

*Good Word Schedule*  
**Three Cosmic Messages**  
*April, May, June, 2023*

1. **Jesus Wins—Satan Loses—***March 25—March 31*
2. **A Moment of Destiny—***April 1–7*
3. **The Everlasting Gospel—***April 8–14*
4. **Fear God and Give Glory to Him—***April 15–21*
5. **The Good News of the Judgment—***April 22–28*
6. **The Hour of His Judgment—***April 29–May 5*
7. **Worshipping the Creator—***May 6–12*
8. **The Sabbath and the End—***May 13–19*
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10. **Satan’s Final Deceptions—***May 27–June 2*
11. **The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast: Part 1—***June 3–9*
12. **The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast: Part 2—***June 10–16*
13. **Ablaze with God’s Glory—***June 17–23*

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# Three Cosmic Messages

## General Introduction

For nearly over 175 years, Seventh-day Adventists excited about Christ's return have looked to Revelation 14 for parameters of our socio-spiritual context, and the primary content of our last-day message in response. Adventist leaders in the fledgling Sabbatarian movement found these messages provided not only a reason for existence, motivation for mission, and compelling communicate for the world, Revelation also situated these messages in a prophetic timeline that allowed the believers to situate themselves in God's unfolding Revelation in the last days. Adventism was animated by these messages, driven forward in growth as a church, in transformed lives through repentance and sanctification at the hearing of these timely announcements.

This quarterly examines the three Cosmic Messages. But at the start of the quarter—and we will likely say more throughout this study—we must remember that these messages have a context in Revelation. Sequentially, these three angels are the *initial trio* in a parade of *seven angels*, of whom the 4<sup>th</sup>, the central messenger in the sequence, appears to be Christ coming on a cloud to harvest his ripened harvest. We must study Revelation more broadly, to see the themes that are developed, to watch for the sequences of seven that function in a linear fashion, in order to understand the message in total. Taking a verse here or a verse there with this amazing book does an injustice to its intent. We must read the whole and understand it well before subdividing sections, and seeking deeper meaning in individual verse content.

I recommend that you take the book of Revelation in your favorite modern translation, and read it cover-to-cover, ideally in one sitting. It will take you about 2 hours, minus water/snack and bathroom breaks. You will see patterns and themes emerge. New questions will be raised in your mind, and some old ponderings may find answers. When you come to Revelation 11:18, slow down. Read from 11:18 all the way through chapter 14, and recognize that these verses form a sectional whole. The Dragon and his allies—a creature from the Sea and a creature from the Land—make war against Christ and His body, the faithful church. This sets the spiritual-contextual stage for the three prophetic messages given to prepare God's people for the judgment, that time when Christ will figuratively separate the wheat harvest from the grape harvest; this is the hour of God's judgment!

It is my prayerful hope that these messages find new place in your Christian experience, and fresh and timely meaning during these tumultuous times. They may not be popular messages, as God's messages rarely resonate with those on the broad path leading many to destruction. Rather, these messages will ring in the hearts of those on the narrow way, and we pray that others will join us on that path toward the New Jerusalem.

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 2nd Quarter of 2023. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and even answered!

May the God who gave John the Revelation illumine your study by His Spirit as the consummation of Christ's atoning work and second coming draw near!

Brant Berglin  
March 17, 2023

*Opening Question*

**Is the idea of good and evil only something for story books and Hollywood movies, or do you see evidence of it in your own life and the world around you?**

*Introduction*

Our lesson this week backs up from the three angels' messages in Revelation 14 to chapter 12 and the dragon's war against Christ. But really, the lesson should start in Ch. 11. Each sequence of seven in Revelation (Churches, seals, trumpets, angels, plagues) begins with a setting in the Hebrew Sanctuary, next to an item of furniture. John introduces us to these furniture scenes in ch. 1 when he hears a voice behind him like a trumpet, and then turning, sees Jesus—one like a son of man!—dressed as a high priest and walking among candlesticks. In the introductory scene of the seven seals (chs. 4–5), the throne opposite the candlesticks is likely a reference to the table of showbread, though the table isn't referenced explicitly. In 8:2, the altar of incense introduces the seven trumpets, and as the trumpets close, the anticipation grows as we expect one more piece of furniture to complete the priestly ritual.

In 11:18–19, we move with John's revelation into the Most Holy Place, only seen and visited by the High Priest once each year, the most solemn of days, Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. On this day, God begins cleansing His people, the camp of Israel. By faith, Israelites follow their High Priest who makes atonement for them, and symbolic of the forgiveness he offers their own sanctuary hearts as they turn to Him for their personal cleansing and reconciliation with God in spite of their sins. This sanctuary scene forms a context for this entire section, through the end of ch. 14.

*Revelation 12:1–5*

I have the privilege of teaching a class a couple times each year on Daniel and Revelation, and my students are given the option for one of the seven academic assignments to create art based on some of the imagery in Revelation. Submission mediums have included oil-paintings, needlepoint, songs/poetry, sketch-pencil, even epoxy shapes! But the single most commonly chosen passage to illustrate is this one. The scene introduces characters who will play significant roles in the rest of the book, but who also have been mentioned previously in Scripture. We see a brilliantly-but-naturally adorned, pregnant woman, her son, and the dragon ("that ancient serpent"). Hebrew Bible students will recognize allusions to Genesis 3 where the woman is confronted by the serpent, and after the human couple are led away from trust in God's words, the promise of a male offspring gave hope that the serpent's ways would end. The O.T. allusion provides a religious setting for this narrative. Throughout centuries of Biblical history since the fall, women have given birth to male offspring hoping their son would be the promised deliverer. Cain, Seth, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. Each of these were hoped to have been the promised seed, but the real, true *seed/offspring* would come through Mary. The imagery of the woman in Rev. 12 then seems to go far beyond the original Mary, and beyond Eve, too.

**In what ways is Mary similar to this woman according to the text of Revelation 12, and in what ways is she different?**

Of course, just as Mary and Joseph were protected in the wilderness of Egypt for a time before Herod died, so this woman goes into a wilderness. But *her* time of sojourn is prophetic time—1,260 days. This is the most repeated time prophecy in the Bible between Daniel 7 and 12, and several places in Revelation and given as either 1,260 days, or time-two-times-and-half-time, or as 42 months. It is the time of the little horn's power in Daniel 7. Protestants have attributed this prophetic time to the nearly 1,300 years of apostasy of the Church-State power of Rome.

There was a war in heaven, according to 12:7-11. Satan and his angels were thrown down, and Michael and his angels won. There was no longer a place found for evil in heaven. The victory of Christ cast him down once for all.

**When was this war in heaven? What is the immediate context for Satan's fall and why was there no longer a place found for him there? Does this passage reach back to the beginning of sin, back to Christ's ascension, or to some other point in time?**

**What role does "accusation" play in our spiritual experience? When we're accused by Satan of wrongdoing, is he right? Do you ever play the role of "accuser" of others or even yourself?**

**According to verse 10 and 11, the accused brethren *conquer* Satan by "the blood of the lamb" and "the word of their testimony." To what experiences do these two aspects of Christian life do these seem to apply, especially considering Satan's accusations?**

The end of chapter 12 shows that the woman's offspring become the object of Satan's rage, because he cannot hurt the mother, he hurts the children. They are noted for two aspects: they keep the commandments of God and hold to the Testimony of Jesus. It is through the new covenant written on the heart by Christ's Spirit that the commandments become second nature; and the testimony of Jesus is exactly the experience of John (1:2, 9) and the angel (19:10) who, through visionary, prophetic revelation came to understand the events that would take place "soon." Adventists have been blessed with this testimony, and we should see it again in larger measure before Christ returns.

### *Closing Comments*

We see that Christ's victory came about sequentially, and within earth history: 1) by his shed blood on the cross, 2) sealed by His resurrection from the dead, and 3) ascension to the right hand of God as King sitting on a throne of grace and help in time of need. Heaven has had its victory, but now the earth is in trouble, facing an opponent who knows he's lost. The end is near, but our faith in Christ's victory becomes our own! His blood cleanses my past, his life empowers my present testimony, and his resurrection assures my future!

*Opening Question*

**Is it discrimination to divide people into groups?**

*Introduction*

Our lesson this week is based on Revelation 14:14-20. It merges two concepts or interpretations of this section: the judgment/separation of people into two distinct groups, and the harvest, which the writers assume means the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ. Thus, the lesson tries to deal with both topics at the same time but does not provide as much background into *why* or how the structure of Revelation 12-14 informs these conclusions.

What is the harvest? How does it fit into Revelation's narrative? What is the context before and after this passage? We will look at this issue in today's study.

*Broad Context for Revelation 14*

The context for the three angels' messages is found in chs. 12-13. The dragon (Satan) in ch. 12 gets allies in the form of a beast out of the sea (13:1-10) and a beast out of the land (13:11-18). The Sea-beast—often noted as a parody of Jesus Christ—persecutes the saints of God (13:7), but the Land-beast is worse. This beast creates an image to or of the first beast that must be worshipped on pain of death. This recalls Daniel 3 and Nebuchadnezzar's image.

**What is the experience of God's people under the power of the dragon, the sea-beast, and the land-beast? How does Revelation 13:10 offer a warning of what is to come while also being an encouragement: "This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people"?**

**In Daniel 2, the nations of the world were shown to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream as representing parts of an image, an idol, made of different types of metal or clay. But in Daniel 7 and Revelation 12-13, these same types of powers are shown as predatory animals. Why the difference? Why such a contrast in the imagery of the lamb, the land-beast?**

*Immediate Context for Revelation 14*

Immediately after the lamb-like Land-beast in ch. 13, ch. 14 shows the 144,000 faithful saints of God. Originally, Revelation did not have chapter/verse divisions, and there was no real break between chs. 13 and 14. Thus, the people who receive the mark of the beast in ch. 13 on their foreheads or hands are contrasted with the sealed saints of God, the 144,000 in 14:1-5.

**What are some of the differences between the followers of the beast and the 144,000? According to the context, how does one become part of the 144,000?**

### *Two Harvests*

The three angel's messages are part of the larger context of seven divine beings in this structure:

**1<sup>st</sup> Angel's Message**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Angel's Message**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Angel's Message**

One Like a Son of Man coming on the clouds to harvest the earth

1<sup>st</sup> Reaping Angel

2<sup>nd</sup> Reaping Angel

3<sup>rd</sup> Reaping Angel

The lesson this week ties together the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming language as well as that of the judgment. Of course the two events are linked together, but Adventists have suggested that before Christ returns, the judgment will be complete for the House of God, that those who claim to be His will be judged by their faith in the blood of the Lamb, and their testimony about what God has done for them. So is Revelation 14 and the two harvests a call to see the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, or the judgment, or both?

**Read Matthew 25:31-46. Is this parable speaking about the return of Jesus at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, about a judgment that occurs *prior* to Christ's return, or a parable that combines the two? Does it make a difference? (See also, *Desire of Ages*, ch. 70: *The Least of These My Brethren*)**

Revelation 14:14-20 pictures two harvests—wheat and grapes. The wheat harvest reminds readers of several of Jesus' parables where the harvest of the earth's wheat represents those who respond to the gospel. They become ripened for the harvest, the time when their faith and commitment are unshakable. On the other hand, Isaiah 63:1-10 shows the Old Testament prophecy of the winepress of God's wrath, alluded to by John as well. The proverbial "grapes of wrath" seem to represent the people of God among the nations who rebelled and grieved His Spirit. God's very robe is stained with their blood. These two harvests shown in Revelation 14 may allude more to a final judgment than to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming as an event.

**Much is said about "inclusivity" today. Is God inclusive or exclusive in Rev. 14:14-20? How do we reconcile a God who divides people into groups, then excludes some from His Kingdom, with a culture today that seems to want to include everyone, where belonging is the most important virtue, and maybe more important than virtue itself?**

### *Closing Comments*

Before Christ returns, all decisions will be made for or against Him. The work of the land-beast brings the issue to the forefront of all humanity. All people will be faced with a decision—do I worship the beast and the image (and maybe save my life now), or worship God and face death now, but eternal life later? It's a difficult choice. But the faithful of God will certainly be part of His harvest, even if they lose their lives for His sake.

### *Opening Question*

**In a world where bad news seems common, what is some good news that you've received?**

### *Introduction*

The lesson this week looks at the “everlasting gospel” in Rev. 14:6. Sometimes we’ll use this word to describe something being the absolute truth if it’s the “gospel truth.” The word “gospel” comes from the Greek term “euangellion,” meaning “good news” or “a good report.” It was often used to describe the birth of a King’s son who could continue on the leadership of a country. The word could also mean a good report about a person. Throughout the New Testament, the “euangellion” is found in numerous places. Mark’s story about Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection is called “the gospel,” as is Paul’s defense of his overall message about Jesus found in 1 Corinthians 15. In Romans 1 however, Paul uses the word “gospel” to describe the theological and practical ramifications of Christ’s life and death for Jews and Gentiles alike; the gospel is the Good News of what God has done for us, by saving us. How does Revelation 14—the first Angel’s Message—use this term?

### *Revelation 14:6*

The first of three angels comes in response to the giving of the mark of the beast and compulsion to worship the image in ch. 13. We must remember the context of the three angel’s messages. While the Dragon (ch. 12), and the beasts from the sea and the earth (ch. 13) work together to deceive the inhabitants of the earth and attempt to draw people’s attention to the sea-beast and dragon, God gives his own messages that call people back to worship of the true God, the one and only creator. The message begins with the phrase, “And I saw another angel flying in <sup>a</sup>midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.”

Much can be said about the details here. First, the first of three angels comes flying in “midheaven.” Some have said this is the middle of three “heavens,” reflecting an ancient cosmology where the atmosphere is the first, space is the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and God’s dwelling is the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven. Paul uses the phrase “3<sup>rd</sup> heaven” to describe being in vision and in the presence of God. But mid-heaven here likely means the highest point in the sky, where everyone can see. It’s a figure of speech, not intended to be taken as some kind of so-called scientific statement about a flat earth.

Second, the idea of the “everlasting gospel” is a difficult one. If we read Revelation, we see similarities to Paul’s theology of objective, substitutionary atonement, but it’s more like Christ *purchasing* us with or by His blood. But is this what the “everlasting gospel” means in Revelation?

**The first angel “has the everlasting gospel.” Is it possible that the “everlasting gospel” in Revelation is different than the “good news” of Paul’s letters or the “good news of Mark’s gospel? How is the idea of “fearing God and giving Him glory, and worshipping Him,” good news or how are they related to the good news?**

Next, what makes this gospel “everlasting”? Is it because it deals with “everlasting life?” Or is the gospel here the good news about God’s character, His justice mixed with His love, His mercy that knows no bounds until people reject it utterly, His plan of salvation that is open to all but His wrath that falls on those who wish to hurt His covenant people? If this is the case in Revelation, then the everlasting part is that God never changes—he’s the same yesterday, today and forever. The good news is that He is trustworthy, just, holy and righteous, even in His dealing with the sin problem, including how He treats people like me, sinners by birth.

**How does a message about the goodness and love of God resonate with people today? Do people need to hear this? Or do you think they need to hear more about the wrath of God against sin? Why?**

The everlasting gospel in this that is “preached” uses a verb built off the same noun for “good news.” In other words, the gospel is “*gospelled*” to people. And in this case, it is “those who dwell on the earth.” If you did a search of every place in Revelation where “those who dwell on the earth” occurs, you will quickly find that these are people who are not followers of God. In other words, they are the ones who most need to hear the message. They are the ones who made the image to the beast in ch. 13. They are the ones who must be converted, to see the true character of God, and worship Him rather than the beasts or the dragon.

But the cost is high in the context of the three angels’ messages. If someone does not give homage to the image of the beast, one’s life is at stake and potentially forfeit. That’s a high price to pay to worship God. But Jesus’ words come back to us: “he who seeks to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

Those who hear the gospel make up “every nation, tribe, tongue and people.” This is the same extent of nations from which the great multitude/144,000 is composed. It is possible, then, that there are some who dwell on the earth, who even see the image to the beast as something worthy of worship, who will hear this message, turn/repent, and be saved, and join the 144,000.

An important question here must be asked. Is this angel a symbol for the church and our partnership with God in evangelism to the world? Or is the angel in midheaven an indication that the final message is God’s to give, and His alone? He’ll us angels to share it; I can sit back and watch Him work... ? Most people I know who read it conclude that all of us have a role to play in joining in sharing this message. The Great Commission that concludes the gospel of Matthew (28:19, 20) invites us to be part of it.

**What part have you played in either sharing the good news about God with others or preventing them from hearing it? Does my life reflect God’s character to others? List some things that may hinder us from sharing the good news? Now, what steps might we take to share it more effectively?**

### *Closing Comments*

The final great message to the world in the face of the Dragon’s war against God will center upon the character and attributes about God, which we’ll see in the angel’s proclamation (vs. 7).



*Opening Question*

**If you met God face-to-face, how do you think you'd react?**

*Introduction*

The first angel flying in midheaven who has the everlasting gospel proclaims in a loud voice two imperatives in Greek: 1) Fear God, and 2) Give glory to him. These must be unpacked a bit in order to understand what the text is suggesting and what it is not. But these imperatives appear to be a part of the everlasting gospel. The call to fear God and give him glory are again urged in response to the beast compelling everyone to worship a human-made image, an idol. The command to worship the image is backed by force, compulsion, by teeth that bite. Failure to bow before the image brings about death. Of course Daniel 3 is being alluded to and the fiery furnace awaits the faithful Hebrews. But they refuse to worship the image that “Nebuchadnezzar set up,” even at the cost of their lives. They believed the God they served was able, and would save them from the King’s hand. It is that kind of faith that those living through the establishing of this new image will exercise. The beast is fearsome, without doubt. But Jesus’ words come again: “do not fear the one who can destroy the body but not the soul...”

*Revelation 14:7: Fear God!*

The first of these imperatives is to fear God. The Greek word, *phobeomai*, is the word from which we get *phobia*, a general fear—realistic or unrealistic, warranted or unwarranted—of something specific. Claustrophobia, the fear of tight spaces, or agoraphobia, the fear of wide-open spaces affect many people. But how should we think about fear of God? Is God someone to be “scared of”? The quarterly says we should think of this word as in reverence or awe, but not fear. While Jesus came to show us the character of the Father, and says that perfect love drives out fear, we must contend with the places in the Bible where people witness a theophany, a revelation of God or a divine being. Each and every time someone sees God, Jesus, or a glorified angel, the response is the same—falling face down, as if dead, and unable to move. The idea of being *scared to death* almost seems appropriate. This happened to Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, the guards around the tomb of Jesus, and John the Revelator. Divine visitors elicit fear because the senses are overwhelmed. How much more should we come face-to-face with God? To recognize that God is *OTHER* than I, that in His hand and will is all power to make and unmake the universe, to take life and raise it back up, that is a sobering thought. Certainly reverence and awe are the minimum emotions and actions we might feel and act out.

But of course these are also balanced by our knowledge of God’s character as shown through Scripture, through His law, and through the law incarnate in Jesus. As a loving father who invites us to come to Him, to have a relationship with Him, we have nothing to fear, just as a young child climbs into his or her father’s lap for comfort after a fall, for a story, or just a snuggle.

**What has been your picture of God? How does it play a role in how you think about this command to “fear God”? Do you sense you have too much fear of God and not enough trust in His goodness? Or do you have too familiar a relationship with God and not enough**

**respect? Where do we find the balance encouraged by the 1<sup>st</sup> angel's message without swinging wildly to either side?**

*Revelation 14:7: Give Him glory!*

The angel commands another action: those who dwell on the earth are to *give Him glory*. Both imperatives in this lesson are in the plural, that means they are not given to individuals per se, but to all those who hear. They are corporate commands, and the context suggests they are being given to the entire earth.

What does it mean to give glory to God? The word for glory here is the word used in *the Doxology*, the well hymn of praise to God. *Doxa* in Greek can refer to the brightness around a heavenly being, splendor or radiance emanating from someone's countenance, a state of being great or magnificent, fame or honor earned by status or exploits in war, business, the arts, etc., or praise given for simply having certain characteristics. In this case, we are to give glory to Him, and that begins to narrow this list down.

What kind of glory can we give God? Certainly not the kind found reflected on the face of Moses when He had visited in the presence of God. Humans are not able to grant any kind of radiance or splendor to a God who dwells in unapproachable light. We can however, give Him glory for his attributes and make Him famous in the world. Although Time magazine may never run a cover with God's picture (against the commandments anyway), but we can still make Him famous in our circle by talking about Him. Recently, a video was made by a "man-on-the-street" who asked random young people questions about the founders of America. Many could not recall the first president, though Washington is doubtlessly one of the most famous. But they could easily identify all the members of the Kardashian family and other famous Hollywood stars.

This angel asks us to make *God* famous, to give Him the praise and honor that is due to Him. Many people talk about professional athletes, movie or music stars, or political/military heroes far more than they talk about God. Perhaps we can change that; God can be the most famous, the most worthy of praise within my sphere. And that may start with something as simple as confessing our relationship with Him to others, asking if they'd like to hear more.

**What attributes of God do you feel are most worthy of praise? How can we make Him famous in our circles? Have you ever been embarrassed to talk about your relationship with God? Tell of a time you confessed your love for Him to someone else...**

*Closing Comments*

In Revelation 12, the people of the earth overcome the Dragon by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. Through the Johannine literature, Jesus testifies about the Father, and we are urged to share the same testimony. This plays a central part in giving glory to God. He is most glorified when I offer Him my body as a living sacrifice, when He works His will through me just as He did through His Son Jesus Christ.

*Opening Question*

**When have you ever questioned whether God was who you hoped He was?**

*Introduction*

This week's lesson studies the next phrase of the 1<sup>st</sup> Angel's message: *because the hour of His judgment came*. Many people fear judgment, and that is only natural if they know that the judge who condemns or acquits is using a law which they've broken. But judgment need not be negative. Many people cry out for justice under the law, they want their case heard, especially when the prosecutor is being unfair with the evidence and the defendant is innocent. The judgment is then the best way to set the record straight, to lay out all the facts of the case, and to let the judge or jury weigh all the testimony. Sometimes a court case can clear someone's name who has lost credibility through the press, it can prevent the innocent from acquiring fines, from incarceration, or worse. If the hour of God's judgment has come, is that good news or not? On what does the judgment depend? Who is the judge in this case and who is the defendant? What are the criteria on which the case rests? What law is being used? These are all questions about the *hour of God's judgment*.

*Revelation 14:7: because the hour of His judgment has come.*

This clause begins with the small Greek word *hoti*, which often denotes cause. That is, the previous statements or clauses are to be carried out because of this clause. So in the context of Revelation 14:6-7, the angel who has the everlasting gospel gives the two commands: fear God and give glory to Him *because the hour of His judgment has come*. We must recognize that our response to fear and glorify God come because of this judgment. So that begs several questions: who exactly is being judged? And what is the result of that judgment?

The Greek text is actually not as clear as we would like. But that appears to be God's plan here. Because the word *judgment* is a noun, but one with a verbal idea, it leaves open the possibility that *the hour of His judgment* can mean that God is either *the one doing the judging* (the subject of the verbal idea in "judgment"), or He is the one *being judged*. Both are options. So, which makes more sense? Or does God leave it vague enough because both can be possible at the same time?

We have a similar phrase in Revelation 1:1 when John introduces the book saying "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." Is Jesus the one *giving* the Revelation, or is He the one who is *being revealed*? Again, both are possible, and likely intended.

Now, some people are hesitant to think about God being judged; He Himself is the judge, isn't He? But Paul in Romans 3:4 quotes from the Greek text of Psalm 51:4, and says "Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you are judged.'" There was an idea that when God judges us, He puts Himself on display as well.

A recent example from American politics serves here. When several recent supreme court justices sat through hearings before being appointed, they were grilled by congress as to their past findings in certain cases, how they might rule in tough, current issues, and what standards they use when judging. The goal is to find justices who will be fair, understand the law and how

it pertains to every situation, and then rule based on that law, both the letter and the spirit. There is no place for them to make new laws or reinterpret the law according to their own whims, or worse, through bribery or fear of recrimination.

**What might God be on trial for? What do people today blame on God? Is God able to be judged, or is He above our scrutiny? Do you even feel comfortable talking about it?**

But here we have a problem in Revelation. Because God is also the judge! We have ties in Daniel 7 to judgment of the beast, the “little horn” power. This power has taken the prerogative of God, demanded worship, persecuted the true people of God, and tried to take the very place of God in His sanctuary. He is truly anti-Christ. The people of God cry out, as it were, the words of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal: How long oh Lord, Holy and Just, before you judge and avenge our blood? The cry to God is that of Abel—how long will you let us be killed without cause? *IF* you’re a good judge, then step in and give us justice.

This is one of the most significant questions—indeed, accusations—levied at and against God. If He is a good, loving, kind, all-knowing and all-powerful being, how can He let injustice and suffering continue? And thus the judgment is necessary that He step in and avenge His servants who faithfully shed their blood in solidarity with Jesus Christ.

But the judgment also confirms who are His people and who are not, so that when Christ returns, all decisions have been made. The division of the sheep and goats is a judgment by God, *and those being judged*.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Revelation, beginning in 11:19, introduces the Ark of the Covenant, the furniture in the Hebrew Sanctuary only seen by the High priest once each year, on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. This was the great day of reckoning when Israel was to confess all sins, make restitution and trust that God would cleanse the sin from the sanctuary and the camp. This section of Revelation is part of the “day of atonement” section of Revelation. That means that God is doing a special work through Jesus Christ in cleansing sin from His people, judging the evil beast power, and finally giving the kingdom to His saints. The judgment hour of God here is Good News!

**When you think about standing before God, and giving an account of everything you’ve ever done, what kind of emotions does it elicit? Where do you see good news in God’s judgment hour beginning? Why might some people be afraid of it?**

**What is the role that the death of Jesus Christ plays in the judgment? What happened there that determines *my* place in eternity?**

### *Closing Comments*

The hour of God’s judgment begins when He judges the little horn and beast powers. At that time God will both be judged for how fair He is, and what kind of judgment *He* offers. At that point, the character of God will be front and central. There is no better judge of character than how someone deals with wrongdoers. God seeks reconciliation and redemption always; mercy always triumphs over law, and where sin abounds grace abounds still more.

*Opening Question*

**What are some of the most important turning points in the history of this world?**

*Introduction*

This lesson jumps back to Daniel 8 and 9, and relates the time-prophecies there to the three angels' messages. The links between the two chapters are abundant, and there is no question that although the vision of Daniel 8 and the visit of the angel in Daniel 9 may be separated by some time, they are literarily and thematically bound. The real shame in the lesson is that it doesn't return to Daniel 2 and 7 also to build a stronger historicist foundation. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreams that the future of kingdoms broadly, from his day until God sets up His kingdom, can be likened to an image, an idol. Power for Nebuchadnezzar was something to worship; this is a warning for us today! The nations depicted there: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and divided nations retaining Rome's influence, are shown again in ch. 7. Only this time, Daniel has the vision, and the kingdoms are represented by powerful predatory animals. For Daniel, all these nations preyed on small nations like Israel, and each would have significant influence and control over God's people. This isn't just about *all powerful nations*, but about religious history. These nations are chosen to teach us lessons about God and His plan of salvation. Daniel 7 introduces a feature not present in Daniel 2: a judgment scene after a little horn emerges from the great iron-toothed beast of Rome. The little horn becomes so powerful, it even seeks to take the place of God, and eventually, God must deliver His people from its hand. Daniel 8 and 9 build on and add to the complexity of Daniel 7, and Daniel 2.

*Daniel 8*

Daniel has another vision and this time, Babylon is no longer relevant; it's about to fall. The dream begins with a ram and a goat fighting. The angel interpreter informs Daniel that the ram symbolizes the Median and Persian alliance. The ram is conquered by the Grecian goat, led by Alexander the Great (the prominent horn on the goat). Alexander's kingdom is passed to four of his generals, rather than a dynastic successor. But most of the vision concerns another horn, a little one, that arises from one of the four directions of the compass. This little horn has a horizontal, earthly, political conquest that includes Israel, and then a vertical, religious conquest against God Himself. This power appears to be Rome in both its pagan/republican role and its later religious guise led by popes as well as emperors.

Numerous references to the temple and sanctuary fill ch. 8. The animals indicated in this vision—a ram and a goat—were sacrificial animals in the Hebrew sanctuary specifically on the day of atonement. The little horn tears down the place of God's sanctuary, and abolishes the "daily" or "*tamid*," the work of the priest in interceding for God's people. The angel finally asks how long this will go on, and the answer is "2,300 evening-morning." This is not a typical way of speaking about time, thus it makes sense to take it as a prophetic number. How long should this last? Daniel is told several times in ch. 8 that the vision concerns "the time of the end," and for the distant future. An evening-morning is the designation of one day in Genesis, and also references the evening and morning—daily!—sacrifice made at the temple for God's people, for

the sins committed in ignorance. There was *always* a sacrifice available for God's people, even when they weren't aware of their own sins.

The good news is that at the end of the time prophecy, the sanctuary would be restored, set right, made holy, or cleansed. The Hebrew verb used here, *tsadiq*, is broad and covers the restoration of all the damage done by the beast. But the day of atonement language is hard to miss. It was only on this day that Israel sacrificed a goat! This section of Daniel 8 parallels the judgment scene in Daniel 7 where the beast loses his power and the kingdom is restored to God's people.

We see the same language in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Revelation. The ark of the covenant is seen in the introduction to chs. 12-14, the judgment of God is mentioned, the same beasts from Daniel 7 are mentioned, and the same oppression of God's people. The restoration of true worship, of repentance and confession, of honoring

**In what way is this message related to the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ's blood shed on the cross? Some argue that the judgment of God is antithetical to the gospel because it examines the lives of people. It is said salvation is by grace, but judgment is by works. Can this be true?**

#### *Daniel 9*

Daniel is left after his ch. 8 vision without any strength. He is sick and doesn't understand how the temple, currently in ruins in Israel, will actually be restored so far in the future. He is hoping it will be rebuilt.

Fortunately, Daniel 9 offers some hope. Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the Messiah will come. Space prevents us here from discussing all of Daniel 9, but it may be the single most significant prophecy about the Messiah in all scripture. Daniel is told that from the time a decree is given to rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah the Prince, 483 years will elapse. In fact, a total of 490 years (70 sabbatical-year cycles) are "decreed" for Israel. The word decreed can also mean "set aside" or "cut off". That suggests that the 490 years of Israel's probation are cut off from the 2,300 years of Daniel 8. The decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem that actually completed the work and reestablished Israel's autonomy occurred in 457BC. This means the sanctuary would be restored, set right, cleansed, etc., in the mid-1800s AD. Adventists have held that William Miller's prediction of 1844 fulfills this time. The big question is what event actually occurred. It wasn't the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming as Miller and other Advent people hoped, and they were left disappointed. Rather, it was the beginning of the final judgment of God and the restoration of the sanctuary. The beauty of the Adventist message is that it also restored our study of the Sanctuary in Exodus and Leviticus. This story opened our study of Revelation in a new way, since the entire book is based on the Hebrew temple, the priesthood, and God's dealing with sin.

**If God sent Jesus right on time as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 9, does it make sense that God would give us a warning about when the final judgment would begin? What does such a warning mean for us?**

#### *Closing Comments*

The final judgement is not bad news, something to fear but good news!

*Opening Question*

**With so many scientific claims made about life on earth evolving through millions of years, can Christians still believe in God as a creator?**

*Introduction*

The final phrase of the 1<sup>st</sup> angel’s message is another imperative, and this time it urges people to worship. Many secular humanists have said that God is narcissistic because He commands people worship Him or die. But here in Revelation 14, it is an angel giving this message, and the context is vitally important. We must remember that there are conflicting objects of worship, of allegiance, of homage, or service. Revelation 13 pictured a Christ-like beast that begins speaking like a dragon, and compels people to worship an idol. Much is said throughout the Jewish and Christian scriptures about idolatry. Jeremiah 10:1-10 speaks about the foolishness of idol-worship. People go to the forest, cut a tree, carve it, decorate it, nail it down so it doesn’t fall, then they fall and worship it. But idols and images need not be physical, made of material things, to gain our worship.

*Revelation 14: And Worship Him Who made the heavens, the earth, and the fountains of water.*

The call to worship the Creator may be one of the most significant in Revelation. In ch. 4, the One on the throne is worthy of worship because He created all things, and sustains them. Now, in light of the lamb-like-beast making an image to the first beast, we have a call to worship the *TRUE Creator*. Much of the secular and scientific world believes that our world is the product of chance, a singularity, and that life emerged and evolved in just the right more-or-less random set of circumstances (thank you, Charles Darwin!). Today, many scientists are beginning to question the fundamental neo-Darwinian view of origins and evolution; the chance that the structure of living cells arose at random is so small as to be unacceptable. Many are now turning to intelligent design, whether invoking the Bible’s God or not, to explain life.

**Why do you suppose that there is a call to worship the Creator as a response to the power of the lamb-like beast? Is it possible that the lamb-like beast is suggesting other origins for life, for people, and the universe? How would this play a role in the Great Controversy between Satan and God?**

While there are very few quotations in Revelation from the Old Testament, this is about as close as we come. The passage alludes to the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment in Exodus 20, and forms the foundation for the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment regarding rest on the Sabbath.

But now we have a challenge. The command says to “worship.” How do I show my worship of God as creator? Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their traditions, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’”

Honoring God as creator means identifying with Him in His creation, and the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment tells us what that looks like: Rest! The seventh-day is our day of *REST!* I can

honor my Creator and give Him glory by resting on the day that commemorates His creative power, the day He sanctified and made holy.

**Some people suggest that honoring God by resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day is legalistic. How might you respond? Why did the Sabbath become so burdensome to the Israelites in Jesus' day? How did He show its true purpose and meaning? (See the Gospels and Acts!)**

**How do we think about the Sabbath as a day of rest when often times even going to church is work? How can we make our religious services less work and more *restful*?**

The fact that creation is recalled also reminds us of the image of God. Dr. Nicholas Miller, professor at Andrews University Theological Seminary has noted that the land--beast makes an image to the first beast; but it is a parody of the image of God. Many Christians rightly see a call to Sabbath here, but in Genesis 1 at creation, we also see the image of God displayed. Genesis 2:28-29 clearly say that humans were created in God's image—male and female, with the command to be fruitful and multiply. The divine image of God, then, is seen in marriage that leads to procreation. The beast has a counterfeit for that, and without question, has compelled people to worship *that* image.

**How can God's people retain their appreciate of His image found in male-female marriage in our western culture that pushes it further and further from the norm? What level of obedience is necessary to preserve it?**

The final part of the phrase describing God's creation mentions *the fountains of water*. This phrase is not in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment; rather, it comes from Genesis when describing the flood. The fountains of the great deep burst open when God sat as king at the deluge (at the *mabbul*, Psalm 29:10). This command to worship God as Creator also implies the un-making of the earth in the judgment of the flood, and the re-creation afterwards. Much of the language of the flood mirrors that of the creation account. We see the wind blowing over the water, dry land appearing, the emergence of animals and people, and the command reiterated to fill the earth and subdue it. God even gives instructions and limits on diet, just as He did in the garden. Now in Revelation, worship of the Creator invites us to also remember the flood.

**Why did God send the flood on the earth? Will He destroy the earth again, and remake it? How does this concept fit in with the command to “fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come”?**

### *Closing Comments*

This section of the 1<sup>st</sup> Angel's message is vital, and central to the Seventh-day Adventist church. It forms a core tenet of doctrine, but more than that, guides us in our message and mission to the world. We are to call people back to God as our Creator, the one who remade the earth at the flood, and will do so again at the end! We give Him glory and honor by resting each seventh day as He modeled for us and asks us to remember in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment.



*Opening Question*

**Why does it seem so hard to find time for real rest these days?**

*Introduction*

The lesson this week links the judgment with human accountability for right actions, and then ties in the commandments of God and the Sabbath particularly. The theme appears to be obedience through actions, but little is said about the source of the power to live out the law. Phrases like “make decisions in light of eternity,” “adherence to the seventh-day Sabbath,” “faithfulness” and “obedient lives” suggests we pass through the judgment by simply knowing the right thing, and then doing it. Because the lesson shows us what is right (God as Creator, the perpetuity of His law), the job is now ours to prepare for the judgment by acting correctly. Simply knowing the truth of Him as Creator will make us do right. Something about this seems to miss the truth about the human sinful condition. More should be said about repentance, submission/surrender, and the power of God’s Spirit in transformation. But how does the Sabbath and Creation fit into Revelation’s drama? That’s a better topic for this quarter, and fortunately the lesson gives us much to consider.

*Revelation 14:6-7*

The second half of the first angel’s message in Revelation 14:7 reminds us to worship the one who created the heaven, earth, the sea, and the fountains of water. The context for this message is the land-beast’s deceptions in Revelation 13. The false trinity—the Dragon, sea-beast, and land-beast—coerce worship from *those who dwell on the earth*. They make an image to a human institution (the sea-beast), and then require everyone to bow down before it. But they are not worthy. They have done nothing to deserve human adoration or praise.

In Rev. 4, God is seated on the throne and is worshipped by the 4 living creatures because He is holy. They never cease to cry their praise. Then the 24 elders join in, but their song praises God for His creation. He has made the world and sustains it. Because of that, He is worthy of all worship and praise. The Lamb, on the other hand, is worshipped in ch. 5 because He redeemed the earth; He “purchased people for God” with His precious and valuable blood—His very life!

It is not accidental that the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment in Exodus 20 is worded differently from the second reading of the law found in Deuteronomy 5. Israel was reminded in both places to “remember the Sabbath,” but for different reasons. These reasons parallel the praises in Revelation 4-5. The Sabbath command in Exodus 20 reminds us about the Sabbath because God created the world and rested; Deuteronomy, on the other hand, recalls Israel’s slavery in Egypt and reminds Israel to treat their slaves well on the Sabbath because they were once slaves, but had been redeemed.

**Revelation never once mentions the Sabbath specifically, yet hints and allusions to the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment and creation are found throughout the book. Why do you think the Sabbath is never *directly* mentioned, though “seven” and creation are everywhere?**

**If you've experienced God's Sabbath-rest, how important is this to you personally? How is the day one of rest and rejuvenation for you rather than religious works, a day of joy and freedom rather than one of legalistic ritual?**

*Revelation 13:11-18*

Read Revelation 13:11-18. A time is predicted here when those who dwell on the earth will make an "image to the (first or sea-) beast." Adventist interpreters have identified the sea-beast with the little horn power of Daniel 7 and Daniel 8, that of the church-state power of Rome. Daniel 7 notes the little horn's brazen attempt to change the very times and laws of God, its persecution of the holy people, and attempts to take the very place of God. It is anti-Christ in essence. The land-beast makes an image to this first beast. Many Adventist interpreters have found in the descriptions of the land- or lamblike-beast a caricature of the United States who will eventually begin to *speak like a dragon*. Its coercion to worship gives people an identity with the beast; they receive a "mark," a visible sign of their allegiance.

But God's people receive His seal (see Revelation 7), and these sealed saints are mentioned again at the beginning of ch. 14. The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast delineate the people of earth at the end. At this point in world history, it does not yet appear that the image to the beast has been established. However, many Christians find themselves struggling with their faith as a secular world pushes them to speak in specific ways and align or ally themselves with actions not supported by the Bible. Followers of Jesus are being tried and tested by secularism and humanism at this moment in history. However, a strong pendulum swing as a reaction to the secularism in the west can quickly put into power those wishing to return to the ways of "God." Such a swing can happen quickly, and what more significant sign of a nation's faithfulness to its God can be found than resting on "*the Lord's Day*?" The problem for Bible-believing Christians is that should such a scenario play out, Sunday as a day of rest is never mentioned in the Bible.

**Why would Satan find the Sabbath offensive and seek to change it? What is significant about this day according to Genesis 2:2-3? As you consider how Jesus viewed, taught, and lived out the Sabbath, how can our following Christ's model be a meaningful indication of our faith and love in these last days? Hebrews 4:9 reminds us that there remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. If this remains, how can we truly enter into that rest? If as a sinner, I cannot keep the law at all, how does this change for me?**

*Closing Comments*

The Sabbath, like all other Biblical commands, are actually promises of God. When I ask Christ to come into my life, transform me by His grace and power, the Sabbath becomes a rest I will seek out and long for, a day I cannot wait to experience again because God has blessed it. My rest from daily labor becomes an act of homage and reverence to my maker; in fact, it is the *opposite* of legalism. It is evidence of total faith and trust in God for life, for salvation, and for re-creation.

*Opening Question*

**Do you believe that ancient Babylon will be rebuilt?**

*Introduction*

We now move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Angel's message. Although the city of Babylon has not been mentioned yet in the apocalypse, at our very first glimpse we learn that it fell. In the Old Testament, Babylon was a city rebuilt at Shinar, the location of the ancient city of Babel. (compare Genesis 10:10 and 11:2 with Daniel 1:2). Babylon was, according to the prophets, a tool in the hand of God to punish His people for their sin and disobedience. But they went too far, and failed to give Yahweh glory. Daniel 5 tells of the overthrown of the Babylonian city and the death of King Belshazzar who shook His fist in the face of God, much like those first generations after the flood. Revelation draws on this story and retells it, but instead of Babylon's glory and power being illustrated leading to its eventual fall, Revelation uses Hebrew thinking—from effect back to cause—to showcase the “great city” that rules over the whole earth, and from the outset, it is already in ruins.

*Revelation 14:8*

Read Revelation 14:8. The second angel announces that Babylon fell, and unlike the first and third messages, this one is *not* given in a loud voice. Revelation will use language more like that of a funeral dirge for Babylon's demise. The use of the aorist tense of the verb “fall” here suggests it is a completed past action. The city fell, it fell. And it isn't ancient Babylon, it is “Babylon the Great.” Who is this new iteration of the old city of Babylon, which is still in ruins?

The lesson spends a lot of time on Revelation 17, which describes Babylon the great in some detail. First, she is related to the woman in ch. 12. In both places the women are described by their clothing, their relationship with the dragon is shown, they both have offspring, and both are in the wilderness or desert. The implications here are hard to ignore: the symbolic woman in ch. 12 who gives birth to Jesus is the very people of God. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people were shown to be His bride, His wife. Her frequent infidelity was a continuous source of pain, grief and discouragement to God; He bore long with her but was finally forced to give her up. The prophetic story repeats itself in Revelation; the people of God appear as the woman in Ch. 12 who flees from the multi-headed red dragon into a wilderness where God cares for her. But the next time John sees her (ch. 17), she looks like the ancient Babylonian queen mentioned in the prophets. Instead of fleeing the dragon, she is now in a relationship with the multi-headed scarlet beast. She is described as having *harlot daughters*, those who have done just what their mother has: lived in immoral sexual relationships. The illicit nature is shown rather graphically in Rev. 17 and appears to be a relationship with the kings of the earth, seeking power!

**If these two women represent the same symbol but at different times in history, what happened to God's people that they became so enamored with power and earthly politics? How can political *activism* really be an illicit relationship with power?**

### *The Fall of Old Babylon*

In the Old Testament, Babylon's fall was predicted in both Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 50-51. The prophets looked forward to a day when the enemy of God's people could no longer threaten, harass, and destroy them. The day came, according to Herodotus, when Cyrus the Great and the armies of the Medes and Persians sieged Babylon. But Babylon was nearly self-sustaining with the Euphrates river running below it and the hanging gardens providing food, the walls protecting from any siege engines, and the armies ready to defend it. Herodotus says the siege engineers had previously diverted a river from its course as vengeance against it for sweeping away one of the King's prized stud war-horses. They decided a similar method could work with Babylon. The river was diverted, and Daniel 5 recalls the night the city fell. The prophetic hopes for Israel were realized. Isaiah 44-45 even call Cyrus a *messiah* because he is God's chosen who delivers them from Babylon.

**If God could use a pagan king to save His people, what surprises might God have in how He delivers His people from Babylon the Great at the end of time?**

### *Revelation's Two Cities*

The city of Babylon in Revelation represents a religious entity or institution that takes political power just as did the Christian church hundreds of years ago. The final scenario depicted in Revelation seems to be still future for us today. It may *seem* fearful when it arrives, and even filled with truth and goodness in some ways. Afterall, it deceives the people on earth. But it will direct those who dwell on the earth and don't make the Bible their theological and practical foundation to put their allegiance in something other than the Creator.

Revelation 18 laments the fall of Babylon the Great from the viewpoint of the merchants and kings of the earth who grew rich from their relationship with her. Whether the financial wealth described there is symbolic or literal is yet to be seen, but it is likely that both fit. The seventh plague in ch. 16 says that Babylon falls when the great river Euphrates is dried up preparing the way for the kings from the east. God will cause Babylon's support system to dry up, and the city will fall from within. The people who have invested in Babylon will be shown the error of their ways, and the "city" will be unmasked.

But God has His own city, as well. It has a river flowing down the center, with trees on either side just like Ancient Babylon. God's New Jerusalem is the great original of which Babylon was a poor earthly copy or parody. His city will never be destroyed; it will last forever!

**Revelation describes the 144,000 as not deceived by the beast because they follow Christ wherever He goes. How can we follow Jesus today so fully that no person, situation, or institution can sway us from our faith and commitment?**

### *Closing Comments*

Babylon the Great's fall paves the way for God's New Jerusalem! Today, it may be unpopular to point out the errors and sins of Christian institutions that have strayed from the truth of the Bible, but God is calling people *out* of Babylon, for their own good!

## *Opening Question*

**Can you recall a time someone lied to you or led you astray? How did it make you feel?**

## *Introduction*

Today's lesson is less from an exegesis (study drawing meaning from the text) of the three angels' messages and more about a theme from Ellen White's book *Great Controversy*. It deals with two main issues: the role that Sunday plays in the Christian religious world today, and the role of spiritualism in the last days and the ability of the forces of evil to play on misconceptions about life and death. This is not to say these are not Biblical issues, but they are not strictly seen in Revelation 13-14. Still, we can take on each one this week.

## *Sunday vs. Saturday*

Adventists have for over 150 years held that the issue of God's law would be a final test for God's people. Critics have argued instead that to place the law in such a position would be akin to legalism. A quick perusal of scripture would reveal that God has had tests for people at different times in Jewish and Christian history, and the results of disobedience were sometimes tragic. In Genesis 2, God gives the first human pair a test in order to give them freedom of choice. They could eat from any tree in the garden except one. The command was "do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It probably seemed arbitrary, was exceedingly specific, and required restraint on the part of Adam and Eve. We know the outcome of that story. Abraham was given a test which he passed when he offered Isaac as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, a prefiguring of the death of Jesus Christ. For the prophets, Israel and Judah were given a test concerning how they would treat the poor, the widow, and the orphan. They failed to love their neighbor as themselves, and found themselves invaded, cast out of the land, and some exiled. For Daniel and his friends, issues like idolatry and consistency in prayer life became tests because the culture around them forced them to make a choice; they succeeded and refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image or King Darius. The early Christian church was shocked when Ananias and Saphira lied to the Holy Spirit and were removed from the congregation by the Holy Spirit.

Can the Sabbath be just such a test? Of course it can. It merely takes a religious organization pushing for state or federal law. How we respond to the world around us tells us a tremendous amount about our faith in Christ and our desire to follow Him wherever He leads. But is the Sabbath such a test *now*? It does not appear to be so. Yet many people are either ignorant of the day of rest which God has blessed and invites us to partake of, or they may know the Bible Sabbath but prefer to go along with the crowd of their own religious institution.

**If the Sabbath becomes a test of faithfulness, how would you know you were "remembering" it and "keeping" it as God desired? More importantly now, how are you inviting people to enjoy God's rest?**

### *Are the Dead Really Dead?*

Another belief or doctrine which Adventists tie to the last days is spiritualism. We do not mean becoming more “spiritual” or growing personal faith, but the belief that a person has an immortal soul or spirit that continues to have conscience existence after death. The belief that the dead are not really dead, but alive in spirit-form, is a theological error which Satan can use to deceive people. Imagine if an apparition of your deceased father came saying he had a message for you from God, like Jacob Marley returning to Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. How open would many people be to taking such a message quite seriously!

How can we know the truth about what happens to us when we die? Of what are people composed? Genesis 2:7 says that God made people from dirt of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the “breath of life.” The word “breath” here is *ruach* in the Hebrew, and its parallel in Greek is *pneuma*. The word can mean spirit, wind, or breath. But then Genesis says that the man *became* a living “soul.” People do not *have* a soul, we *are* a soul when the gift of life, God’s breath, fills a human body. The amazing, living human body requires both the spark of life from God and the human body to have conscious thought. We have a brain, but it is just a collection of cells if it has no life. Our *mind*, on the other hand, our conscience, is a pairing of the physical brain with God’s breath of life. When people die, the Biblical authors constantly describe death with the metaphor of *sleep*. Metaphors are not exact parallels, but a symbol that helps explain another reality. Sleep is a fit metaphor here because it is a state of general unconsciousness, but not a permanent separation from the world of the living. Jesus is the great alarm clock and can wake the dead just as He did Lazarus (John 11), just as He did with the graves that opened at the death of Jesus.

**Why do many people believe that when a loved one dies, they go immediately to heaven? How can this be a comforting perspective, yet open the door to evil spirits? How can the Biblical view of death as sleep provide comfort in other, important ways?**

### *Closing Comments*

In reality, the doctrine of what happens when a person dies can be called “life only in Christ.” People do not go to hell immediately upon death because that continues their *life*, even if it were in a place of torment. Life—conscious existence—is a gift from God and is only immortal when we place out faith and trust in Christ. The good news is that we can *know* we have eternal life now when we live in relationship with Him. Death no longer is something to fear; it is simply like falling to sleep at night. Jesus is the great alarm clock!

*Opening Question***What is the Mark of the Beast in Revelation?***Introduction*

Our lesson today begins to address the 3<sup>rd</sup> angel's message. This is a sobering note, and requires us to recount the context again. In Revelation 13, the land-beast compels people to worship an image (of the sea-beast) just as Daniel's friends in Dan. 3. Anyone who refuses to worship the beast will receive God's seal and favor, but face death from human forces. Anyone who does worship the beast will live temporarily and be marked, but must turn their backs on God. It is into this world-wide dilemma that the three angels' messages are given. And the third is the most dire.

*Revelation 14:9-13*

Read through the 3<sup>rd</sup> angel's message. We find here a conditional sentence: *if anyone worships the beast*. The conditionality of this warning indicates people will have a choice. Revelation 13 makes it appear that the beast is worth worshipping, but this warning shows otherwise. If people worship the beast and its image (and receives the mark on forehead or hand), they will also drink the wine of God's wrath. This passage can be broken down into several segments.

First, what is the mark of the beast mentioned in vs. 9? It is a mark that appears on the forehead or hand. But is it a literal mark, or a symbolic "mark" that identifies people? In Daniel 3, people were marked by their actions. You could tell who obeyed the king and who obeyed God by their worship, whether they bowed or not. Worship can mark you, and this is true of Revelation 13. Who or what we worship is critical.

**Why do people receive the mark in either their forehead or their hand? Can people worship the beast by action and not their mind/belief system, or vice-versa?**

**How are Adam and Eve representatives of those who receive the mark of the beast on their foreheads or on their hands?**

Second, how do we make sense of vss. 10-11? Here, God is pictured as tormenting those who receive the mark. They drink the wine of His wrath and experience fire and brimstone in His presence. But God is often pictured in the Bible as a God of love. Is it possible that God torments people with his grace? Could the fire and brimstone here be indications of His grace to sinners that they reject?

Read Proverbs 25:2-22 and Paul's quote of this proverb in Romans 12:18-21 where God's people are called on to repay evil with good. By so doing, we pour burning coals on peoples' heads.

**Would a loving God torment people forever? Is it possible that the imagery of fiery torment in Revelation is a symbol of God's grace which goes unwanted by those who worship the beast? How does this metaphor fit with what you know about God throughout the Bible?**

Next, we should consider the reference in 14:11 to the smoke of their torment ascending forever. In Rev. 8:2ff, we see that incense and the prayers of the saints are related. When God's people pray, their prayers are like sweet-smelling smoke which God receives and to which he responds. But for the wicked, their prayers are not heard because they only wish to avoid the penalty and consequences of their crimes; there is no repentance and desire for God to give justice.

**Those who worship the beast have no "rest." How does this idea of rest fit with the concept of the Sabbath as a test in ch. 13?**

Finally, 14:12 says that God's people will need perseverance, but they will be the ones who keep God's commandments and have faith in or of Jesus.

**What is the difference between faith *in* Jesus or the faith *of* Jesus? Should we have both?**

*Closing Comments*

The third angel's message is truly all about God's grace. We receive rest when we come to Him, and peace through His sacrifice. Those who worship the beast desire man-made religion.



*Opening Question*

**In what ways would someone know you are a Christian if you never told them?**

*Introduction*

The lesson today should have taken more time to speak about the Seal of God, and instead spent a bit of time on Christian history; helpful history, but not directly in the text of the Bible. We'll ask more questions about Revelation 7 and the sealed saints today.

*Revelation 7*

When we read Revelation 7, we see angels holding back the four winds of heaven waiting for God's saints to be sealed. They are said to receive God's seal on their foreheads only, as opposed to the beast's mark, which could be received on either the forehead or hand. What is this seal of God? How are God's people sealed, and what is the result? Will we recognize who has God's seal and will only 144,000 receive His seal?

In the Old Testament, the law was given to put into people's minds. Read the following texts, then consider how the seal of God may be similar:

Exodus 13:8-16 – The Passover of Israel was a “reminder on your forehead, that the Law of the Lord may be in your mouth.”

Exodus 28:36-38 – the gold plate over Aaron's forehead was a reminder of God's law

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 – the Law of God was again meant to be in their foreheads

Isaiah 8:16 – again, the Law of God was to be sealed among God's people.

Ancient seals contained the name, rank and territory of their owner. Our presidential seal at WWU contains just such a seal. God's seal is found specifically in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment – His name (Yahweh), title (Creator), and territory (heaven and earth).

**Why do you suppose the seal of God and the commandments of God are pictured as being only in the forehead? Why not the hand indicating action?**

*Who are sealed?*

The 144,000 are sealed from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. But Dan and Ephraim are left out, most likely because of their historical apostasy. The specificity of the numbers—12,000 from each of the 12 tribes—seems symbolic. This contention is further suggested by the fact that the New Testament teaching on Israel is that believers in the Jewish Messiah Jesus *are* Israel (see Romans 2, Galatians 3, and 1 Peter). The church is not a replacement of old Israel, but the continuation of it. Jesus, the perfect Israelite, invites us by faith to become partners with Him.

When we accept Him through belief that transforms, we become “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the covenant.”

Further, John only hears the number that is sealed. When he turns to look, he sees a *great multitude made up of people from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people*. All ethnic divisions are erased in Christ. God’s seal is granted to anyone who follows the Lamb and comes through the great tribulation.

**How have you understood the 144,000—as a literal or symbolic number? What difference does it make for you?**

#### *Sealed by His Spirit in a New Covenant*

The New Testament confirms in several places that the Seal of God is given in relation to the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1:13, and Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit seals us for that time by changing us into Christ’s image. This is the verity of the New Covenant found in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8. God will write His law in our minds, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and preparing us to stand in times of difficulty and religious persecution. Only with the power of God’s Spirit will the 144,000 stand for Him.

**Is the Holy Spirit important to you? What promises does Jesus make in John 14-16 regarding the promise of the Holy Spirit?**

**Describe what happened to the early Christians in Acts 1-4 when the Holy Spirit came on them. Is that needed today?**

#### *Closing Comments*

The Seal of God is a gift given to those who place their trust fully in Him, who refuse to bow their knee to human objects, and worship only the Creator and His Son who redeemed us!

*Opening Question*

**What prophecy of the Bible do you most look forward to seeing fulfilled and why?**

*Introduction*

This week, we wrap up our study of the three angels' messages. We will consider the goal that awaits God's redeemed, those who are faithful and keep the commandments of God and faith of Jesus.

*Revelation 21-22*

Read Revelation 21-22. Consider what awaits you as you struggle through this life. Then answer the following questions as we conclude our overall study of Revelation 14:6-13.

**In light of the challenges God's people go through on earth, would you say that Revelation 21-22 make up for it? Is the glory to come worth our suffering today?**

**How does Job's story exemplify Revelation's struggle between good and evil, and especially Job's conclusion compared to Revelation 21-22?**

**The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, is contrasted in Revelation with Babylon the Great. Which city is worth lasting forever? What makes the New Jerusalem better?**

**Do you believe the New Jerusalem is a literal city, or could it be a symbol as well? And if it is a symbol, what could it represent?**

*Closing Comments*

This quarter's study of the three angels' messages is a timely one. Christians in today's world have much to learn, and preparations to make. May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you as you continue your own journey of faith and discovery from His Word.

As always, the conversations that accompany this study guide could not have been possible without help from radio station KGTS, their sound engineer Samuel Hoffman, and my conversation partners Dr. Janice McKenzie and Dr. Doug Thomsen. My thanks to them in making this a delightful quarter!