

Understanding Revelation – Topic 23

God's final ultimatum

An exposition of Revelation Chapter 14:6-13

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Introduction

Then I saw another angel fly in mid heaven, with a firm and final ultimatum to deliver to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue and people. Revelation 14:6 (Dr Schonfield's Translation¹)

The setting of Revelation Chapter 14 is significant. Chapter 13 has depicted Satan's final and most successful effort to control the world. It is Chapter 14 which outlines God's response. The three angels messages found in this chapter present a dire warning to all who fail to withstand the Satanically-inspired trends of the last days. They are the final messages from God before the second advent of Christ.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. Revelation 14:14

This verse depicts Christ returning to earth as King of Kings at the Second Advent. The three angels' messages associated with this event are God's final warning – a preparatory message for the Second Advent. The Lord has promised His people that

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. Amos 3:7

In view of the imminence of the Second Advent, it falls to God, in His desire to impart justice, to make a special announcement concerning this climactic event.

Background

In Revelation 14:1-5 the one hundred and forty-four thousand are placed centre stage. This number of one hundred and forty-four thousand symbolizes the final product of the Three Angels' Messages, revealing those who constitute the one hundred and forty-four thousand.

The first angel's message

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven...

The expression *I saw* in the book of Revelation indicates a new vision. However, while this is not a continuation of events that were presented in the previous verses, it may at the same time be a repetition and an enlargement of events already mentioned. The principle of *repetition and enlargement* is frequently employed in the book of Revelation.



¹ Hugh Joseph Schonfield, *Authentic New Testament* (New York: New American Library, 1958)

This angel is flying in the midst of heaven, which denotes the urgency of the message. One previous instance of an angel described as flying in *the midst of heaven* is found in Revelation Chapter 8.

And I looked and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"
Revelation 8:13

This angel pronounced three woes upon mankind. By contrast, however, in Revelation Chapter 14 three blessings are pronounced.

...having the everlasting gospel...

This is the only instance in Scripture where the gospel is described as *everlasting*. It is an acknowledgement that it is impossible to destroy the gospel of Christ. In spite of all attempts to obliterate or pervert the good news of the gospel, it continues to maintain its integrity. Secondly, the effect of the Gospel, its fruitage, is everlasting. Acceptance of the gospel provides everlasting life. A third reason is that the tremendous truths of the gospel - God's love for humanity, God's suffering for humanity, God's plan of salvation for humanity - will be studied and retold for all eternity.

The *everlasting gospel* is then, in a special sense, the message of the three angels of Revelation 14. It is *the great, international, world-wide message which goes to every nation, tribe, tongue and people* (v6).

Gospel essentials restored

The gospel of salvation has been proclaimed through the centuries. However in the main only a few of its essentials were ever emphasized at any given time. In fact, much of the central gospel message was lost during the Dark Ages. During the Protestant Reformation the main features of the gospel were restored. Yet Revelation 14 demonstrates that in the last days some essentials of the gospel, previously lost or neglected, will be restored and re-established.

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

Three essential aspects are emphasized in the final, everlasting gospel of the first angel.

1. Respect for God

Fear God and give glory to Him...

Sincere Christian men and women in the past have always feared God in the sense that they have respected and given glory to Him. However we are living in a period of history when the world's population will fear and glorify *the beast*, for Scripture declares

...all the world marveled and followed after the beast.

and

all who dwell on the earth will worship him (the beast) Revelation 13:3, 8

The Three Angels' Messages exemplify God's response to counteract Satan's final assault. Instead of a call to worship the beast, this call is rather to *fear God*.

There are two kinds of fear referred to in Scripture. The first is a slavish fear which is offensive to God (see I John 4:18). The second is a respectful, reverential fear which leads to love and obedience.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29

Today there is a serious lack of godly fear and reverent respect for God and His will. This is especially true of the professedly Christian world where God has been presented in an unbalanced light. While in the past God was sometimes pictured as harsh and cruel, today He is often depicted as being so loving and forgiving that He will overlook almost any outrage against God or man. This contemporary view maintains that it does not matter what a person believes, so long as they are sincere in their beliefs. Yet Scripture is clear:

*...Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.
Ecclesiastes 12:13*

If one is to be ready for translation at the Second Advent, a correct attitude is essential towards our great and holy God.

...give glory to Him...

This means to give praise to God not merely by voicing the correct sentiments, but also through our actions, our lives and by our influence. It is a call to represent God faithfully. It means obedience from the heart – born out of love - and not from a sense of compulsion.

2. Judgment

The angel then gives a special reason for giving glory to God.

...for the hour of His judgment has come... v7

Some have claimed that this refers to a judgment made upon God: and in a sense God has been judged and already been vindicated of Satan's false charges. Lucifer's defection generated grave questions in regard to God's justice and character throughout the unfallen universe. However these questions were resolved at Calvary.² Jesus Himself declared:

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. John 12:31-33

God was judged and vindicated at Calvary. However, the term *the hour of His judgment* does not refer to God being judged, but to the judgment of God upon mankind. The context of the passage reveals that this is the case. The message states:

...to every nation, tribe, tongue and people...

This judgment falls upon people.

² A.P. Cooke, *War on God's Woman*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Self-published, 1985) on Revelation 14:7-12.

The word *judgment* in Scripture has several meanings. Firstly, it means recompense. It represents the visitation of God's justice, the meting out of His punishment upon mankind. Perhaps the best example of this will be the seven last plagues which are termed God's judgments and which will be poured out upon Babylon (Revelation 18:10).

Judgment also implies that an investigation has taken place, an examination to determine innocence or guilt.

Judgment of the wicked

Judgment involving punishment of the wicked will occur at the end of the world:

...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. Hebrews 9:27

This judgment takes place after death, not during death.

Jesus said:

The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. John 12:48

The judgment *in the last day* is the final judgment before the Great White Throne (see Revelation 20). Jesus declared:

*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
John 5:28-29*

This *last day* judgment transpires at the close of the millennium:

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works. Revelation 20:12

However the message of the first angel of Revelation 14:6-7 states that the hour of His judgment has come - present tense – meaning that it has already commenced. This can only refer to the second type of judgment - an investigation or a trial. However it is not God who requires an investigation or an examination to determine guilt. This is not the connotation of this Scripture.

God does not even *need* a final judgment at the end of the world because He already knows all: He reads the thoughts and intents of every heart. He knows the secrets of every person's life, the motivation and consequences of their decisions and what they justly deserve as a consequence. Nothing is hidden from Him and He is all wise and all knowing. Why then is this investigative judgment necessary? It is for the sake of humanity and for the benefit of the universe.

If God does not need a judgment process then this judgment must be to facilitate understanding on the part of both mankind and the rest of the universe. Throughout the universe are unnumbered worlds inhabited by sinless beings. It is essential that the justice of God be revealed to the whole universe. This is why, in addition to a final judgment at the end of the world, there is also a judgment that involves investigation. This is, in a sense, a type of trial, for God must not only be just - He must be seen to be just.

This is the reason for a two-phased judgment which applies a process we are familiar with: first the trial, then the execution of the sentence. Justice must be seen to be done. As humans we expect true justice to be transparent so it is important for God to stage a

trial so that the judgment which falls upon our race will be seen to be fair and just. There are therefore two phases to this judgment – first the trial, and then the execution, of justice.

Judgment of the saints

There are numerous Christians who claim that believers do not come under judgment, that there will be no trial or examination for those who are *in Christ*. Consequently a large body of professed Christians rejects the claim that believers will be judged at the end of time. This conclusion is based upon their concept of justification. They claim that when a person is justified, they are declared to be righteous, which means they have already been judged. (It is true that when a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior, they are judicially acquitted: they are deemed by God to be righteous.) The claim is then made, however, that as a consequence there is no further need of judgment. Two Scriptures are used to uphold this view.

He who believes in Him is not condemned... John 3:18

...he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. John 5:24

In these verses are two key Greek words which are translated *condemned* and *judgment*. It is claimed that the word *condemned* should be translated *judged* and that thus believers are not judged and do not come into judgment.

These Greek words however, may be legitimately translated into other English words, for example: *to try, condemn, punish, avenge, conclude, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to law, ordain, call in question, sentence to, or think*.³

Other Scriptures tell us which English word is appropriate. The Scriptures explain whether believers will be judged in the great final assize and whether born again Christians will have to answer before God for their deeds. It is clearly stated that

...God will judge the righteous and the wicked... Ecclesiastes 3:17

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

It should be noted that Paul is writing to believers and that he includes himself within the scope of the judgment even though he was himself a justified believer. Truly the saints will stand before the judgment bar of God. Again:

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Romans 14:10-12

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. James 2:12

We must not be misled on this issue. The following Scripture settles the matter.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4:17

³ James Strong. "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance". Bible Study Tools. Accessed 23-10-2011. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>

These are solemn words. Every intelligent, responsible person will *stand* (that is, have their life examined) before the judgment bar of God to give an account of their lives.

We may wonder why it is essential for the saints to be involved in a trial - an examination - to determine whether they stand guilty or innocent.

Scripture clearly portrays the establishing of a court trial that involves the saints. The Book of Daniel - the name *Daniel* meaning *God is judge* - depicts an awe-inspiring court scenario. Daniel 7 describes how, after the reign of the four universal kingdoms, the *little horn* rises and reigns for twelve hundred and sixty years, ending in 1798, and it is after 1798 that this remarkable court scene occurs.

I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. Daniel 7:9-10

Other translations render this passage as follows:

I beheld till thrones were placed and one that was Ancient of Days took his seat. (RSV)

I watched until an assize was held. (Moffatt)

Until thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days took his seat and the judgment was set and the books were opened. (Amplified)

...the court sat in judgment... (RSV)

The court was held, and the records were opened.

...the judge was seated, the court was in session, and the books were opened. (Amplified)

This passage depicts a great court trial taking place in the awe-inspiring heavenly temple, a heavenly trial or judgment which involves the saints, for the passage goes on to state:

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever... Daniel 7:18

...the Ancient of Days came and a judgment was made in favour of the saints of the Most High... Daniel 7:22

Daniel also says:

But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him. Daniel 7:26-27

This judgment includes the *little horn* as well as the saints, so after 1798 AD a court session commenced which focused on the people of God. The first angel of Revelation 14 declares to the world that this judgment has begun:

...the hour of His judgment has come...

The exact date of the commencement of this judgment is revealed in Daniel 8:

And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed". Daniel 8:14

The term *cleansing of the sanctuary* can be shown to represent a work of judgment in the heavenly temple. The two thousand three hundred days (that is, 2300 years) can conclusively be shown to end in the year 1844 AD.⁴ This means that the heavenly court session commenced in the year 1844. Therefore the fulfillment of the first angel's message of Revelation 14:6-7 must commence in the year 1844.

The process of examining the life record of the saints is intended to display to the universe that those who are to be saved in the kingdom of God have met the conditions laid down for entrance into heaven. It demonstrates that the saints not only commenced as saints, but also they have ended up as saints. While eternal life is a gift, that gift may also be lost: eternal life is conditional. A believer must continue in the faith. Unfortunately there are millions of people who commence the Christian life but fall away from Christ. Vast numbers of others claim to be Christian yet never experience a *born again* experience. This is the reason an examination is essential; it constitutes a public audit, in order to reveal those who can rightfully and justly be granted eternal life at the Second Advent.⁵

Some believe in what is commonly called, *once saved, always saved*, but Scripture teaches the opposite.

But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13

The believer, by the grace of God, must be an overcomer.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Revelation 3:5

It is possible for one who does not overcome to have his name blotted out of the Book of Life. As previously stated, eternal life is conditional. We are to be faithful even unto death.

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10

To enjoy eternal life we are to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. I John 2:15

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. I John 5:4

God is both infinite and omniscient: He knows every detail of the lives of every person who has ever lived. However created beings are finite and limited in knowledge and subject to deceptive forces. Even a third of the angels were deceived by evil forces.

⁴ See Topic 21 – *The head or the hand?*

⁵ For further Scriptural evidence for a pre-advent judgment, see Topic 15 – *No more delay!*

Therefore it is necessary for God to conduct a public examination before the universe in order to reveal the final state of every believer. Such an examination must transpire prior to the Second Advent, because at that time the saved will receive eternal life. Before the Second Advent a special decree will go forth from heaven,

*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.
Revelation 22:11-12*

The first Angel's Message of Revelation 14 proclaims to the world that the pre-advent judgment *is come*; or *has come*, NOT *is coming*, nor *will come*, but it *is come*, meaning it is here, it has commenced. It commenced in 1844. It will conclude at the close of probation before the Second Advent.

3. Worship

...worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water (v7)

The third emphasis of the gospel of the first angel's message is worship.

This is a special call from heaven for human beings to worship the Creator in the last days. There are specific reasons why this special call is needed. The first reason is that at this time in earth's history many people no longer believe in creation. When it comes to human origins the theory of evolution has taken precedence in the minds of mankind. Atheism - the belief that God doesn't exist – has also grown rampant, especially among intellectuals.

Interestingly, the modern form of evolution fostered by Darwin originated in the year 1844. It was in that very year that God sent out a special message for mankind to worship the Creator. God's timing is perfect.

The second reason for the special call is that unwittingly the world is being lured into the worship of the beast and his image, as depicted in Revelation 13.⁶

*All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.
Revelation 13:8*

We therefore need to be able to distinguish between false worship and true worship: the worship of the beast versus the worship of God. Scripture provides guidelines for acceptable worship. This is important because Jesus said that certain forms of worship are worthless.

*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.
Matthew 15:9*

God commands people to worship Him in a particular way. The standard for true worship is laid down in the first table of God's eternal law which is comprised of the first four of the Ten Commandments. Here the essential principles of worship are enunciated, encompassing our complete duty to God. The second table which incorporates the remaining six commandments describes our duty to our fellow human beings.

In the first table of the law we find eight principles of true worship which we will now examine.⁷

⁶ See Topic 19 – *The Antichrist* - 666.

Principles of true worship

- i. The first principle is found in the first commandment, which focuses on who we are to worship:

You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:3

We are to worship only the God of heaven.

A god is anyone or anything in which you place your trust. Jesus said:

*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.
Matthew 4:10*

Again:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.... Matthew 6:33

The only One in whom we are to place our complete trust is the Creator.

The second commandment lays down another three principles of worship. It reads:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me. Exodus 20:4-5

In summary, the three principles found here are that worship should be spiritual, it should be simple and it should be direct. Let us examine each of these.

- ii. Worship should be spiritual. This second principle forbids the use of any material object as an aid in worship, eg statues, pictures, relics, crosses, altars, angels, crucifixes, etc. It does not forbid the making of such objects, but it disallows us bowing down to them. Nothing of a sensual nature is to be used to assist us to visualize God in our worship. True worship must be spiritual. Why? Jesus said:
God is a spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth. John 4:24
- iii, iv We are to worship God simply, directly, in spirit through the exercise of the mind and with the aid of the Holy Spirit. We know that God insists on this because Jesus said:
*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
John 4:23*

⁷ In Scripture the number '8' is frequently associated with regeneration or resurrection. Appropriately, the eight principles involving True Worship, declare that only the regenerated believer can render true and acceptable worship to God.

God is very particular regarding the type of worship we render Him because false worship is supremely harmful. It profoundly affects the individual's formation of character. God commands true worship because He loves his creatures. He knows that true worship uplifts and ennobles but false worship degrades. One of the great lessons of history is that every nation or group of people that has persisted in false worship has finally sunk into degradation and then ceased to exist.

- v. Worship should be respectful and reverent. This principle is enunciated in the third commandment:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Exodus 20:7

We are not to use God's name lightly or unnecessarily.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29

The true worshipper will be conscious of the power and holiness of God Almighty - the Creator.

But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him. Habakkuk 2:20

In the fourth commandment there are another three principles of worship. These relate to when we worship, why we worship and our condition when we worship.

- vi. The Sabbath day – Saturday - should be set aside for worship.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God....For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Exodus 20:8-11

Why does the Creator command that we do not work on His Sabbath? The answer is that this principle ensures that we will have quality time in which to acknowledge and to worship Him. The day that God has set aside for mankind to acknowledge Him is the day that He has especially blessed. The only day of the week that He has blessed is the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3).

- vii. Why does God call us to worship Him? The reason is that He created us, He owns us and we belong to Him. Therefore He has the sole right to call for our worship.
- viii. God asks us to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. To be in a condition of holiness means to be free from the guilt of sin. True worshippers, consequently, are those whose sins have been washed away. The only way we can be free from sin is through the cleansing blood of Christ, for that alone can wash away our sins (I John 1:17). This then is the condition for true worship - to be washed in the precious blood of the Lamb by true confession and repentance.

The sign of Creator worship

True Sabbath keeping as directed in the fourth commandment is the sign of Creator worship. Speaking to His ancient people, Israel, God declared

Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.
Exodus 31:16-17

The term *Israel* encompasses all believers - those who are God-ruled, those who belong to Christ - so this command also applies to spiritual Israel today. The great sign between the true believer and God, and which demonstrates that we worship the Creator, is our observance of the seventh day Sabbath. Therefore the first angel's message is a special call to observe the first table of the law, and that includes the observance of the true Sabbath of the fourth commandment. It also includes all other commandments given by God to Christians.

Has a movement arisen in these last days, commencing in 1844 and endeavouring to fulfill all the above points of the first angel's message of Revelation 14? Yes, only one, and that is the Seventh-day Adventist movement which arose in 1844 and is proclaiming the truths brought to view in the first angel's message.

The second angel's message

Identity of Babylon

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." Revelation 14:8

This is the first mention of Babylon in the book of Revelation. Babylon is called *that great city*. In prophecy, a city represents a church.⁸ In the Old Testament two cities, representing two religious organizations, are singled out. There is Babylon, representing Satan's centre of worship, and Jerusalem, representing Christ's centre of worship.

In Revelation Chapters 17 and 18 Babylon is revealed as the great apostate church of Satan. Revelation 17:18 also describes Babylon as *that great city*. In Revelation 17 ten identifiers of Babylon are presented. Only one organization fits these specifications. She is referred to as the *mother of harlots*, that is, she is the Mother Church. Babylon represents the great religio-political system of the Papacy. This does not include every individual member of the Church of Rome, however, because Revelation 18 reveals that some of God's people are to be found there, and that God is continually calling them out of this system of false worship.

The term *mother* also means that Babylon has offspring. These can be identified as the "daughter" churches that came out of Rome, but who are now following the practices of the mother church.

⁸ Hebrews 12:22-23.

Babylon's fall

...*Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city... Revelation 14:8*

The Church of Rome did not fall either morally or spiritually after the first angel's message began to be proclaimed to the world in 1844. Rather, she fell morally and spiritually in the early centuries of the Christian era when she combined Christian belief with pagan concepts during the time of Constantine the Great, in the fourth century. This is when the Church of Rome became apostate.

The churches which did fall spiritually from 1844 onwards were, in the main, the Protestant churches. They fell spiritually by rejecting the truth of the first angel's message and by beginning to reject the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ. They also began to reject the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and the recovered truth of the heavenly sanctuary, including that of the pre-advent judgment.

The Protestant churches began to fall morally when they rejected the standard of Christian conduct found in the Ten Commandments. Commencing with the abandonment of the fourth commandment there followed a tendency to reject the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. The major Protestant churches also began to accept the theory of evolution which leads to a dismissal of the first ten chapters of Genesis. In addition they clung to the error of the natural immortality of the soul, which is the basis for belief in Spiritualism.

Some Protestant churches accepted the prophetic interpretation system called Futurism, which had been invented by the Jesuits. The outcome of this is that they dropped their protest against Rome and are now largely pro-Catholic in their stance. Other groups have accepted false views concerning the Second Advent, for example, the secret rapture.

As well, some Protestant churches retained rites and ceremonies such as Sunday observance and the celebration of Christmas, Lent and Easter all of which originated in paganism. These churches demonstrated that they preferred to follow human traditions instead of the dictates of Scripture.

Because of such compromises worldliness began to flood the churches. Scripture depicts this as spiritual adultery. This aligns with the description of Rome as the *mother of harlots*.

Adultery in a religious sense implies illicit union: typically union with secular powers, union with the world, or union with false worship. Ultimately it is unfaithfulness to Christ. The Lord likens Himself to the Husband of the church, and if the Church is unfaithful to Him and seeks the favour of others, this is classed as spiritual adultery.

The effect of Babylon's wine

...*because she (Babylon) has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication... Revelation 14:8*

Wine in Scripture symbolises doctrines and teachings. Intoxicating wine represents false doctrine.

The *wrath of her fornication* depicts the anger and intolerance of those who assimilate the *wine*, that is, the doctrines, of spiritual Babylon. It makes them intolerant of truth and intolerant of those who hold to the truth.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Revelation 12:17

Revelation 17:2 tells us that the Catholic Church makes the inhabitants of the earth *drunk* with her wine. Through the centuries Rome has extended her cup of false doctrine to the nations. Now apostate Protestantism is doing the same. From 1844, when the first angel's message began to be sounded, the Protestant churches in the United States began rejecting it. As a result they began to fall from God's grace.

Since that time apostate Protestantism has been infecting the world with her false teachings and has been sliding further into apostasy until finally, as will be shown from Revelation 18, it will come to the point where it will be totally under the control of occult powers. This is a terribly sad picture when we recall how, in the past, God mightily used each Protestant church in its time.

Not only do the majority of Protestant churches ignore the 10 commandments but they also accept into their ministry those who practice homosexuality. Leading churches have officially declared that they accept homosexual clergy. This is a rejection of the seventh commandment.

Flee sexual immorality... 1 Corinthians 6:18

...Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9

The third angel's message

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, 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. 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. Revelation 14:9-11

This is an appalling picture and it is vital to comprehend its components correctly. Here is God's answer to the events of Revelation 13 where mankind is compelled under threat of boycott, then ultimately under threat of death, to worship the beast and his image and to receive his mark. Those who submit to this worship *will drink of the wine of the wrath of God*.

The mark of the beast

The *mark of the beast* has been covered in Topic 21⁹ where it was shown that in the near future this mark will involve the enforcement of Sunday sacredness.

Rome has continually claimed that Sunday sacredness is the mark of its authority. All who accept Sunday observance, when it is enforced by law, will thereby receive the *mark of the beast*. This is the only satisfactory explanation for the identity of the mark.

⁹ See Topic 21 – *The head or the hand?*

Many have claimed that no one knows what constitutes the mark of the beast. If that were true then the third angel's message is a meaningless puzzle comprised of guesswork, and the integrity of God must be called into question. Some also confuse the number 666 with the mark of the beast, but the mark is a spiritual mark, not a number.

Since the mid 1800's Seventh-day Adventists – the only movement which proclaims the Three Angels' Messages - have taught with conviction that the mark of the beast will consist of enforced Sunday observance. This mark is not yet apparent.

The wine of God's wrath

The third angel sounds *with a loud voice*, indicating that his message is to be proclaimed with power. It will be a world-wide message because the worship of the beast will encompass the whole globe. *All the world wondered after the beast*, it is stated, and every one whose name is not recorded in the Book of Life will be compelled to worship the beast. Therefore God's response must also be *to every nation, tribe, tongue and people*.

...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.... Revelation 14:10

Here is God's fearful threat to earth's last generation which worships the beast and his image and receives his mark. Notice that the message entails *two cups, two wines and two examples of wrath*:

...the wine of the wrath of her (Babylon's) fornication...

and

...the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture...

Here indeed is a profound contrast. Babylon has a golden cup in her hand *full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication* (Revelation 17:4). God's cup *overflows with indignation*. If we accept Babylon's cup then we will necessarily also receive the cup of God's wrath. On the other hand if we reject Babylon's cup of false doctrine, we will be the recipients of *the wrath of the beast*. It is comforting, however, that the wrath of the beast pales into insignificance when compared with the wrath of God.

Seven last plagues

John describes the wrath of God:

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. Revelation 15:1

These are punitive judgments, ordained by God and supervised by Christ and the angels.

He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. Revelation 14:10

These plagues do not come from natural causes - they are ordained by God and are therefore the result of divine justice.

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. Revelation 14:11

If these plagues had resulted from *natural* causes then all humans, just and unjust, would suffer the consequences. However those who reject the worship of the beast, and of his image and his mark will escape the wrath of God.

Complete destruction

The description of God's wrath paints a frightening picture and on the face of it appears that this torment is eternal in its application. Indeed, some commentators have used Revelation 14:11 to teach that the unsaved will be damned to eternal hellfire. However, when we analyse the phraseology it is clearly drawn from the Old Testament account of the destruction of ancient Edom which was located southeast of the Dead Sea, in Palestine.

John the Revelator uses the imagery of Edom's punishment to depict the punishment of earth's final generation who worship the beast and his image. Understanding the context of Edom's destruction clarifies the meaning of the passage in Revelation.

For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made overflowing with fatness, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. The wild oxen shall come down with them, and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness." For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion. its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.
Isaiah 34:5-10

This is a picture of the total destruction of the Edomites and their civilization, and it is borrowed by the Revelator for his description of the punishment of the wicked at the end of time. The wording does not describe eternal torment, but rather complete and utter destruction, the effect of which lasts forever. While it is true that there will be a certain amount of suffering during the plagues (it is after all stated that they are *tormented day and night*) this does not refer to unending, eternal punishment.

Characteristics of the saints

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12

This next verse in Revelation Chapter 14 presents a beautiful contrast. It is a description of those who have accepted the Three Angels' Messages and are the product or fruitage of these messages. It depicts those who have rejected the mark of the beast. These *saints* are distinguished by three characteristics.

1. Patience

...the patience of the saints...

This indicates steadfast endurance. In the tremendous conflict with the beast that is just ahead, the saints will need to endure and maintain their integrity. They must refuse to yield. They must be willing to die rather than sin against God. In the last days when this

conflict comes, the saints' characters will have developed to full maturity. They are steadfast in their faith. Their characters are established in righteousness (Isa 54:14).

*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.
Revelation 22:11*

In his footnote on this verse Dr Weymouth declares:

*The word 'still' seems to denote development and crystallization of character immediately preceding the coming of the great Judge of all.*¹⁰

Before the Second Advent, at the close of probation, God's people will be sealed. They will be holy, they will be settled in the faith, and they will be steadfast in their obedience.¹¹

2. Commandment keeping

...who keep the commandments of God...

This is in stark contrast to those who comply with the laws and regulations of the beast, who obey men rather than God. God's people do not just proclaim the commandments of God - they observe them and they fulfill them. Therefore, in that *sin is the transgression of the law*, it means that by this point in history, the saints will have overcome sin entirely.

God's people of this current era endeavour to keep all of His commandments. And, in truth, they often fall short of God's ideal for them. However as they repent and confess their sins God forgives them - repeatedly. As they maintain their allegiance to the Saviour, they grow in grace by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Eventually they will come to the position where it will be said of God's people that truly, *here are those who keep the commandments of God*.

3. Faithfulness

...the faith of Jesus...

What constitutes the faith of Jesus? There are three aspects to this phrase.

- i. **The teachings of Jesus.** In one sense the term *faith* represents a body of belief or doctrine. The Three Angel's Messages - *the everlasting gospel* - involves the restoration of all the truths and teachings of Jesus which have been lost over the centuries. The Protestant Reformation which commenced in 1517 did not understand the complete gospel. Since that time the lost truths have been recovered and restored to their rightful place. As a result, in the last days the gospel to be proclaimed is the gospel in its fullness - the gospel fully restored.
- ii. **The confidence of Jesus.** The faith of Jesus also means possessing the same confidence in God that Jesus Christ possessed in His Father. Jesus is our great example, not just in deed but also in faith and trust. It will be this faith that will enable the saints to be victorious.

¹⁰ Richard Francis Weymouth, *The Modern Speech New Testament* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1903) footnote to Revelation 22:12.

¹¹ A.P.Cooke, *The Three Sealings of the Saints* (Sydney: Self published, 1985)

...and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. I John 5:4

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. Revelation 15:2

If God's people are to gain the final victory they must possess the confident faith that Jesus had.

- iii. **Faith in Jesus.** The term *faith of Jesus* could also mean faith *in* Jesus. It encompasses faith in the Messiah's sacrifice, believing that it removes all our sin and guilt. It means faith in His resurrection, His intercession and His mediation: faith in His promises for the power to change us to prepare us for translation and the faith that one day soon He is returning to this earth in glory. It also refers to faith in His protecting power during the coming conflict involving the beast and his image.

The righteous dead

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". Revelation 14:13

...Blessed are the dead...

Not all the dead are blessed. Those who die outside of Christ will sleep the death of condemnation. Jesus said:

*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
John 5:28-29*

The *resurrection of life* applies to those who die trusting in Christ.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Psalm 116:15

Revelation 14:13 is a beautiful promise. Another Scripture states that *the dead in Christ shall rise first* (I Thessalonians 4:16). The blessing for those who rise first is clear:

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

In contrast, those who rise in the second resurrection are subject to the power of the second death.

In Verse 13 we also notice that there is a unique blessing upon a special group of the righteous dead:

...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... Revelation 14:13

This statement is saying that those who die before the Second Advent, but within the period when the Three Angels' Messages are being preached, will receive a special blessing if they have responded favorably to those messages. This is the setting of this remarkable promise.

There is also a special blessing upon those who remain alive and who are true to the Three Angels' Messages. They are referred to as *the one hundred and forty-four thousand* - the symbolic number representing those who will not see death but will rather be translated into the kingdom while still living. But the special blessing of Verse 13 is upon the dead who die in the Lord during the preaching of the Three Angels' Messages. In the light of the above Scriptures this blessing appears to include a special resurrection. Scripture reveals that it is the privilege of some saints to rise from death before the general resurrection of the saints at the Second Advent.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2

This verse is not referring to the general resurrection of the saints at the Second Advent, because in that resurrection only the blessed and holy take part (Revelation 20:6). In the resurrection of Daniel Chapter 12:2 we notice that there are some righteous and some wicked (some are raised *to shame and everlasting contempt*) so this must refer to a different resurrection entirely. In fact, when we read Daniel 12 we realise that verse 2 must apply to the time of trouble preceding the Second Advent.

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. Daniel 12:1

This verse describes the close of probation and the ensuing time of trouble during which the seven last plagues occur. During the plagues therefore, there is to be a special resurrection of some of the righteous and a particular group of the unsaved. Revelation 1:7 reveals that at the Second Advent some who had crucified the Messiah 2,000 years ago will be raised from the dead.

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. Revelation 1:7

Those who mistreated the Son of God in His humility, who were responsible for nailing Him to the cross, will be raised from death before the Second Advent to see His return. Those also who unjustly condemned Him - the High Priest and his cohorts - will be raised at this time also. During the illegal trial that Jesus underwent, in answer to the High Priest's demand to know whether Jesus believed Himself to be the Son of God, Jesus replied:

It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. Matthew 26:63-64

All of these guilty parties will be raised before the Second Advent to see Christ returning. For them it will be a terrible experience characterized by bitter remorse and anguish of soul.

The special resurrection we are discussing here is generally known as *the partial resurrection*. According to Daniel 12:1 the *partial resurrection* takes place during the seven last plagues when God's people *shall be delivered* from their would-be slayers. The living righteous are delivered during the sixth and seventh plagues during the drying

up of the River Euphrates¹². Not long after this occurs, a special group of the righteous dead of the End Time are delivered from the grave and raised to everlasting life. It is enlightening to note the comments by the author of *The Great Controversy* on Daniel 12:1-2:

*Graves are opened and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth...awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. All who have died in the faith of the Third Angel's Message, come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God's covenant of peace with those who have kept his law.*¹³

Rest from labour

... "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours...."

The word *labours* here means *wearying toil* or *strenuous effort*. The word is used in the New Testament of the believers' labour of love in the cause of Christ. Often this involves wearying toil, just as the Apostle Paul experienced:

...in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness.... 2 Corinthians 11:27

The Revelator is referring to the wearying toil of God's saints in proclaiming the Three Angels' Messages – referring to both the pioneers and those also who faithfully labour all over the world in more modern times.

During his ministry James White performed the work of three men and finally died from overwork. Ellen White was involved in wearying toil in the cause of Christ for over seventy years. Colporteurs, evangelists and missionaries in isolated, uncivilized areas often labour under great difficulties in the proclamation of God's last message.

On the other hand there are many who will have died during the Third Angel's Message and who, while not having experienced the wearying toil of the pioneers, may also share in the partial resurrection. It may be that the wearying toil and strenuous effort depicted could also refer to the labour involved in fighting the good fight of faith - the continuing struggle against the carnal nature, against *principalities and powers, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12). As one author has written:

*There are living upon our earth men who have passed the age of fourscore and ten. The natural results of old age are seen in their feebleness. But they believe God loves them. The seal of God is upon them, and they will be among the number of whom the Lord has said 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord'. With Paul they can say, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. There are many whose grey hairs God honors because they have kept the faith.*¹⁴

¹² A.P. Cooke, *The Drying up of the River Euphrates* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985)

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898) 982.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, "Letter 207, 1890, God Honours the Faithful Aged," in *SDA Bible Commentary*, ed. FD Nichol (Washington DC: Review & Herald Publishing Assoc, 1957), 982.

Again:

*Though Christ is everything, we are to inspire every man to unwearied diligence. We are to strive, wrestle, agonize, watch, pray, lest we shall be overcome by the wily foe... Teach man to co-operate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.*¹⁵

A special reward

"...and their works follow them". Revelation 14:13

When God's people are laid to rest they are not overlooked by God. He remembers their works, because we read that they are rewarded *according to their works*. Their works are regarded as significant during the Three Angels' Messages because they have been called to walk in opposition to popular religion, to sacrifice status, position and the favour of family, peers and colleagues. They have been called to a life of temperance and reform as well as to the sacrifice of time and of money for the salvation of others.

They have been called in a special way to separate from the degenerate world, and for many this will mean having to endure hostility. For some it has resulted in imprisonment and even martyrdom. Before the close of probation *there will be many martyrs*.¹⁶ Already in some areas men and women are sacrificing their lives for Christ. Before the close of probation many more will be called upon by God to bear testimony to their faith by their death. God will reward them according to their works and it appears that their reward will be to share in the special resurrection.

At the commencement of the Three Angels' Messages (Revelation 14:1-5) we have already discovered the special reward of the one hundred and forty-four thousand - those who are living at Christ's second coming.

At the conclusion of the Three Angels' Messages we find also a special reward for those who die believing in those messages.

Characteristics of the partial resurrection

The partial resurrection is a unique event. Those involved in this resurrection enjoy privileges not experienced by those raised in the general resurrection of the saints at the Second Advent. While the majority of the righteous will be raised up at the actual Advent when Christ is already in the heavens above, the partial resurrection occurs a few days prior to the appearance of Christ. The vast difference is that those just resurrected will be able to witness the awe-inspiring events that climax in the Advent. They will experience events which, in life, they looked forward to with great anticipation and for which they labored so diligently.

The participants in the partial resurrection will rise from death after the living saints are delivered from their oppressors. Probably they will witness the destruction of the religious leaders by their own followers. They will no doubt witness the gigantic earthquake associated with the seventh plague, with the mountains disappearing and hail devastating the earth, but they will witness it all without experiencing its terrible effects.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc, 1958) 1:381.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 3:397.

They will see the atmosphere depart, the dark clouds rolling away amid the deepest thunder, while yonder on the eastern horizon they will behold that small, distinctive, captivating cloud which transfixes every eye. With awe and inexpressible gratitude they gaze upon that cloud as it moves toward the zenith of the sky. With the living saints they will call:

*...Behold, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us...
Isaiah 25:9*

Confined in their graves for a period of time they have waited nevertheless and at last God rewards them by giving them the privilege of observing Christ returning to the earth. They behold the remarkable transformation of that small dark cloud from black to brilliant white as it draws nearer to the earth. Soon they discern in the midst of the cloud the figure and face of the Lord Jesus enthroned and crowned - a sickle in his hand - surrounded by multiplied millions of radiant beings.

The participants in the partial resurrection witness the greatest event ever known in the history of the universe - the transcendent glory of the returning Messiah with the heavenly hosts. With awe-inspiring rapture they hear the clear resounding peals of the trumpet echoing across the heavens. They hear Christ's incredible voice, in moving tones, calling to the sleeping saints of the ages:

*Awake, awake you that sleep in the dust, and arise!*¹⁷

What a call! What a command! In that voice is creative power, and throughout the earth from every graveyard, tombs burst open in immediate response to His call and the sleeping saints arise and step from their graves. Those who have risen in the special resurrection behold the guardian angels flashing from the cloud to gravesides to welcome back to life those whom they tended in life.

Throughout the earth are the resurrected dead, a vast army of multiplied millions of glorified beings of all ages and races. They are aglow with immortality. When they come forth from the grave they realize that they have been delivered from death and they burst forth into grateful and glorious song. As the prophet Isaiah declared:

*Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. **Awake and sing**, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. Isaiah 26:19*

They sing:

Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades (grave), where is your victory? I Corinthians 15:54 -55

The righteous living will also join in this beautiful song, proclaiming their victory over death. Amazing victory! Incredible reward!

...Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Revelation 22:20

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 644.

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