are permanent. Sodom and Gomorrah, which "will burn forever and ever" are not still on fire. David trusted in God's mercy "forever and ever" (Psalm 145:2) but he is resting in the grave. The sons of Korah wrote in Psalm 45 that they "shall praise you forever and ever" (Psalm 45:17). While the action itself doesn't continue, its impact does.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

A handful of the Advent believers who responded to the invitation of the first angel's message and the warning of the second angel discovered in the third angel's message an even more specific focus. This angel's severe warning introduces a message that became the identity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when it formed in 1863. The small and unpopular church came to see itself as not only fulfilling the prophecy of a people who "keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus," but also as the messengers who are entrusted to carry the three messages to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

As part of carrying that message, the Adventist Church has established churches, schools, medical facilities, health centers, publishing houses, and more. Generations of Adventist preachers have shared the "lost truths" of the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the state of the dead and more—all out of the conviction to preach the third angel's message to the world.

However, the message is actually a personal message first before it is a corporate, public proclamation. Those who hear and accept the message become personal messengers; they are the living witnesses of what God wants to do in the lives of those who "keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12), which will be the subject of the next lesson in *A Reason for Courage*.



FOR FURTHER READING

Ellen G. White, "The Scriptures a Safeguard," *The Great Controversy*, 593-602.
Ellen G. White, "The Final Warning," *The Great Controversy*, 603-612.
Ellen G. White, "The Controversy Ended," *The Great Controversy*, 662-678.





NO SURPRISES, NO COVERUPS

Read Revelation 14:9-11

Life comes with cruel surprises. Toddlers don't know that oven doors are hot and balloons drift away if you don't hold on to them. But it doesn't take long to learn that toys don't work as claimed, people don't always mean what they say, advertising exaggerates, and it's important to read the fine print of a contract. That's the kind of world you live in. You are used to surprises, unreliable information, even coverups and lies.

But God doesn't exaggerate, deceive, or lie. He speaks the truth. He relates with facts. He is clear. Too much is at risk to allow you to be surprised.

That is why you have just heard one of the most graphic warnings in all the Bible. The language the third angel used in John's vision was strong and uncomfortable. The picture can fire your imagination—with fear. The angel was sounding a warning; it held within it the possibility of a different outcome.

Listen: What is the condition—the “if” statement—that accompanies one of the most pointed, most distressing warnings that God has ever sent to the earth? (Revelation 14:9-11)

Reflect: In what ways can a severe warning benefit you? Have you received a severe warning? What caused you later to realize it spared you much grief and even proved to be a great blessing?

THIS IS ABOUT YOU

Many of the scenes of John's vision were dominated by such powerful actors and the conflict involved such large issues that you might assume you're just a spectator—that all this was happening to someone else.

Then the angel begins talking about “anyone.” A person. Any person. Every person. Suddenly the message is referring to you and the consequences of your worship. Your forehead. Your hand. A mark that expresses your allegiance. Suddenly all heaven's focus is on *your decision*.

Listen: What personal choice secures the mark on the forehead or hand? (Revelation 14:9)

Reflect: Even though worship is often considered a group experience, why do you think Revelation presents it as a personal choice?

In the Bible, the hand is symbolic of action, the forehead is the center of thought and belief. When the second beast assigned the mark (Revelation 13:16), it didn't seem to matter whether a person simply acted like they were complying or if they truly believed the beast deserved their admiration and worship. The beast appeared to accept worship either way—in a practical decision to survive, or as a personal conviction. But both were considered a personal decision against the God of heaven.

What the third angel shared isn't comfortable, but it is complete information. The details are taken from the very end of John's vision—the scene of the final judgment, before the destruction of the wicked, when every misrepresentation, distortion, lie, and cover-up will be exposed. The warning carried the details about where Satan's current efforts will really end.





ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Revelation 20:7-10

If your imagination takes in the scene the third angel was describing, you will see Satan's raging silhouette against the brilliance of the New Jerusalem as he tries to arouse the seething mob around him to attack the New Jerusalem. After his thousand years alone (Revelation 20:3) the multitude of his victims are raised from the rocks and wreckage that had covered them at Jesus' coming. Alive and angry, they are back in Satan's grasp.

But God's throne overwhelms the scene. God's voice interrupts the war cries. Singing erupts from the city. Scenes of Calvary play out in three-dimensional detail across the sky. Every life record passes by each horrified viewer. The hard truth dawns on each watching soul.



It is now evident to all that the wages of sin is not noble independence and eternal life, but slavery, ruin, and death. . . . All see that their exclusion from heaven is just.

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 668.3.

In one awful admission, although not in any sort of humble confession, every knee bows (Isaiah 45:23) with the realization that God is fair and just in all He does. Satan stands condemned. His angry army turns on him with vengeance. Their volcanic rage explodes with torrents of pain, regret, rage. It is a painful scene.

Listen: Compare Revelation 14:9-11 and 20:7-10.

Then and only then does mercy end. Then and only then is God's wrath poured out in a consuming fire. Everyone is held accountable, the judgment is final, and sin, sinners, and Satan are no more.

This isn't arbitrary or vindictive of God. He is the Holy One, the Creator, the Lifegiver, and Redeemer. This is what happens when you set Him aside, when you replace the Redeemer with any other help, when you assume the responsibility for saving yourself, or you choose to carry your own sin. For anyone who holds onto sin—so incompatible to God's holiness—this is the reality of God's intense and final response to Satan, the sin he's promoted, and the sinners he has ensnared.





THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

If John's vision gives you anything at all, it is a vivid picture of the conflict that has engulfed our world, and the vast difference between the two sides.

Listen: As a review, list the characteristics of the two beasts John saw (Revelation 13: 5-8, 12-17. See also Revelation 18:2-10) alongside the characteristics the redeemed saw in God (Revelation 15:3, 4. See also Revelation 3:8, 11; 5:9, 10; 11:17, 18; 16:5-7).

Reflect: How can you keep the choices clear in your mind, so you can make decisions based on reality, not on distortions or lies about life, about yourself, or about God?

The character and purposes of God are directly opposite to those of the powers that are lined up against Him. The character and purposes of the beast are in direct opposition to God Himself. The two are distinctly different. In fact, if God's reaction says anything at all, the two are incompatible.

But, as the final scenes of John's vision show, the divine wrath that the third angel described is not just directed towards the beast and his loyalists. Even though they carry enormous responsibility, a proud, blasphemous religious power and a compromising government are not the only objects of divine punishment.

The larger focus of God's fury in the final judgment is the dark work of Satan. He has engulfed our world in his hatred towards God. He has used every human system possible to accomplish his purpose. He has deceived, manipulated, intimidated, violated, tortured, and killed to do it too. In a way that is beyond understanding, but certainly within the reach of every believer's awe and relief, the third angel's message gives assurance that God will finally say enough is enough. He will execute a fair and right judgment and will declare, "It is done!" (Revelation 21:6).





WHEN EVERYTHING MATTERS

One reason the third message John heard was so strong is that it had to cut through distorted, self-centered thinking, Satan's special trap. For thousands of years, he has suggested that many things in life don't really matter: You can live as you want, say what you want, treat people the way you want, think as you want, believe what you want. Then of course, as the suggestion goes, why wouldn't you be free to worship whatever you want, however you want? The fantasy world, where you make your own rules and where life is what you want it to be, might seem to work if no god exists but yourself. But. . .

Listen: How do the first two messages (Revelation 14:6-8) emphasize the spiritual reality that you are accountable to Someone above yourself?

GOD STILL EXISTS

But. All the angels' messages together, especially the third, remind you that regardless of the lies that float around you, God is still God. He still calls you to fear Him in love. He still invites you to give glory to Him, not to yourself. He still advocates for your redemption because you have no defense of your own. He is still the Judge over all things. Yes, He is still worthy of your worship.

How you express your belief that His place in your life *does matter*. Does your life clearly, openly identify with Him? Is His honor your concern? Are you anxious for His reputation? Are you willing to give evidence of His goodness to you? His power in your life? His love? Are you prepared to worship Him, regardless of the consequences? Worship is not just a morning in church. Worship is a way of life, where living in harmony with Him and honoring Him is all your life.

Listen: Among the characteristics describing God in Revelation 15:3, 4, which attributes are sufficient reason to worship Him? Considering all the attributes together, how much worship does He deserve?

Reflect: How is your worship shaped by your knowledge of God's judgments?

THE MARK MATTERS

The third angel's warning revolved around a mark—a feature that appeared in John's vision repeatedly, right alongside the beast and its image. Apparently, it was the beast's trademark. It might seem a logical plan, if you don't know the issues: *Wouldn't it be great if everyone worshipped together? And isn't being able to do business just part of surviving in our modern world? With so much in our world out of control, maybe this will help—or so the logic of many might go.*

But nothing in John's vision treated any of this lightly. The beast demanded worship that was meant for God. He claimed power only God has. He used deceit and force. He oppressed and murdered. God responded with plagues, fury, and burning sulfur (Revelation 15:2; 16:2; 19:20). Clearly, the mark sits at the center of the battle between God and Satan, like a flag that identifies the enemy.

Listen: According to Revelation 13:12, 15-17, how was the mark enforced?

Reflect: Why do you think the enemy places so much emphasis on creating a mark at all and then implementing it so violently?

The effort represents the enemy's last stand; the mark draws from his deepest anger. It denies God's life-giving, life-saving power and His self-sacrificing love for His creation. It is meant to purge the memory of our Creator and refuse Him anything but passing mention. Even worse, the mark destines those who wear it to be separated from God—from life, hope, a future of any kind. While the mark is enforced with a death decree for those who don't wear it, the third angel unmasks the lie: The mark is itself a death sentence.

Nobody avoids the mark simply by saying they'll never go to church on the "wrong" day. The enemy has made sure it isn't that simple. In the days just before Jesus' coming, worshipping on Sunday is merely the last step in a long trail that begins easily enough with pride, independence, even indifference toward God. Of course, the enemy knows that false doctrines, lies about life, godless living, and outright rebellion give plenty of reasons for not obeying God. He also knows that to give even half-hearted service to the beast is to stand fully on Satan's ground. That is his fatal design.

It's his trap for an unsuspecting world. But the opposite is true as well. To those who are listening carefully, the angel announces that *nobody needs to receive the final judgment of the beast and his followers if they live loyal to God and to what is true.*

THE SABBATH MATTERS

More than anything else, the third angel's message is for a world that hasn't yet learned about one of heaven's greatest blessing—an invitation to personally live in the presence of God each week. They need to know that Sabbath carries the only protection against every man-made system of worship, every false teaching, every counterfeit religion. It is the only God-sanctified means for acknowledging the Creator and giving Him worship He deserves. It is a weekly decision of obedience that reflects six days of surrender to the Lord of the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance is far more than getting to church on the "right" day. At any time of earth's history, "to keep" the Sabbath has meant *consecrating* (in the Hebrew) or *guarding* (in the Greek) the holy experience God intended. It has always meant worshipping in His holy presence (Psalm 100), resting in His righteousness (Hebrews 3:3-5), celebrating His deliverance in your life (Exodus 20:2), doing good to others for His sake (Isaiah 58:6). But at the end of earth's tumultuous history, the Sabbath experience is even more important.

Careful, prayerful Sabbath "guarding" is the only way you will be able to keep God's perspective of what's happening around you. It's the only way you will know Him well enough to hear His Spirit speaking above the confusion or to see through the haze of deceptions that has enveloped our world. It's the only way you will gain the spiritual strength and courage to meet the difficult decisions ahead.

Listen: When God created the Sabbath, what was provided that would make a difference in the end of time (Genesis 2:2)?

Reflect: If Adam and Eve needed the Sabbath in a perfect world, what does the Sabbath give you for the great need you experience in a world of sin?

Sabbath observance isn't what will save you at the end of time. But the holy time you spend with God now—so precious you would be willing to die rather than lose it—is what gives Him the opportunity to prepare you for eternity.



⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
¹⁰ But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.
In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter,
nor manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle,
nor your stranger who is within your gates.
¹¹ 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





LOST IN HIS PRESENCE

Read Revelation 14:10

The third angel spared no words as he fast forwarded to the final judgment scene and God's last, decisive response to the horror the universe has experienced under Satan's treachery. Full strength wrath. Indignation. Torment. Brimstone. Forever and ever.

But in the middle of the third angel's searing words, an unexpected image emerged. All of this chaos was taking place "in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb" (Revelation 14:10). What? This hellish picture is no place for angels. Or for the Lamb. God's strange act is difficult enough to understand.

Listen: The final judgment will bring both God and His enemies together. As the heavenly court's final judgment, why is it important that everyone involved be present? (Revelation 20:7-10)

Reflect: Do you find the last judgment scene frightening, puzzling, or reassuring? Why?

In the end of earth's history, everyone will be there—the lost, the Lamb, the angels, the universe. And Satan himself. As the treacherous journey closes, everyone who has ever been involved will be present.

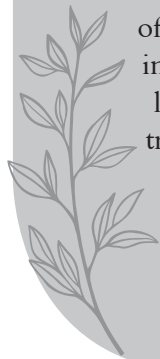
The holy angels will be there because they have always been present, intervening, pleading, and recording the decisions of those entrusted to them. They have never shrunk from representing God's care in the most unlikely, most vile places. Every decision has been made in their presence.

The Lamb will be there, a testimony to the experience He accepted so that "whoever believes in Him" would not have to perish in such a tragic scene, but "have everlasting life" (John 3:16). As repulsive as sin is to the holy God, in His mercy He chooses not only to be present "with us" but to accept the final judgment "for us." Tragically, every decision that brought each soul to this end was made in the presence of—and despite—the unimaginable price God Himself paid.

Listen: List each response from God that the third angel assures will take place in the final judgment for those who worship the beast? (Revelation 14:9-11)

Reflect: What does it mean to you that alongside God's wrath against sin is the presence of the Lamb?

When the wicked face God one last time, mercy will no longer be available. All the decisions will have been made; mercy is no longer sought. But even in the full strength of God's final judgment, the Lamb is present. God's last response to sin is strong, very strong, but it is still a message of longing. In the middle of the awful scene, God is saying, Heaven did everything possible so you would not have to carry the shame of your own sins. If only, if only you had accepted the Lamb.



God's judgments will be visited upon those who are seeking to oppress and destroy his people. His long forbearance with the wicked emboldens men in transgression, but their punishment is none the less certain and terrible because it is long delayed. "The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act." Isaiah 28:21. To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Yet he will "by no means clear the guilty." "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." Exodus 34:6; 7; Nahum 1:3.

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 627.2

If your heart feels heavy with the grief of that moment, perhaps you can sense more easily the grace that gives the third angel such urgency: There is still time to choose! There is still time to fear Him, time to honor Him with your life, time to worship Him, time to separate from anything that doesn't lead to Him. There is still time to identify with Him and Him alone and honor Him with your highest allegiance.

Even though the message is an ominous warning, it is also an invitation: Come to the Lamb. Come to your only hope. Come to "Him who sits on the throne" who is worthy of glory and honor and power. He has created you, by His will He has made you. By His heart of love you exist. (Revelation 4:9).

Reflect: What hope does the third angel's message have for someone—maybe even you—who feels she has lost her last chance to be right with God?





PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Lamb of God, my only hope. I come to you today, so aware of how much I am surrounded by influences and temptations that keep me distracted, even confused. But I come, certain enough that I want to choose You while there is time. I want You to have my deepest loyalties. I want You to matter most in my life. I want to worship you with my whole life. I want to be standing in the New Jerusalem singing Your praise with heaven's chorus, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" Do what You want to do, what You need to do, so I can stand with courage. In the name of the Lamb who gave so much for me,
AMEN.

A black and white photograph of an orchid flower, likely a Phalaenopsis, in the foreground. The flower is in full bloom, showing its characteristic five petals and a central column. The background is softly blurred, showing other orchid leaves and buds. Overlaid on the image is a large, light gray circle with a thin white border. Inside the circle, centered, is a block of text. On either side of the text, within the circle, are two stylized white line drawings of leafy branches, mirroring each other.

Here is the patience
of the saints; here are
those who keep the
commandments of God
and the faith of Jesus.



THE COURAGE TO *Stand*

LESSON SIX

PATIENCE DOESN'T MAKE A SAINT, God Does

TO EXPLAIN

Worldview is the framework in which you understand life. It is shaped by your view of God, your view of human life, and how you see the origin and meaning of the world around you. God's revelation in the Bible gives you what might be considered a biblically informed worldview that provides God's own revelation of who He is, who we are (in His eyes), and how He is relating to our fallen world.

Dualism is a theory about the nature of man that developed within the classical period of the Greek philosophers (300 B.C.). It suggests that the human being is made up of two parts—the body (material) and the soul (spiritual). In this view the spiritual world is considered the higher, or divine, level of existence and the physical world of concrete elements is thought to be the lower, imperfect level. God is considered timeless, abstract, and non-physical, and man's highest purpose is to pursue that "elevated" spiritual level. There are numerous ways dualism has shaped Christianity, but it suggests (1) a view of God as impersonal and uninvolved in the time and space of human affairs except in Christ's single, unique appearance in earth's history; (2) a view that the soul is immortal and that at death the soul continues to exist apart from the body; and (3) a view of a supernatural realm populated by the souls of the dead who can communicate with the living, allowing for spiritualistic manifestations and encounters that provide a powerful tool for Satan, especially in the last days (Revelation 16:14).

The immortality of the soul, a common belief within Christianity and in most other faiths, is based on dualism and assumes the soul, being separate from the body, continues to live forever even after physical death. The immortality of the soul is not taught in the Bible, but it is the substance of the lie that Satan told Eve in the garden "you will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4).



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church draws its identity from Revelation 14:12 as the last-day movement that honors all the commandments of God and holds to the faith of Jesus. This verse has helped to propel the mission of the Church in sharing the good news about God's true character to the world: He has given the Ten Commandments as an expression of His will, including the truth about the Sabbath, and provided a living demonstration of what He is like in Jesus Christ, who is serving as our High Priest and Advocate in the phase of judgment now taking place in heaven.

The strength of this third message is not only the identity and mission it provides God's last-day movement. It is a personal message that speaks of the Holy Spirit's power in the life of each one who has accepted the judgment messages. As the Day of Atonement in Israel's earthly sanctuary illustrates, Jesus, now our heavenly High Priest, represents to the heavenly courts all those who have accepted the truths the angels have shared. Judgment is ruled in favor of all those who have allowed God to work His will and character in their lives and who live by faith in the righteousness and power of Jesus Christ.



FOR FURTHER READING

Ellen G. White, "The Snares of Satan," *The Great Controversy*, 518-530.

Ellen G. White, "Can Our Dead Speak to Us?" *The Great Controversy*, 551-562.

Ellen G. White, "The Scriptures a Safeguard," *The Great Controversy*, 593-602.





THIS REQUIRES SAINTS

Read Revelation 14:9-11

Like the final scene of a depressing movie, the picture the third angel described to John must have troubled his imagination. The smoke, the burning sulfur, the wrath. What could be more graphic than the final judgment scene? How much clearer can it be as to where this was all leading? John must have shuddered as he penned the words of one of the darkest, most fearful warnings ever to fall on human ears.

But the message wasn't finished.

*"Here is the patience of the saints,
here are those who keep the commandments of God
and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).*

The angel turned John's focus from the horrendous end of those who worship the beast and his image to the fortitude and character of a very different group of people.

Listen: What issues come into sharp contrast when you compare the two groups described in the third angel's message? What identifies each group? What is each group's relationship to God? (Revelation 14:9-11 and 14:12)

To point out the difference between the two groups, the angel must have decided it was easier to show John than to explain. So he pointed to a real-life profile of what saints look like. Those who respond to the warnings will shape their lives after God's commands and will rely totally on Jesus to do so.

Reflect: If you were trying to explain what a holy person—a saint—looks like, how would you describe them?

In striking contrast to the rebellion and evil of the world, there will be a group of people who will stand out. They will know their identity. They will know what is important to them, and who they serve. They will live with courage at the most difficult moments of earth's history, because—

*They are firmly connected to the will of God and
they live by faith in what Jesus has done for them.*

Those who have chosen to be loyal to God and safe from the collapsing world around them are intent on following every command God gives them, not as credit for their salvation but to avoid the fatal traps Satan has set. And they do it in the Holy Spirit power that is found in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

They must persevere because they belong to God and represent Him, and because He is under severe attack by an angry, collapsing world and by desperate, satanic powers.

Listen: What formidable power is the real force behind the opposition that meets those who identify with God and choose to obey Him? (Revelation 12:17)

THE MESSAGE IN THE MIRROR

To John, the group of people he saw at the end of the third angel's message looked similar to the choir and harpists on Mount Zion, the ones he heard singing around the Lamb just before the three angels appeared (Revelation 14:1-6).

In the Bible, an important passage is often framed by a scene just before it that is similar to a scene right after it. The two scenes act as bookends to support the purpose of the passage in between. They offer clues for unlocking the meaning of the passage.

In this part of John's vision, the saints of Revelation 14:12 *mirrored* the redeemed in Revelation 14:1-6 who followed the Lamb wherever He went. The message in between is both what has shaped them and what they share.

Listen: Compare John's description of the multitude in Revelation 14:1-6 with the saints of Revelation 14:12. What do the two pictures of God's people say about the impact of the messages on those who respond? What about the character of those who share the messages?

Reflect: How comfortable would you feel to be a part of either group? Would you fit in? Would you know how to act? Are you willing to learn?

The power of the gospel that the messengers proclaim is the transforming power of the Lamb and the holding power of the testimony of Jesus in their lives. They can testify that the messages come with the power to live them. But it will not be easy.





KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Read Revelation 14:12

John's view of the saints must have been refreshingly positive, considering the sizzling scene he had just witnessed of the last judgment. But the angel was not trying to distract John with a nicer message, he was broadening the warning he had just given. While some would meet horrifying doom, others would be challenged to show patience, great patience as they lived God's will by faith.

Only two options present themselves throughout the messages, only two consequences. What's more, God does not gloss over what it means to choose Him. In a battle, even though only one side wins, both sides are challenged.

Listen: How much is at stake in the conflict that was unfolding before John? Why such opposition? (Revelation 12:10, 12)

The saints whom John was shown faced a world in headlong, bold defiance against God and anyone who identified with Him. While everyone listening still had the opportunity to choose, the angel was realistic. To be loyal to God meant living against powerful odds, colliding with every human system and its relentless pressure. Only perseverance in heaven-empowered living could meet such a challenge.

Patience in the original Greek means *endurance* or *staying power*. It is what develops under trial. It grows when it meets a test. Patience is the word John used to describe what he and his fellow Christians shared with Jesus Christ and what he himself needed to meet the trials of Patmos (Revelation 1:9).

Listen: Who else in John's vision was commended for patience? When? Why? (Revelation 2:2, 19; 3:10)

God's people at every time, in every place have met resistance. Godly living has always required a decision to persevere. But there would be a time, the angel warned, that would require even more stamina, more endurance than any other point in earth's history.

"Perseverance" is what it takes to press on each day in the same direction for as long as needed. "Staying power" is the resolve needed to stand unmoved in the face of constant opposition. "Patience" is the decision to keep going longer than you ever thought possible. The message of the third angel confirms that in the end nothing less will be enough.

Reflect: What do you draw on to "keep on keeping on" when you feel you have no spiritual strength left?

Perseverance, though, is not performance. You will never become a saint by obeying rules, even when God made them. You are able to live as “set apart,” which is the definition of sainthood, only because you choose God over everything else, you continue to choose God over everything else, and you never stop choosing God over everything else.

Patient endurance describes the pattern of your daily decisions—choices motivated by God’s invitation, a faith that He feeds, habits that strengthen by His Spirit, a life that demonstrates His saving power. Patience doesn’t make you a saint. God does.



Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.” This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 70.1





CHOOSE YOUR WORSHIP

If there is one issue that arose repeatedly in John's vision, it is the extent to which an earthly power will go to stand in opposition to God. But over and over again, no matter how dominant and coercive human systems appear, they can never match God's activity and response. That is hard for human pride to admit, but that is the underlying issue of the great controversy.

When it comes to dictating worship, human declarations simply can't match an institution established by God Himself, rooted in the creation of our world.

The seventh-day Sabbath sits at the very center of God's eternal commandments. As surely as He made a tree, a lion, or Adam himself, God created the seventh day Sabbath. He made the time sacred. He set it apart to receive the worship of His creation and to give His special blessing. Thousands of years later, when it had been nearly forgotten by generations of slaves, He placed it at the center of the principles of life He spoke from Mount Sinai. He called it a "sign" between Him and His people. The Sabbath would continually remind them that He created them and redeemed them from the slavery of sin (Exodus 20:1).

If the Sabbath was just a weekly break at the end of a busy week, any day would do. But if a holy God created holy time—something no human being is qualified to do, least of all sinners—then the Sabbath of Creation is unmatched. As the special expression of your allegiance to Him, the seventh-day Sabbath, and only the seventh-day Sabbath, carries God's holy presence and His blessing.

Listen: How did God identify Himself with the Sabbath, and what importance did He give the fourth commandment over all the others? (Exodus 20:8-11)

The Sabbath isn't only a command, though. It is a gift. Even more than the other nine commandments, the fourth commandment carries the strength you need to live in a way that is different than the godless, self-centered world around you. The Sabbath experience is what you need the most to stand separate from the world, to be a saint.

Reflect: How can the Sabbath protect you spiritually and prepare you for not only the coming week, but for some of the challenges that John's vision prophesies?

Surrounded by a broken, godless world, you can easily forget about God. You can get distracted by the everyday, overwhelmed by sin. You can even break under temptation. You need the Sabbath. It is your constant reminder of who God is, who you are, what He will do for you, what you can't do for yourself, what those around you need. To enter into that experience with Him expresses your desire to remember His place in your life so you can represent Him well in the conflict ahead.

Reflect: How might wanting to represent Him affect how you chose to "keep" the Sabbath?

The Sabbath commandment represents all that Satan hates, all that he wants to destroy. God knows it, so He pleads, "Remember." Satan knows it, so he has planned a last-stand attack, "Deny the Sabbath and the Lord of the Sabbath or die." To the amazement of all who will be watching when John's prophecy unfolds, there will be a group of people who know it too. They will stand firm on everything God has asked for them to do because they understand that any compromise will blur their thinking about God and everything needed to represent Him. They also know the Sabbath is the only sign that they treasure all of God's full, revealed will.





THE ONLY REALITY

Honoring the Sabbath is an expression of loyalty to the Creator who made it holy. To keep it is to register allegiance to Him. The saints, fully convinced He is everything He has said He is, willingly identify with Him.

Listen: Throughout John's account, what was repeatedly given as the reason God's people are targeted? (Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4)

Of course when John mentioned "the word of God," he primarily had in mind all that God had communicated to him in vision. But as the last book in the Bible, his account provides the conclusion to the full Word of God. John drew on more of the Old Testament than any other author in the Bible, with hundreds of Old Testament references and a constant flow of Old Testament images. God's Word is at the center of the conflict John witnessed and the challenges God knows His people will meet.

Listen: List all the roles Scripture provided in Timothy's life. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Reflect: Considering how central God's Word is meant to be in your life, how can you possibly grow spiritually—and meet the future confidently—without a deep, personal experience of your own in God's Word?

It is in this record of God's activity that He reveals His heart towards you and what He has provided to save you. In the process, evil also is exposed and Satan identified so you don't need to be ignorant of how the enemy works. In the Bible record, the conflict is laid bare; you can be informed and prepared. You can choose carefully, in spite of the controversy that rages around you.

That's why the Bible is not an encyclopedia about God. It is not even the full history of sin; small pictures of the war in heaven imply that sin has a tragic past we know little about. It was written to give you a reliable glimpse into God's character—His ways, His heart, His will, His Son. By Jesus' own testimony, it is the rock-solid source for you to know Him (John 5:39).

Reflect: How confident are you about studying the Bible on your own? Why? Are you willing to learn more?

We all find it inspiring to hear *about* the Bible. Great preachers, inspirational writers, seminars, conferences, even Bible study guides can teach us a lot. But as helpful as others can be, personal time in God's Word means that you and God meet alone. He speaks, you listen. It is a discipline to focus on a message given thousands of years ago. It takes some simple skills to know how to understand a passage, or how to find meaning in a story that you don't understand. It requires energy to "dig" into the Word. But the Holy Spirit, who has brought you the Bible, will work the miracle of making it meaningful to you as well.

The Bible itself is a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Under His inspiration, at least 40 different authors wrote over a period of more than 1500 years. To produce it, God engaged shepherds, kings, businessmen, farmers, fishermen, and common laborers. He has preserved it to this day, a connected, complete record of how He has related to our fallen world, and to sinful people. In its stories and instructions God provides the only dependable standard to measure what is right, wrong, real, fantasy, true, false, good, evil, loving, hateful, how to live, how to die.

Reflect: How do you “measure” your life by God’s Word? Is it even something you can do on your own?

Even as the Sabbath orients you each week to God Himself, the Bible orients you to what is true about Him. He shows how He wants to deal with your sin. He presents the principles for how to live. He provides rules that will protect you. He instructs you how to represent Him. In contrast, you also see how Satan really functions. Because his intention is to distort everything God has said or done, it’s important for you to have God’s constant input.

Reflect: What influences other than God’s Word do you feel shape your day? How much around you reflects God’s input? How much of God’s input do you seek?

Many say it doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re a good person. Or that everyone has their own truth. Or that there’s no certain truth about anything. But that’s the lie that blurs everything else. If God hadn’t chosen to reveal what is real and true about Himself and us, the whole world would sink under the dark falsehoods of the enemy. Without hope.

To *believe* anything other than God’s truth, to *live* by anything except God’s reality places you within easy reach of Satan’s arguments. His lies become believable when you have nothing to measure them against. His deceptions are hard to dispute unless you know what is true.



None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. . . . Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 593.2

A LOST TRUTH

With deep sadness, John must have seen that some truths so central to his faith became the enemy’s target early and forcefully. Even before truth had a chance to thrive, the whole world was buried under his strategy and is still living under the first lie Eve heard.

The Genesis story describes how God created Adam with His own hands—a living soul shaped from dirt and brought to life by God’s breath—a beautiful image of our complete dependence on God. No life exists except what God forms and God breathes. When life ends, a person ceases to exist. Those who die know nothing, feel nothing, can do nothing.

But this is one of the truths that Satan tried to attack with his first lie, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). And he’s never given up telling it. As the simple faith of the early Christian church gave way to the human philosophy of *dualism*, it served as one of the enemy’s earliest tools. It will serve as one of his most powerful end-time deceptions as well. The immortality of the soul, life after death, a place where the dead continue to exist, the ability to communicate with the dead, another cycle of life where decisions can still be made—almost the entire world has embraced some form or other of Satan’s most dangerous falsehoods.

Listen: What kind of direct, satanic activity did the angel of Revelation 18 associate with Babylon? (Revelation 18:2. See also Revelation 9:20; 16:13, 14)

John’s vision pictures demonic activity that will grab the attention and loyalty of the masses, whether it is through compassionate healings or eerie spiritualistic manifestations. The only safe response to what your senses cannot deny depends on the place truth has in your life. Only a heart fully dependent on the Holy Spirit to guide you “into all truth” (John 16:13) can protect you. Only the power of God’s Word can give you the courage to live set apart—the definition of a saint—and keep you from being taken in by Satan’s final deceptions.

Reflect: How can your complete dependence on God be strengthened so you can trust what He says in His Word over what you feel or see?

Let God’s Word become more real to you than anything else around you. Let it shape your life more than any other influence. Choose God’s Word to be your standard of truth (Isaiah 8:20), His Holy Spirit your teacher (John 17:15), Jesus your focus (John 5:39). The more your life centers around His Word to you, the more you will know He is trustworthy.



Whoever will prayerfully study the Bible, desiring to know the truth, that he may obey it, will receive divine enlightenment. He will understand the Scriptures. “If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.” John 7:17, R. V.

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 459.1





PRAYER MOMENTS

Dear Lord, what an act of grace that You would reveal so much to us. Give me a longing to see You more clearly! I want to treasure Your Word and understand it better. I want to live by everything You have shown me about Yourself, about myself, about life, about Your coming. I know I am no match for the enemy of my soul; I can hardly detect right from wrong. I desperately need the protection of Your Word in my life, the power to meet what is stronger than myself. Hedge me in, strengthen me, prepare me through Your Word. In the name of Jesus, the Word, AMEN.



Then I heard a voice from
heaven saying to me, “Write:
‘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.”



THE COURAGE TO *Stand*

LESSON SEVEN

You Are Holding A SACRED TRUST

TO EXPLAIN

The testimony of Jesus is a phrase John uses four times in his vision. The word “testimony” has the same Greek root from which we get “witness,” “martyr,” and also “proof.” In the context, the testimony of Jesus includes a witness about Jesus, from Jesus, on Jesus’ behalf. In whatever way the meaning is applied, all of it is only possible because of Jesus.

Twice John paired the phrase “testimony of Jesus” with “the word of God” when he was identifying why he was on Patmos and what he was sharing (Revelation 1:2, 9). One time he used it to describe the offspring of the pure woman who was giving birth (Revelation 12:17); they “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.” The *testimony of Jesus* in the lives of God’s people appears in the same role as the *faith of Jesus* the third angel noticed in Revelation 14:12. The angel that directed John’s attention throughout the vision clarified at the end that the “testimony is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). This was the reason the angel refused to be worshipped. He was only the carrier of the message from God the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of prophecy, only mentioned one time in the Bible (Revelation 19:10), is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit that brings prophetic understanding and direction to God’s people. It has been evident in all eras of salvation history and clarifies the work of Jesus for humanity. It is a term often used, based on this passage, within the Seventh-day Adventist Church to refer specifically to the gift provided through the ministry of Ellen G. White. While her life and work meet the biblical criteria of a prophet and her ministry expresses the presence of the Spirit of prophecy within the Adventist movement, the context of Revelation 19:10 generally applies to all the Holy Spirit’s activity that witnesses of Jesus, which includes her ministry—and we often refer to her collection of writings as the Spirit of Prophecy.

The biblical tests of a prophet are important to apply in the confusion of world religions and modern movements that claim prophets and spiritual advisors. Because of the unique role Ellen White's contribution played in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the perspective her writings have provided on Revelation 14:6-2, you may want to decide for yourself how to view what she has written and how to use her writings appropriately:

1. A true prophet receives dreams and visions directly from God (Numbers 12:6). During her 70-year ministry from 1844 to 1915, Ellen White received approximately 2,000 visions and prophetic dreams.

2. The message of a true prophet is in complete harmony with the Bible (Isaiah 8:20). What a prophet claims to have received from God must be in harmony with the rest of God's Word, because God does not contradict Himself (Psalm 15:4; Malachi 3:6). Although Ellen White was not a trained theologian, her messages are in harmony with Scripture and uphold biblical truths.

3. A true prophet witnesses of Jesus (1 John 4:1, 2). Anyone familiar with the writings of Ellen White, such as the books *The Desire of Ages* or *Steps to Christ* and the content of all her writings, will see that she not only accepted all that the Bible teaches about Jesus, but she continually pointed people to Him as their Lord and Savior.

4. The prophecies of a true prophet come true (Jeremiah 28:9). The proof of a true prophet lies, in part, in the fulfillment of their predictions. Although Ellen White's work did not primarily consist of predicting the future, she did make a number of predictions that have been fulfilled in a remarkable way.

5. A true prophet's personal life bears the fruit of a life fully consecrated to God (Matthew 7:20). It takes time for the impact of a person's life to be measured, but the 70 years that she worked under the critical eyes of millions of people bear witness to a godly, selfless ministry that continually pointed to Jesus and God's Word. The fruit of her life and work are witness of her commitment and godly influence.

While counterfeit prophets may pass one or two of these tests, a true prophet will pass them all. As you continue to study God's Word and evaluate the insights her writings have provided even in this lesson series, prayerfully consider the nature of what you read and compare it closely with the Bible. The careful use of the gift of prophecy expressed in the writings of Ellen White should support what God's Word says and lead you to hear God speaking more clearly through His Word.



TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE

On a timeline from the Great Disappointment in the mid-1840s to when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized in 1863, the third angel's message was the last that was understood by the small group. But as the final warning became clearer, the Adventist Church found its identity as the end-time people of God who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." It was a remarkable claim in the 1860s for such a small movement. In the 21st century it is a remarkable identity that each Adventist member is called to embrace. It is no small thing to fully embrace God's will for your life and to grow in the faith of Jesus.

These three angels' messages are not for the comfort of belonging to a special church that exists for a special reason at just the right time in history. Even if the Adventist Church does teach the commandments of God and hold to the testimony and faith of Jesus Christ, these messages aren't for an organization. These messages are for you to embrace personally—and to pass on.

The Spirit of prophecy in the work of Ellen White has been crucial in empowering an entire worldwide movement. But what makes you a special messenger for God at this time is not the organization you belong to, although your church is there to nurture and support you. Your part is to realize where you stand in salvation's history, what you've learned, and who else needs to know.

On a profoundly personal level, God's Word has given you an understanding of the times you live in, what is happening in the world around you, the issues each person you know will someday confront, and the only real safety you can offer them. This is your sacred trust.



FOR FURTHER READING

The Five Tests of a Prophet, <https://www.adventist.org/gift-of-prophecy/the-gift-of-prophecy/>
Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/>
Ellen G. White, "The Final Warning," *The Great Controversy*, 613-634.





TRUTH WORTH GUARDING

Stories of martyrs might be intriguing, even inspiring, when they are about someone else long ago. But the third angel's message, the message given for you and for your time, includes a sobering connection between how you honor the truth about God and how much you value your life.

Listen: What did John repeatedly record as the consequence of identifying with the Word of God? (Revelation 6:9, 11; 20:4)

Truth worth dying for is more than just head knowledge you were taught in a Bible study or heard in a sermon. It is a divine principle that has become a part of your life so completely that you cannot live by anything else. It is God's reality that has become yours; you would rather die for what is real than to support the enemy's fantasies.

Reflect: Have you ever "innocently" believed in something that you later learned was not true? How did it shape your life? How did you discover truth? How did truth change you?

You may not feel ready to die for anything you believe in right now. But martyrdom doesn't begin at the stake or guillotine. The word "martyr" comes from the Greek word *martus*, meaning *witness*.

The kind of conviction that would lead you to die for God begins with living as a witness for Him. Not every witness for truth is called to die. But every martyr for truth was already living as a witness before they ever faced death.

Heaven has sent each message to inform you and appeal to you. Every message you embrace and respond to makes you a witness to what you've learned. That means you have something to share with someone who doesn't know what our world is facing, what is true, or what is real in God's eyes.

IS THERE A WITNESS?

Some witnesses in a court case are called to the stand to tell about something they heard. Some are interrogated about something they watched happen. But the strongest witness is one who has been involved personally in the circumstances being investigated.

Reflect: You are the best witness to biblical truth when you have experienced the impact of truth in your life such as in the following statements and many more:

- *The truth about what Jesus is doing in heaven right now for you.
Do you trust Him to advocate in your favor?*
- *The truth about the spiritual strength you find in God's Word.
Have you found Him there?*

- *The truth about the blessing of the Sabbath.
Have you experienced His Sabbath presence?*
- *The truth about the Holy Spirit's role in your prayer life.
Have you heard Him speak to you?*
- *The truth about living in the end of this earth's history.
Are you allowing Him to prepare you?*
- *The truth about facing the judgment.
Do you have the assurance He is a Good Judge?*
- *The truth about the sleep of death.
Are you at peace with Him?*

Allowing the truths that you learn shape your life makes you a living witness—one who can testify from personal experience that what God has said is true. For a world that claims truth can't be known, the living witness is a mystery. You may even be considered a fanatic. People can have heated arguments about religion, everyone can disagree, but nobody can argue easily with "this is what God has done for me, and this is why I live for Him."

Every truth in God's Word—from the instructions we call doctrine to the record of God's commitments to us that we call promises—is meant to shape how you live. What you believe affects how you live, how you see the world around you, how you understand what is happening, and how courageously you share what you believe.

A GUIDE TO LIVE BY

For the biblically grounded believer, truth is what you know to be real about God. It is contained in His Word and revealed to you by the personal instruction of the Holy Spirit who inspired it. You have no safer guide to shape your thinking, your choices, or your faith in a world of mirages and falsehood.

Truth is worth knowing. Living what you know is how you guard it with your life.

Listen: A brief outline of some essential biblical truth is given in the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe. These do not represent a creed; the document organizes the areas of biblical teachings that you can study for yourself to build your beliefs on God's Word.

Reflect: How does each biblical truth shape your personal life—how you treat others, use your time, maintain your health, spend your money, keep the Sabbath, pray, witness, work, and much, much more?

Some may say that doctrines—*teachings* or *instruction* as the word means in the original languages—are concerned with nonessential theory, and that believing in Jesus is all that matters. But by the Bible's own testimony, the teachings of the Bible show us Jesus, the living Word of God.

Listen: We know that the New Testament's central topic is Jesus, but what part of Scripture is Jesus referring to in John 5:39, a conversation recorded by John in his gospel account?

Reflect: How does each biblical truth testify of Jesus—who He is as your Creator God and Savior, what He is doing as your personal Advocate in heaven, how the Holy Spirit teaches us about Him, how He wants you to live so you are courageous in Him, how....and much, much more?

DISCOVERING TREASURES

Studying the Bible is not the same as reading through a textbook or listening to a story, even though you'll find thoughts far deeper than any reading assignment and stories more gripping than a best-selling novel. Some of the Bible's treasures are obvious—promises, stories of faith. Other treasures lie deeper than a casual reading, but the reward is in the search.

The Bible needs to be handled carefully by its own criteria (See Lesson One, "To Give Perspective"). You'll find your greatest discoveries when you handle it personally, on your own, in prayer.

- Ask the Spirit to help you lay aside every personal interpretation or bias, all the sermons you've heard preached, even what someone taught you that the verse means, so you can hear what God is saying through the biblical message.
- First listen carefully for what the passage was saying in its original setting, to its original audience, and what it meant to them.
- Then listen for what the Spirit is teaching you personally from the passage.
- Ask the Spirit to give you power to apply to your own life what you have learned. Resist the natural inclination to imagine what the verse is saying to others.



The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise of the Revelation, "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4), the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme,—man's uplifting,—the power of God, "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57.

—Ellen G. White, *Education*, 125.2





JESUS IS EVERYTHING

If John were trying to make a profit on foretelling the future, his sweeping predictions were impressive. He saw thousands of years of intrigue and conflict. He may not have named the players as clearly as Daniel, but he described the action and conflict, who lost, who won.

But the purpose of that Sabbath afternoon on Patmos when Jesus visited John was not simply to tell a breathtaking story, not even to give advance warning of trouble.

The most precious gift God gives you in prophecy—the reason heaven unveils the future at all—is to give you early promise of the help Jesus has available for everything ahead. Prophecy brings the assurance that He knows what’s going on—even more than you do—and has a full solution if you’re willing to join Him. You are privileged to make present-day decisions knowing future results.

JESUS AND HIS MESSENGERS

Listen: In addition to the “bookends” of the redeemed (Revelation 14:1-6) and the saints (Revelation 14:12) that John recognized, how is Jesus present on either end of the messages themselves?

Jesus Himself appears all through John’s vision. He opens it personally, brilliant and majestic (Revelation 1:15-16). He reappears dozens of times as a Lamb, and as a slaughtered Lamb several times beyond that (beginning in Revelation 5). He will appear as a king wearing a golden crown (Revelation 14:14) and with more angels than you can count (Revelation 19:14). But here, at the very center of John’s vision, He appears more discreetly. However, He is not absent. And He is not anonymous either.

He presents Himself to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people through messengers who have the *gospel* and through saints who *keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus!* His presence in a world reeling with deception and chaos is through those who *follow Him* and have *identified with Him*. Their lives say more than words can, their characters validate everything He values.

Reflect: What does it mean to you that Jesus wants to present Himself to the world through you?

Considering the countless dimensions of all God’s activity, “the faith of Jesus” is so full of meaning that it has more than a single definition. For the saints to “keep” the faith of Jesus is for them to trust fully what Jesus has done for them. Their lives also faithfully witness to His victory in their lives. But in the most profound message to the world, the third angel is also saying the saints are demonstrations of the faithfulness of Jesus in accomplishing their salvation (Philippians 1:6). Because of Jesus, this is what God can do for those who choose to be loyal to Him.

For sure, Jesus Himself is tightly linked to the saint's perseverance. Their obedient surrender. Their faith. Their witness. They are saints—or are set apart—not because they are perfect, but because they have chosen to be obedient, to trust Him wherever He leads (Revelation 14:4).

Reflect: In what ways do you think keeping the faith of Jesus is linked to obedience to God's will?

HIS TESTIMONY IS YOURS

In a revealing parallelism in Revelation 14, we notice that John described saints that “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” In several places in his vision, he shares a similar picture of God's people—even of himself, a prophet—as “having the word of God and having the testimony of Jesus.”

Listen: Considering how John used the two phrases in Revelation 1:2, 9; 12:17 and Revelation 14:12, how does “having the word of God” give meaning to “keep[ing] the commandments of God?” And how does “the testimony of Jesus” broaden the meaning of “the faith of Jesus?”

While these two pictures have occupied Bible scholars and preachers with their depth, a simple picture is clear enough. When you choose Jesus, He draws your heart into a new realm of thinking, choosing, and living. Whatever Jesus values, you want to value too. You are concerned about being obedient because you want to be in harmony with Jesus. You are committed to living faithfully for Jesus because He has been faithful to you. Jesus' testimony can be your testimony of the Holy Spirit's power working in your life too. You have chosen to follow Jesus, the Lamb, wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4).





THIS IS YOUR SACRED TRUST

Nothing the Lamb does is ever about Himself. Nothing He is doing in your life is just about you either. You might be learning new truth, claiming victory, gaining influence, and feeling like you're growing in Jesus. But your salvation is not God's end goal, as important as you are to Him.

The good news of the gospel (Revelation 14:6) and the working out of God's character in you (Revelation 14:12) is real-life evidence for the universe. For your neighbor. Co-worker. Family. Stranger. Anything God is doing in your life is for their sake too. You are God's demonstration to a world that knows very little about Him.

Listen: What is similar about those who were the object of the dragon's wrath in Revelation 12:17 and those in Revelation 14:12 who keep the faith of Jesus? How is keeping faith in Jesus and having a testimony related?

In this beautiful combination of faith and witness, Jesus' role is central, critical, and the basis of all that sets you apart for Him. The strength of your testimony is not in being different, bold, better, or holy. It is in being like Jesus to those around you.



It is by beholding that we become changed into the likeness of Christ. By looking unto Jesus, by talking with Jesus, by fashioning the life after Christ's example, we become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, for our taste is perfected for the purity of heaven.

—Ellen G. White, "Hungering for Righteousness," *Signs of the Times*,
September 5, 1895

That's how you become the living evidence that God's work to redeem sinners is possible. That's when you become living proof to the universe that God's love is powerful enough to save even you!

The last-day presence of Jesus in your life is a demonstration to anyone, anywhere of what it means to respond to heaven's messages and to fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him in a world that is clearly doing just the opposite. Your life is a witness for Jesus.

Reflect: What do you feel is your strongest motivation for telling someone what God has done for you? What is your greatest fear?

Never forget: God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Not you, not your family, not your difficult neighbor, not the jealous coworker, not the sad clerk, not the old classmate. His love longs for all of them to know Him; His grace is sufficient for you and every one of them too.

The messages He has entrusted you with are a plea to your heart, to theirs, and to a confused world that is spinning towards destruction. In grace He longs to give one more opportunity—through you—for any who would respond.

They just need to know what is really happening.

They need to see beyond the mirage Satan has created.

They need to hear what He has done to save them through the chaos.

They need to hear what He has done for you.

*Reflect: How do you know what to share with people? Whom to share it with?
When to share?*

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

The three angels' messages aren't usually the topic of casual conversation. Revelation 14:6-13 probably aren't verses you choose to talk about even with your religious friends. But if you carry the burden of the messages on your heart and you sense the soul needs of those around, the Holy Spirit is with you to connect the two—your friends with heaven's appeal (Luke 12:12). After all, these are messages from heaven, you are a messenger for heaven, and the power of the gospel—the very same power that propelled the proclamation of the three angels that John saw—is available to you.

It's true that the messages are sobering. After all, they describe a troubled world that is collapsing under Satan's command. But the angels' messages are saturated with promise also.

- To be warned at all speaks of the opportunity to choose hope.
- The messages are carried by the good news of salvation that the messengers proclaim.
- The judgment coming is God's judgment. The Judge knows you and loves you! He has provided an advocate for you, and He's paid the full fee of your case with His own life.
- The judgment has already been decided in your favor if you accept the intercession of your Savior.
- You can personally know your Creator; He is worthy of your adoration and worship, deserving of your respect and love.
- The warning of Babylon's fall is an opportunity to run for safety from the spiritual confusion and moral compromise around you to the security and assurance of God's truth.
- You have the opportunity to avoid the disastrous end that comes to Satan and his followers, because Jesus' power enables you to live a faith-filled life in harmony with Him.

What is far more sobering than the messages themselves is the prospect of the multitudes that might never be given the opportunity to hear them if the message is not faithfully passed on.

Reflect: While the messages have deep theological and end-time meaning, they each speak to a personal need of someone around you. From your study of these messages, what simple encouragements do you feel you could share?



God has placed in our hands a banner upon which is inscribed, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12. This is a distinct, separating message, —a message that is to give no uncertain sound. It is to lead the people away from the broken cisterns that contain no water, to the unfailing Fountain of the water of life.

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 11.2

It is a tremendous privilege to know so much, to be warned so clearly, and to be given the unique opportunity to carry hope at the most critical time of earth’s history.



[The three angels’ messages of Revelation 14] are **a sacred trust** to be communicated to the world. . . . It is the all-important work for time; it is to be far-reaching as eternity. The love that Jesus manifested for the souls of men in the sacrifice which He made for their redemption will actuate all His followers.

—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 455.2





THERE REALLY IS A BLESSING

Read Revelation 14:13

Even as the angels' warnings were ringing across the countryside, John heard another voice, this one from heaven. It was announcing a blessing for those who die in the Lord.

Listen: What possible reason was there for heaven to interrupt with a blessing for the dead at the end of three messages specifically pleading with the living? (Revelation 14:13)

After such an intense stream of appeals and warnings, heaven's interruption is deeply meaningful. It is not a separate scene. It is not actually an interruption either. It is the promise of all promises. This is divine assurance that the choices, the hard choices, that God's people make against the coercion of a vengeful enemy will be honored. What they have met courageously will be noted by heaven. The faithfulness of their lives will not be forgotten. In death their decisions are sealed, forever safe from the accusations and temptations of the enemy.

Heaven's promise confirms what you've already learned; you cannot "die in the Lord" without also "living in the Lord." It doesn't matter how life ends, whether as a martyr-witness or a faithful witness, it is the record of your life that heaven regards.

That's what amazed John as he opened the account of his vision. It's what amazed the four living creatures and twenty-four elders who considered what the Lamb had done for humanity. Jesus not only gave His life for you, but He has created His identity and character in you to become a king and priest to our God (Revelation 1:5, 6; 5:10).

Listen: How can you explain that the "works that do follow them" is not the basis of their salvation? On what basis will they be saved? (Revelation 3:5)

The peek into the future—where "their works follow them"—is promise that the story is not over for those who have died with the hope of the three angels' messages. Their choices, the record of their lives, are evidence that they have accepted Jesus' salvation. To the encouragement of all who live and die in the hope of the three angels' messages their story will continue. After they rest awhile, after the fierce battle ends, John recorded that there will be music in heaven—a song of victory ringing over a sea of fire and glass:

"Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways,
O King of the saints.
Who shall not fear You, O Lord,
and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come
and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

The great controversy will end. The universe will be at peace. God will be proven righteous and just and good.



From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness. . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 678.3

This is the message of John's Revelation of Jesus Christ, the message of the three angels. This is the message God wants to write in your life and to make the shape of your character. This is the message the world needs to see, and the reason you are a messenger. Some call it "the Three Angels' Messages," but may it also be Your Message and the center of your hope from now into eternity.





PRAYER MOMENTS

O Lord God, the Almighty One! Just and true are Your ways. You alone are holy! I kneel before You in awe, so much more aware of who You are than ever before. I see more clearly what You have done for me, what You want for me. What can I possibly do for You in return except to witness to what I've learned about You?

Teach me how to draw strength from Your Word. Show me how to share what I've learned in these messages from You. I love You. I worship You. I want to give You glory—now and forever. In the name of Jesus, the Lamb, my Savior and my Lord, AMEN. .

1260 YEARS OF DARKNESS

- "He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time" (Dan. 7:25).
- "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3).
- "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" (Rev. 12:14).
- "And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5).

1260 days = 3 ½ years = 42 months = 1260 YEARS

1260 days (Years)

538 A. D.

Decree of Justinian



In 533 A. D. Emperor Justinian declared the Pope "head of all the holy churches." In 538 A. D. the Imperial armies expelled the Ostrogoth

Arians from Rome. It was the last of the Arian tribes that perturbed the Papacy. Then, the political supremacy of Papal Rome initiates.

1798

Mortal Wound



1798. After a series of negotiations to establish the Roman Republic, general Louis Alexandre Berthier makes a proclamation in Rome

on February 15, 1798 to inform Pope Pius VI and the inhabitants of the city that, from now on, the Pope would not practice any kind of political function.



1929

Lateran Accords
Healed Wound

1929. Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, secretary of State of the Holy See, in the name of the Pope Pius XI, and Benito Mussolini, Italy's

First Minister, signs the Lateran Accords on February 11, 1929.

2300 DAYS PROPHECY

"For two thousand three hundred days [years*]; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Dan. 8:14)

2300 years

70 weeks = 490 days [years*]

490 years

69 weeks = 483 days [years*] 483 years

1810 years

457 B. C. Jerusalem
and the Temple
Restored

27 A. D. Jesus' Baptism

31 A. D. The Crucifixion of Jesus

34 A. D. The Gospel is Preached to the Gentiles

1844 A. D. The
Sanctuary is
Cleansed

Key for the Interpretation of Biblical
Time Prophecies:
"I have laid on you a day for each
year" (Eze. 4:6; Num. 14:34)



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The fourteenth chapter of Revelation is a chapter of the deepest interest. This scripture will soon be understood in all its bearings, and the messages given to John the revelator will be repeated with distinct utterance.

—*The SDA Bible Commentary*,
Ellen G. White Comments,
on Revelation 14:6-12, 978.

The time is short; the night soon cometh when no man can work.

Let those who are rejoicing in the light of present truth, now make haste to impart the truth to others. The Lord is inquiring “Whom shall I send?” Those who wish to sacrifice for the truth’s sake, are now to respond,
“Here am I, Lord; send me.”

—Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, 64



General Conference
Women's Ministries Department
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