

Our Prophetic Message



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Revelation 10; Dan. 12:4–9; Revelation 14; 11:17, 18; Revelation 13; Gen. 7:11; 11:1–9; Jeremiah 50, 51.*

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Revelation 14:6, 7, NKJV*).

The judgment message of Daniel 7 and 8 links directly to the great controversy scenario depicted in Revelation 12–14. Here we find the three angels' messages, which contain the themes of creation, judgment, and gospel (*Rev. 14:6–12*). These texts present God's urgent and final call to prepare for the second coming of Jesus.

The message of the first angel is indeed the “everlasting gospel” because it's the same truth that the apostles preached when they said that people “should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them” (*Acts 14:15, NKJV; compare with Act 4:24*). Highlighting the importance of the message is the fact that the word *gospel* itself appears only here in the book of Revelation. Whatever we preach about end-time events, we must make certain that the “gospel” is at the core.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 14.*

Time of Disappointment

Read Revelation 10. What is the message of the angel with the little scroll? What does it mean to “prophesy again”?

The portrayal of the angel recalls the description of Christ (*Rev. 1:13–16*) and of the divine-like “man in linen” in Daniel’s last vision (*Dan. 10:5, 6; 12:5–7*), suggesting that they are identical. In Daniel 12:6, 7, He swore by the One who lives forever as He gave the prophecy of three and a half times (1,260 years). This is a repetition of the crucial prophecy given in Daniel 7:25, describing that God’s people would face terrible persecution, another truth that is repeated in Daniel 12:7, as well.

The book of Daniel was supposed to be sealed until the end of time. Then it would be opened, and many would gain knowledge from it (*Dan. 12:4–9*). When the prophesied period of 1,260 years ended, the time had come to open the book for further knowledge. This is symbolized by the open book in the hand of the angel in Revelation 10. From then on, Daniel’s prophecies were to be better understood.

At the same time, Revelation 10 reveals that the experience would not be totally pleasant. John ate the book as commanded, and it was sweet in his mouth but bitter to his stomach. John stands symbolically for the people who internalized the book of Daniel. This prophetic description, we believe, was fulfilled in the Millerite movement, which arose in the first half of the nineteenth century amid great worldwide interest in end-time events. It also describes the bitter disappointment of those who understood that the longtime prophecies in Daniel referred to their time, but not in the way they had first thought. The “2,300 evenings and mornings” did not signal the return of Christ but, rather, the beginning of the great judgment scene of Daniel 7.

Right after the bitter experience, John was told to “prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” (*Rev. 10:11, NASB*). This is being fulfilled as Seventh-day Adventists preach the “everlasting gospel” to the world.

Disappointment isn’t alien to Christians, especially when they misinterpret the meaning of events. Certainly the experience of the disciples between their Master’s death and His resurrection was a disappointment. Such was the experience of the Millerites in 1844. How can we handle disappointments without losing our faith? What Bible promises can you hold on to during your own times of disappointment?

Fear God!

The first angel’s message tells us to “fear God.” What does that mean? See *Ps. 34:7–22*.

Fear could be understood in two ways. First, there is a fear that shows itself in reverence and respect. This kind is what the first angel wants to bring to our attention. Those who fear God are true believers in Him (*Rev. 11:18*). To fear God means to honor Him (*Rev. 14:7*), praise Him (*Rev. 19:5*), obey Him (*Rev. 14:12*), and glorify His name (*Rev. 15:4*). The fear of God in the first angel’s message also acknowledges God as Judge and as Creator, and it calls us to worship Him as such.

Second, there is a fear in the sense of being afraid that sooner or later God will judge this world. To the unfaithful, the message of the judgment is a message of terror. That’s why we often call the three angels’ messages God’s last warning to the world. Inherent in the very notion of a “warning” is something to be feared, and if we read about that which the lost will face, they indeed do have something to fear.

However, as long as mercy is available, God always desires to move the lost to repentance, and the fear of God could be an incentive to start seeking Him (*see Rev. 11:13*). Though ultimately a saving relationship with God is one based on love, sometimes people need a good dose of fear to open their eyes. And if it takes a warning to get their attention, why not?

We know that “God is love,” and nothing reveals this love more than the Cross. We know, too, that God loves this world, and it must pain Him tremendously to see what sin has done to it. A God of love and justice isn’t going to sit by forever and let evil go unpunished. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (*Heb. 10:31, NKJV*). How can we strike the right balance in understanding both God’s love for us and understanding His wrath against the evil that has done us all so much harm?

The Rage of Nations

Read Revelation 14:7. What judgment is this verse talking about?

The judgment proclaimed here begins before the return of Christ, which is described in Revelation 14:14–20. It is, therefore, the same as the pre-Advent judgment of Daniel 7. Its beginning, which Daniel 8:14 anchors in the year 1844, coincides with the fact that the three angels' messages call people to worship God and turn away from the beast and its "image." This "image" came into existence only after the prophetic 42 months, as with the 1,260 days (because they are the same thing), which ended in A.D. 1798 (*Rev. 13:3–5, 12–14*).

As the final call in Revelation 14:6–12 goes out, the door of mercy is still open, because people are still being called to turn away from Babylon and worship the true God.

What does God's judgment encompass? *Rev. 11:17, 18.*

God reacts to the rage of the nations by revealing His power. Revelation 13 depicts this rage, which Satan's wrath has incited (*Rev. 12:17*). From the perspective of the oppressed believers, whose perennial plea is the call for divine judgment (*Rev. 6:10*), the judgment might seem long overdue. However, it begins at the prophesied time, and the eschatological Day of Atonement takes its course all according to God's plan.

Revelation 11:17, 18 gives a short overview of God's judgment. It begins in heaven and is brought to earth, when God destroys the wicked powers that corrupted humanity (*Rev. 19:2*). God's wrath originates in the heavenly sanctuary and is poured out in the seven plagues (*Revelation 15–18*).

At the Second Advent, God will also reward the faithful (*Rev. 22:12*). Finally, God judges the dead and eradicates evil (*Rev. 20:11–15*). When all is over, God's character stands vindicated before the onlooking universe. Everyone can see that He is just and fair in all His ways. For now, our challenge is to cling to Him with all our hearts and souls and minds, trusting that all this will come to pass in God's appointed time.

Worship the Creator

The heart of the book of Revelation is about worship. While the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth (often called “the false trinity”) join forces to unite the world in worshipping them (*see Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11*), God calls the human race to worship the Creator (*Rev. 14:7*). Those who do not worship the “image of the beast” risk losing their temporal lives (*Rev. 13:15; see also Daniel 3*), while those who do worship that image lose eternal life (*Rev. 14:9–11*).

What a choice!

Read Revelation 14:12. What does this teach us about the role of God’s commandments in the final conflict?

Worship is inextricably connected with God’s commandments. Revelation 13 and 14 are full of allusions to the Ten Commandments: “image” (*Rev. 13:14, 15; 14:9, 11*), idolatry (*Rev. 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11*), blasphemy (*Rev. 13:1, 5, 6*), the Sabbath (*Rev. 14:7*), murder (*Rev. 13:10, 15*), and adultery (*Rev. 14:4, 8*). The final “contest will be between the commandments of God and the commandments of men.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 188.

Since the rise of the theory of evolution, it has become particularly important for us to uphold and affirm our belief in a six-day Creation. This teaching is the foundation of our worship of the Lord as Creator. Evolution, even a kind that purports to believe in the Bible, guts Seventh-day Adventism of all that it stands for. Without Creation, the belief in the “everlasting gospel,” among other teachings (such as the Sabbath), is seriously compromised, even negated.

The verse that describes God as having “made heaven and earth, [and] the sea” alludes to the Sabbath commandment (*Exod. 20:11*). The Sabbath is the central issue in the conflict over God’s commandments. As with no other commandment, the designated day of worship is suited for a test of loyalty because it cannot be deduced by logical reasoning. We keep it only because God has commanded us to do so. Creation also goes hand in hand with judgment. The phrase “springs of water” (*Rev. 14:7*) alludes to the Flood (*Gen. 7:11*) and points to God as the righteous Judge of the world (*2 Pet. 3:5–7*).

Nothing we believe as Seventh-day Adventists makes sense when taken apart from the Lord as Creator, and nothing in the Bible is as clear a sign of God’s creatorship as the Sabbath. How seriously do you take the Sabbath? How can you have a deeper experience with the Lord through obedience to this commandment?

The “Patience” of the Saints

The second and third angels’ messages of Revelation are a warning to all who do not heed the divine call of the first angel’s message. If people continue on their wrong path, they will partake of God’s seven last plagues, which are seen as “the wine of the wrath of God” (*Rev. 14:10*), and this wine will be poured out on those who remain in Babylon.

In the Bible, Babylon stands for rebellion against God (*Gen. 11:1–9; Jeremiah 50, 51*). Babylon arrogantly assumes the place of God and is the enemy of God’s people. By the time of the New Testament, Babylon had become a code word for Rome (*1 Pet. 5:13*). In the book of Revelation, the harlot Babylon is a religious-political power in opposition to God and to His people and, as such, attempts to control the world. Revelation 13:15–17 describes the “Babylonian crisis” when the beastly powers of Revelation 13 join forces to persecute the remnant of God. Babylon is thus a symbol of the end-time alliance of apostate churches together with the corrupt political powers of the world.

The message of the three angels calls God’s followers in Babylon to come out and join the faithful and visible end-time remnant of God (*Rev. 18:4, 5*). Yes, there is still a faithful remnant in Babylon, and they need to hear the Seventh-day Adventist end-time message.

As we saw yesterday, Revelation 14:12 clearly depicts God’s faithful remnant. The “perseverance,” or “patience,” of the saints does not describe so much a passive endurance of hostile activities but, rather, a steadfast awaiting of Christ. The believers not only follow the commandments but also proclaim them to the world.

At the same time, the “faith of Jesus” can refer to the believers’ “faith in Jesus” (*NASB*) and also to Jesus’ loyalty that carries the believers faithfully through. The end of the third angel’s message directs our eyes to Christ. Through His merits and His loyalty, God’s people are able to persevere and keep His commandments. “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 372.

However central the commandments of God are to the final crisis, Ellen G. White says that justification by faith is the third angel’s message “in verity.” How does this help us to understand why, first and foremost, we must rely only on Jesus and His merits for salvation as the great hope that will get us through the final crisis?

Further Study: For the view of the three angels' messages by Ellen G. White, see the following: for the first angel's message, see "Heralds of the Morning," pp. 299–316, "An American Reformer," pp. 317–342, "Light Through Darkness," pp. 343–354, "A Great Religious Awakening," pp. 355–374, in *The Great Controversy*. For the second angel's message, see "Prophecies Fulfilled," pp. 391–408, "What Is the Sanctuary?" pp. 409–422, "In the Holy of Holies," pp. 423–432, in *The Great Controversy*. For the third angel's message, see "God's Law Immutable," pp. 433–450, "A Work of Reform," pp. 451–460, in *The Great Controversy*.

"Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out. It is at the cross of Christ that mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other. The sinner must be led to look to Calvary; with the simple faith of a little child he must trust in the merits of the Saviour, accepting His righteousness, believing in His mercy."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 156, 157.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Warnings play a significant role in our society and in our daily dealings with each other. In most cases, warnings are for the good of those being warned. How can we present the fearful warnings found in the three angels' messages in a way that reveals the wonderful hope that they offer?
- ❷ Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and evolution are inherently contradictory. To paraphrase a fundamentalist atheist, evolution is an "acid" that erodes everything it touches. This would especially include the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, which have the central theme of Creation and Redemption, two truths nullified by evolution, even a "theistic" kind. (Who would want to worship a theos who created like that, anyway?) Why must we as a church never allow the false science of evolution to make any inroad into our teachings?
- ❸ In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 are a treasured beacon that encapsulates the divine end-time message that we are called to proclaim. Although many church members have certainly heard about these messages, some may still have questions about what they really mean. How would you explain briefly the meaning of the last call of God to this world and what it entails?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:6, 7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Explore the meaning of the three angels' messages in order to become deeply acquainted with the gospel for today. This summary message of hope helps to recognize the most essential truth needed to be proclaimed.

Feel: Foster the presence of God in everyday life.

Do: Worship the Creator God in truth and spirit.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Everlasting Gospel to the Whole World

- A** What is the meaning of the phrase “everlasting gospel,” which occurs only once in the whole Bible?
- B** Why does God command in Revelation 10 to “prophesy again”? How can you be a part of this fulfillment?
- C** Explain how the three angels' messages teach or reflect the doctrine of justification by faith.

II. Feel: God's Three Imperatives

- A** Why does God command us to fear and worship Him?
- B** How can fear and love be combined?
- C** How can you show respect for God and give Him glory?
- D** In what ways can you build a meaningful, personal relationship with your God?

III. Do: Characteristics of the True Followers of God

- A** According to Revelation 14:12, what are the three essential signs of God's people?
- B** What are the characteristics of Babylon? How can you historically recognize these features?

► **Summary:** The three angels' messages prepare people to face the last-day deceptions and be ready for the second coming of Christ. One's attitude toward this message is a matter of life or death.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 14:6, 7*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The three angels' messages are, as a unit, the core message of Seventh-day Adventism. These proclamations are like a tripod on which our theology stands and are the reason that we exist. Together they are an outstanding summary of the gospel for today, with God at the center and justification by faith as the basis.

Just for Teachers: This week's lesson should help the class members understand better the relevance, importance, and beauty of the message aimed at people living before the second coming of Christ. It is the eternal gospel and has a simple literary structure (introduction—vs. 6; first presentation of the gospel—vs. 7; second presentation of the gospel—vs. 8; third presentation of the gospel—vss. 9–12; voice from heaven—vs. 13). Chapter 14 consists of three principal parts: (1) the Lamb with the 144,000—vss. 1–5; (2) the three angels' messages—vss. 6–13; and (3) the second coming of the Son of man, presented as the Reaper of the harvest—vss. 14–20.

Opening Discussion:

❶ The phrase “everlasting gospel” is used only once in the entire Bible; namely, in Revelation 14:6. It is by design and not by chance that it is employed in relation to the time of the end. The purpose is to underline that the gospel preached today is not a new invention, but it is a gospel that was always valid and has never changed. Forms and emphases can be different in time, but the principal message is always the same. There is only one gospel; what is it?

❷ Ellen G. White wrote in an article entitled “Repentance the Gift of God” the following statement: “Several have written to me, inquiring if the *message of justification by faith* is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message *in verity.*’ ”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 1, 1890 (*emphasis supplied*). Where in Revelation 14:6–13 can you find references to the doctrine of justification by faith?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: You can appreciate and perceive the relevance

and urgency of the three angels' messages when you study them in their context and see what the two beasts under the leadership of the dragon want to accomplish, according to Revelation 13. They mandate the full obedience of humanity. Key words in Revelation 13 are *worship* (vss. 4 [twice], 8, 12, 15), *authority* (vss. 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12), and *power* (vss. 2, 7, 14, 15). This satanic trinity (the dragon, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth) attempts to lead the whole world into false worship by usurping God's authority and using force. Revelation 14:6–13 is God's answer to these false activities. It is God's ultimatum to the world.

Bible Commentary

The principal theme in the three angels' messages is not the beast or the mark of the beast or obedience but Christ the Lamb, occurring at the very center.

I. "I Saw the Lamb" (Review Revelation 14:6, 10 with your class.)

Consider carefully the key words of the three angels' messages that connect all the messages together. What are the direct verbal connections among these three messages? There is a thematic connection (about judgment) between the first and second messages, but there is no direct word that connects them. The link between the first and the third messages is the term *worship* used in contrast: the first message calls for worshipping the Creator, and the third message warns against worshipping the beasts. The connection between the second and the third messages is the word *wine*, and, again, it is in contrast: Babylonian-maddening wine of false teaching, given as a drink to all nations (the second message), and the wine of God's wrath that will be poured out on the unrepentant (the third message). The true worshiper will not drink from any of those wines. The connecting word between the third message and the voice of God is *rest*: there is no rest for the wicked, according to the third message, but the Holy Spirit assures that there is a rest for those who live and die in the Lord. The result is clear: the third message really connects all messages together. It is like a magnet that holds them together as a unit.

When you teach about Revelation 14:6–13, your audience needs to see the Lamb, Jesus Christ. We need to teach them how to trust in the Lord and help them to cope with their fears. The best compliment you can get from people after your presentation is that they say: "Thank you for showing me the Lamb." The main message of Revelation 13 and 14 is not about the beasts, the mark of the beast, the number 666, the patience of the saints, keeping the commandments of God, et cetera. All these topics are important, but it is about the Lamb. If you point to the Lamb, then you do what John the Baptist was doing (see *John 1:29, 36*).

Activity: Find out and study with your class all the occurrences of the word *lamb* in the book of Revelation and compare them with the rest of the New Testament. Here are some hints for you: the Greek word *to arnion* for “the lamb” occurs 30 times in the entire New Testament, and out of these 30 instances, this particular word is used in the book of Revelation 29 times—referring 28 times to Jesus (for the first time in 5:6) and once to a brutal beast that pretends to act like a lamb (13:11). (Be careful in your study, because another word for a “lamb” in Greek, *ho amnos*, is used four times in the New Testament [*John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; and 1 Pet. 1:19*]).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can you present the three angels’ messages as messages of hope and not as ones of condemnation? Ellen G. White excellently states: “The third angel’s message must be presented as **the only hope** for the salvation of a perishing world.”—*Evangelism*, p. 196; emphasis supplied.
- 2 What is the characterization of people to whom the three angels’ messages need to be preached? Is there a difference between living and sitting on the earth? These people also live in a divided world with different nations, tribes, languages, and peoples. How can the eternal gospel unite humanity and be a remedy for their many problems?

II. The Three Key Imperatives (*Review Revelation 14:7 with your class.*)

God through John stresses that we need to fear God, give Him glory, and worship the Creator. The reason is given: “because the hour of his judgment has come” (*NIV*). It means that God desires to justify, save, deliver, and vindicate people. Consequently, He invites them to live in His presence, to allow Him to change them so they can reflect in their characters God’s character of love, and to maintain a meaningful relationship with Him. These actions of obedience are the results of accepting and responding to God’s grace.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How is worshipping the Creator relevant in our postmodern world, where the theory of evolution is the most popular explanation for the origin of life?
- 2 What role does the observance of the Sabbath play in the context of maintaining a fresh awareness that the living God is our Creator?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In Revelation 18:4, it is stated that God’s people live in Babylon, because God calls them: “ ‘Come out of her [Babylon], my people’ ” (NIV). How can you denounce the sins of Babylon and still love Babylonians? How can you preach the fall of Babylon and still be in good relationship with them?

Application Questions:

- 1 Study the Scriptures and find out if a human being may also be called “an angel” or, more accurately, “a messenger.” An excellent hint can be found in Malachi 3:1. How can you personally be such an angel/messenger?
- 2 In Revelation 14:6, what is the meaning of the angel/messenger who is proclaiming the eternal gospel and flying in midair? What is this symbolic language and rich imagery trying to communicate? How can you and your congregation make the three angels’ messages attractive for the community in which you live?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Study with your class the meaning of the term *Babylon*. What are different characteristics of Babylon in the Bible? How does Babylon behave, and what is its attitude toward others?

Activities:

- 1 Help your class to imagine in a very practical way God’s presence in their lives. Encourage them to do, for at least one week, things that remind them that Jesus is always physically present with them. For example, suggest putting another plate on the table to remind them that He is eating with them or place another chair beside them while reading, watching TV, or working on their computers. This will be a new experience for the members of your class and can change their thinking and lifestyles forever.
- 2 Discuss with your class how family worship can be meaningful, even though everyone may be too busy and individualistic. Be creative in discussing different possibilities and new forms of worship that would be especially attractive to the children and young adults.